

Fred Dretske's "The Pragmatic Dimension of Knowledge"

I. DRETSKE SEES KNOWLEDGE...

- as an absolute concept, that is, as an all-or-nothing concept (like validity) – either one knows or one doesn't, and
- as nevertheless exhibiting "a degree of contextual relativity in its ordinary use" (p. 50).

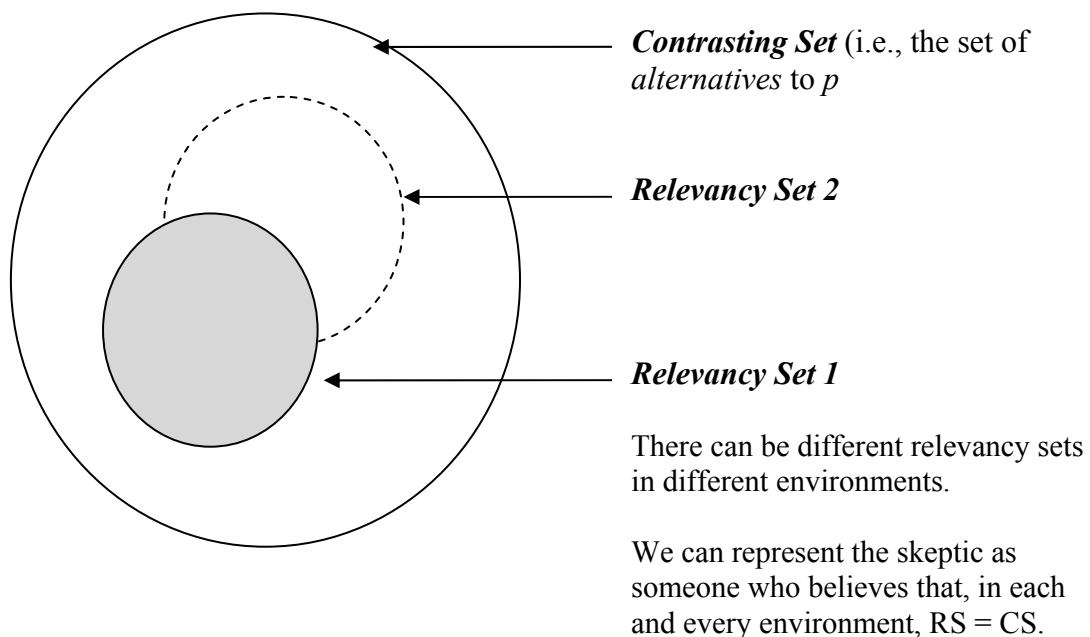
II. DRETSKE BELIEVES THAT THE RELEVANT ALTERNATIVES THEORY (RAT) CAN EXPLAIN BOTH OF THESE FEATURES OF THE CONCEPT OF KNOWLEDGE. HERE'S HIS VERSION OF THE THEORY:

Knowledge is an evidential state in which *all relevant alternatives* (to what is known) *are eliminated*.

It's now fairly easy to see how this theory accounts for our two features of the RAT:

- i. Since the RAT prescribes a threshold—it requires the elimination of all relevant alternatives—it captures the absolute character of the concept of knowledge.
- ii. Since there is (or can be) a difference, from situation to situation, in what counts as a relevant alternative, the RAT captures the contextual relativity of the concept of knowledge.

III. DRETSKE'S DIAGRAM



IV. DRETSKE ON RELEVANCE

“[T]he difference between a relevant and an irrelevant alternative resides ... in the kind of possibilities that actually exist in the objective situation” (p. 63).

V. HOW EVEN THIS NON-CONTEXTUALIZED ACCOUNT OF RELEVANCE ALLOWS FOR DIFFERENT SETS OF RELEVANT ALTERNATIVES IN DIFFERENT SITUATIONS

- Because there is often a difference in “the kind of possibilities that actually exist in the objective situation.”
- Contextualized accounts of relevance – i.e., those in which subject factors, attributor factors or interpreter factors matter for the relevance of certain alternatives – can also allow for different sets of relevant alternatives in different situations.
- The question will be: Which sort of theory allows us to get the *right* set of relevant alternatives in certain contexts?