

Theory of Knowledge (Phil 447)

Joseph Keim Campbell

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Common Sense & Denying Closure

- Moore, "A Defence of Common Sense"
- Dretske, "Epistemic Operators"

The Argument for Skepticism (DeRose, D&W 2)

1. S does not know that not-H.
2. If S does not know that not-H, then S does not know that O.
3. ∴ S does not know that O.

Let: S = any person
 H = a skeptical hypothesis
 O = any ordinary belief

Knowledge Closure: If S knows that P, and S knows that P entails Q, then S knows that Q. (D&W 13)

Supports premise (2)

Two Replies to the Argument for Skepticism

1. The Common Sense Reply: Reject (1)

"... since I do know that I'm standing up, it follows that I do know that I'm not dreaming ..." (G.E. Moore)

Moore accepts (2) but rejects (1). I know that I'm not dreaming, that I'm not a BIV, etc. *because* I know that I have a hand, etc.
2. Denying Knowledge Closure: Reject (2)

"... you can know that the animals are zebras without knowing that they're not painted mules." (Fred Dretske)

Dretske accepts (1) but rejects (2). I know that the animals at the zoo are zebras but I can't rule out that they are disguised mules, or that I'm a BIV, etc.

Moore's "Proof of an External World"

"By holding up my two hands, and saying, as I make a certain gesture with the right hand, 'Here is one hand,' and adding, as I make a certain gesture with the left, 'and here is another.' And if, by doing this, I have proven *ipso facto* the existence of external things, you will see that I can also do it now in numbers of other ways: there is no need to multiply examples." (Moore, 602)

1. "Here is one hand, and here is another."
2. Therefore, "Two human hands exist at this moment." (602-3)

Moore's Reply to the Argument for Skepticism (606)

- "I *do* know that this pencil exists; but I could not know this, if Hume's [skeptical] principles were true; *therefore*, Hume's principles, one or both of them, are false."
- Cf. "I *do* know that I have a hand; but I could not know this, if the premises of the Argument for Skepticism were true; *therefore*, these premises, one or both of them, are false."

A Particular Instance of Moore's Argument

- (1*) Moore knows that he has a hand.
 (2*) If Moore knows that he has a hand, then he knows that he is not a BIV.
 (3*) ∴ Moore knows that he is not a BIV.

Moore's Criteria for a Rigorous Proof (602; 606ff.)

1. The premise and conclusion must say different things.
2. The premises must be known to be the case.
3. The conclusion must follow from the premises.

Moore on (2): Knowing the Premises

- "... the degree of certainty of the conclusion ... will be in proportion to the degree of certainty of the premiss." (608)
- "... any proposition is known to be true, if we have a conclusive argument in its favour ..." (608)
- "If any argument from a *single* premiss is to be conclusive, the *single* premiss must ... be at least as certain as the conclusion ..." (608)

Moorean Fact: a proposition that is more certain than any premise given in its support. (cf. Lewis)

Dretske on Closure (D&W 131-4) (boldface mine)

O is a (fully) **penetrating operator** iff "if P entails Q, then O(P) entails O(Q)."

"I shall be dealing with only the *known consequences*"

Knowledge Closure = the view that 'S knows that' is a penetrating operator (wrt known consequences)

Non-penetrating operators: "their *degree of penetration* is less than that of any of the other operators I shall have occasion to discuss." (D&W 133)

"Anything that falls between these two extremes I shall call a *semi-penetrating operator*."

Dretske's Thesis: "all epistemic operators are semi-penetrating [and not (fully) penetrating] operators."

Both the skeptic and Moore accept closure.

"The only difference is that the skeptic performs a modus tollens, Moore a modus ponens." (D&W 135)

Examples of operators:

- 'it is not the case that' [= '~'] is non-penetrating.
 "If P entails Q, then ~ (P) entails ~ (Q)" is false.
- 'it is necessary that' [= '□'] is (fully) penetrating.
 "If P entails Q, then □ (P) entails □ (Q)" is true.
- 'S knows that' is semi-penetrating.

Dretske Thought Experiments

“We can say that S knows that X is Y without implying that S knows that *it is* X which is Y.” (D&W 136)

- “I said that the little old lady realized that my brother would not move. Does this imply that she realized that, or knew that, *it was my brother* who refused to move?”
- “to see that . . . the roses are wilted . . . is not to see . . . that they are roses which are wilted.”
- “To see that the widow is limping is not to see that it is a widow who is limping.”

The Zoo Example:

“You take your son to the zoo, see several zebras, and, when questioned by your son, tell him they are zebras. Do you know they are zebras? Well, most of us would have little hesitation in saying that we know this. We know what zebras look like, and, besides, this is the city zoo and the animals are in a pen clearly marked ‘Zebras.’ Yet, something’s being a zebra implies that it is not a mule and, in particular, not a mule cleverly disguised by the zoo authorities to look like a zebra. Do you know that these animals are not mules cleverly disguised by the zoo authorities to look like zebras?” (Dretske, D&W 138)