

Wondering is Wanting to Know

Mike Deigan

`mike.deigan@rutgers.edu`

`https://mikedeigan.com`

May 23/24, 2021

Dianoia Institute Language Workshop

WTK (v1): S wonders Q iff S wants to know Q .

I wonder whether it will rain. \supset I want to know whether it will rain.

I want to know whether it will rain. \supset I wonder whether it will rain.

I wonder where my keys are. \supset I want to know where my keys are.

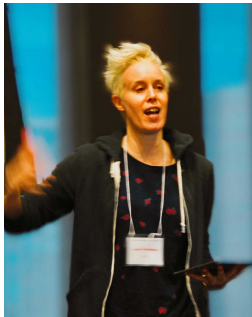
I want to know where my keys are. \supset I wonder where my keys are.

I wonder how to get home. \supset I want to know how to get home.

I want to know how to get home. \supset I wonder how to get home.

WTK sometimes assumed, but has not been explicitly defended.

Objections from



Friedman



Carruthers



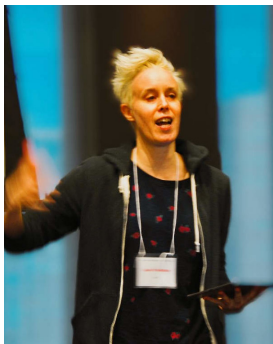
Drucker

My goal: refine and defend the WTK theory of wonder.

PART I

A Preliminary Clarification

Why be anti-WTK?



To show there are attitudes with irreducible question contents.

$S \phi$'s $Q \neq$ [something with p 's and no Q 's]

Assumption: if wondering is wanting to know, then wondering is not irreducibly question-directed.

WTK (v1): S wonders Q iff S wants to know Q .



Does wanting to know Q = [something with p 's and no Q 's]?

WTK theorist need not think so.

Reducing away question contents is not my agenda.

PART II

Answering the Objections

Objection 1a: wondering is an activity, wanting is a state

Friedman (2013, p. 154): “wishing to know is a state and wondering seems to be a process. . . .”

Objection 1b: wanting to know but not wondering

“ . . . Right now I wish to know the answers to a whole range of questions having to do with the origins of the universe, but I’m not currently wondering about each of these questions.”

See also Drucker (forthcoming, pp. 10–11).

Response: occurrent wanting

WTK (v2):

- i. S is wondering Q iff S is *occurrently* wanting to know Q .
- ii. S wonders Q iff S wants to know Q .

Objection 2: wondering but not wanting to know

Friedman: “couldn’t the inquirer simply love their inquiry into Q so much that they do not want to know Q since that would serve to bring the beloved inquiry to a close?”

More common reasons: avoiding bias and bad news.

Response: some-things-considered wanting

Davis (1984):

- (1) a. I want to play tennis today, but I have to teach.
- b. I don't want to play tennis today since I have to teach.

WTK (v3):

- i. S is wondering Q iff S is occurrently *some-things-considered* wanting to know Q .
- ii. S wonders Q iff S *some-things-considered* wants to know Q .

Objection 3: can't get no satisfaction

Drucker (forthcoming, pp. 9–10):

- (2)
 - a. Winning the lottery would allow me to satisfy every desire I have.
 - b. Satisfy my curiosity: what did she tell you?
 - c. #Satisfy my wonder/wondering/wonderment: what did she tell you?

Response: Yes you can.

Drucker's test here not so useful.

- (3) a. ??Satisfy my want/wanting: give me a coffee.
- b. #Satisfy my want/wanting to know: what did she tell you?

Also (from the internet):

- (4) Back in grad school I studied comets and always wondered what it would be like to land on a nucleus. With Rosetta, that wonder was satisfied.

More importantly, seems like a good distinction!

	Satisfaction	False Satisfaction	Dissipation
S wants to ϕ	$\phi(S)$	$B_S\phi(S) \wedge \neg\phi(S)$	pill to stop wanting ϕ
S wonders Q	K_SQ	$\neg K_SQ \wedge B_SK_SQ$	pill to stop wondering Q

Objection 4: wondering without metacognition

Friedman: WTK and other reductive theories of interrogative attitudes [IAs] . . . “would mean that only creatures capable of representing their own epistemic standings could have IAs. But very simple creatures—creatures not thought to have the relevant sort of metarepresentational capacities—can have at least some of the IAs under discussion, e.g., curiosity, wondering.”

Carruthers (2018): “The main problem with metacognitive accounts of curiosity is that they make it hard to see how nonhuman animals could ever be curious. For metacognitive theories of curiosity seem to require conceptual resources that the creatures in question likely lack. Indeed, many animals besides humans seem capable of curiosity. Or more neutral . . . many animals engage in forms of behavior that do not seem obviously instrumental, but which seem designed to obtain information. An animal confronted with something unusual might look closer at it, move up to sniff it, walk around it to examine it from the other side, and so on.”

Response: thin 'metacognition' and teleosemantics

Thin metacognition: simple wonderers of Q want to know Q , even if they don't have theory of mind (can't represent others as knowing or not knowing, e.g.).

Millikan (2005): A representation is *directive* when it has a proper function to guide the mechanisms that use it so that they produce its satisfaction condition.

Function of wondering Q ?

Plausibly, to guide creature through various mechanisms to bring it about that the creature knows Q .

Shea (2018, roughly): if a representation partially explains an organism's ability to perform some function through its causing some condition *C* obtain, then that representation has directive content: *make C obtain!*

Plausibly, wondering *Q* explains creature's ability to perform some function(s) through causing it to know *Q*.

Answers metacognition objection, but also suggests that we can derive WTK from foundational principles together with some empirical facts.

If teleosemantics and the assumptions about the function of wondering are right, it falls out that wondering Q involves directive content to know Q .

Remaining work: show that this is a desire as opposed to some other state with such a content.

Schroeder (2004)'s reward theory of desire and the relevant neuroscience (e.g., Kang et al. (2009)) seem promising here.

PART III

Advantages and Payoffs

1. Intuitive judgments about cases
2. Linguistic explanations (judgements about the inferences, but perhaps also **wonder that* (see Uegaki (2015))).
3. Desert landscape
4. Unifying some practical and epistemic normativity

Thanks!

Remaining questions, objections, observations, etc.?

✉ → mike.deigan@rutgers.edu