

# Wondering is Wanting to Know

Mike Deigan

`mike.deigan@rutgers.edu`

`https://mikedeigan.com`

March 21, 2022

Inquiry Network WIP

**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.

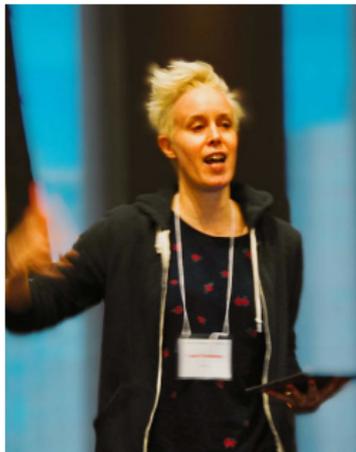
I want to know where my keys are.  $\supset$  I wonder where my keys are.

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.

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 $\phi$	$\phi(S)$	$B_S\phi(S) \wedge \neg\phi(S)$	pill to stop wanting $\phi$
$S$ 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.”

(see also Whitcomb (2010) on curiosity and Carruthers (2018))

## **Response: thin 'metacognition' and teleosemantics**

*Thin metacognition:* simple wonderers of  $Q$  want to know  $Q$ , even if they don't have KNOW available for generally recombinable use in explicit thought.

These sound about equally good to me:

- (5) a. Samson is going to the other room because he wants to know what's making that sound.
- b. Samson is going to the other room because he wonders what's making that sound.

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 various mechanisms to bring it about that the creature knows  $Q$ .

So: content of wondering  $Q$  is “[the creature] knows  $Q$ ”

Almost gets us a direct (if speculative and contentious) argument for the WTK Theory.

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

One route: Reward Theory of Desire (Schroeder (2004) and Arpaly and Schroeder (2014)).

Getting information in wondering agents activates the usual reward circuitry—it seems to constitute a reward (e.g., Kang et al. (2009)).

This would make wondering a desire on Schroeder and Arpaly's theory.

So: I don't think the objections against the WTK Theory work.  
And I think there are some decent reasons in its favor.

I conclude: WTK Theory is looking pretty good!

# **PART III**

## **Norms of Wondering/Wanting**

Plausible: wonder is governed by a norm of instrumental rationality:

if you wonder  $Q$ , take the necessary means to know  $Q$ .

Idea: WTK Theory can explain this by unifying it with standard instrumental norm:

if you want to  $\phi$ , take the necessary means to  $\phi$ .

But remember: wondering is *some-things-considered* wanting!

My view: wondering  $Q$  is fitting response to it being good in some respect to know  $Q$ .

This value will contribute to one's all-things-considered reasons to inquire, but will not generally determine it.

Norms of wonder still are just a special case of norms of wanting, just not the kind of wanting that directly gives one an end to pursue.

Questions for you:

1. What implications for wondering what you already know?

“I want to know who won” is weird if you already know.

However: “I live in Highland Park because I want to be close to campus, but not too close” seems fine.

2. I want to know how to play bassoon.  
Do I wonder how to play bassoon?

# Thanks!

Remaining questions, objections, observations, etc.?

✉ → [mike.deigan@rutgers.edu](mailto:mike.deigan@rutgers.edu)