

- ## Dretske's denial of Closure

Closure and SENSITIVITY

- Dretske also endorses an *analysis* of knowledge that further supports his rejection of closure
- We won't discuss the specifics here, but it is for our purposes similar enough to Nozick's, which also invalidates closure
- Recall Nozick's defending, as a condition for knowledge
SENSITIVITY: Had it been the case that $\neg P$, then S wouldn't have believed that P
(This was his 1st pass, but the comments carry over to his 2nd)
- It turns out that one can fail to meet that requirement wrt $\neg H$ even though one meets it for O : imposing it invalidates closure
- Note: some people might take this to be a reason to reject SENSITIVITY

Dretske's WAM

- OK, so, if it is independently plausible to require SENSITIVITY, we have a prima facie reason to reject closure
- But it still really does seem *very* bad to say:
'I know that there is a zebra in the enclosure but also don't know that there isn't a painted mule there instead.'
(“an abominable conjunction”)
- Closure would explain why this is so: it must be false
- Since Dretske is happy to say that it is true, what's wrong with asserting it?

Closure and SENSITIVITY (ctd)

- SENSITIVITY yields knowledge of the truth of ordinary claims:
Had it been the case that $\neg O$, it would have been the case that $\neg B(O) (\Rightarrow K(O))$
E.g.: Had there not been a zebra in the enclosure, I wouldn't have believed that there was, since, had there not been a zebra there, would have been, say, a goat and I can tell a goat from a zebra
- But it yields *lack of* knowledge of the falsity of sceptical alternatives (even though O entails $\neg H$):
Had it been the case that $\neg \neg H$, i.e. H , it would still have been the case that $B(\neg H) (\Rightarrow \neg K(\neg H))$
E.g.: Had there (not not) been a cleverly painted mule in the enclosure, I would still have believed there wasn't, because, since cleverly painted mules look exactly like zebras, I would still have believed that there was a zebra there

Dretske's WAM (ctd)

- He suggests a WAM may be available:
‘[T]here are logical abominations (self contradictory) and *conversational* abominations (perfectly consistent, and therefore possibly true statements, that violate conventional expectations). To say that S knows that there are cookies in the jar but doesn't know he isn't hallucinating them is certainly to say something absurd, but why suppose its absurdity is such (i.e. logical) as to render the statement incapable of being true?’

Dretske's WAM (ctd)

- But his remarks on what this WAM might look like are sketchy:

“‘The refrigerator is empty, but has lots of things in it’ is also an abominable conjunction. It might, nonetheless, be true. There may be no food or other items normally stored in refrigerators inside (thus making the refrigerator empty in the normal way of understanding what isn’t in empty refrigerators), but it may, nonetheless, be filled with lots of gas molecules... The abomination in saying a refrigerator is empty but has lots of things in it comes... from a violation of normal expectations.’

Dretske's WAM (ctd)

- He continues:

‘In describing an object as a refrigerator (and not, say, a metal container) one is led to expect that the things that are in (or, in the case of its being empty, not in) it are the sorts of perishable items normally stored or preserved in refrigerators. To then include (second conjunct) gas molecules as things in refrigerators is to flout this entirely reasonable expectation... Why isn’t it ridiculous, for exactly the same reason, to say one knows one has hands but doesn’t know one isn’t a handless brain in a vat? The second conjunct introduces possibilities normally assumed to be irrelevant (not counted as possibilities) by someone who asserts the first conjunct.’
- What do you reckon? Good WAM or bare WAM?

References

- DeRose, K. 1999: Contextualism: an explanation and defense. In J. Greco and E. Sosa, ed., *The Blackwell Guide to Epistemology*, Blackwell Publishers.
- Dretske, F. & J. Hawthorne 2013: Is Knowledge Closed under Known Entailment? In M. Steup, J. Turri and E. Sosa (eds) *Contemporary Debates in Epistemology, 2nd Edition*. Wiley-Blackwell, pp. 27–59.