

## Seeing As

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### Simple seeing

seeing X = getting information about X {Dretske, 2000 #1098@109}.

“Seeing objects is a way of getting information about them. What makes it seeing (rather than, say, hearing) is the intrinsic character of those events occurring in us that carry the information. What makes it X (rather than Y) that we see is that the information those internal events carry is information about X (rather than Y).” {Dretske, 2000 #1098@112}

The information is carried by an experience and there is no guarantee that the subject of the experience will be able to do anything with the information:

“When we see X, X ... initiates a sequence of events that culminates in a distinctive sort of experience, the sort we call a *visual* experience. Typically this experience embodies information about the color, shape, size, position, and movement of X. The ... function of the sensory systems ... is to get the message in so that a properly equipped receiver can modulate her responses to the things about which she is getting information. It is responsible for the delivery of information and its responsibility ends there. ... If you don’t take your letters from the mailbox, or if you can’t understand them once you do, don’t blame the postal system.” {Dretske, 2000 #1098@109}

Suppose you have entirely false background beliefs about some object X. You are seeing X (simple seeing) and you form a demonstrative belief, *That is on fire*. Which object is your belief about—what is the reference of the demonstrative? Dretske says this is fixed by simple seeing. He suggests an argument that simple seeing must exist because it is necessary to explain how the objects

of our beliefs are fixed, particularly in cases where we have largely false beliefs about X.

How does this argument work? Suppose there was only *seeing that*. Suppose you do not believe that X is the object you are seeing (you take yourself to be seeing Y). Can you see that X is F? No, because seeing that X is F involves taking X to be F. But it seems that I *can* believe *It is smudged*, where the thing I believe to be smudged is X. What determines that the referent of “it” in this belief is X?

Assumption: it must be some visual relation to “it”. But this visual relation cannot be any state of seeing that, because no seeing that X is F was involved in acquiring this belief. Conclusion: there is a visual relation in addition to seeing that; and one such that seeing X is compatible with not taking X to be F.

Key characteristic of simple seeing: if X is the F, then *S sees X* is equivalent to *S sees the F*. {Dretske, 1969 #1671@54}

**Seeing that** = (i)–(iv)

### **The Gap**

There’s a gap in that simple seeing is not sufficient for seeing that. Can be insufficient merely because the subject lacks relevant concepts; this doesn’t show that there is a gap. The gap consists in cases where subject has the concepts and simply sees the broken object without seeing that it is broken.

Cases of simple seeing that are not seeing that:

*Noticing* “Tom at time t1 differs (perceptibly) from Tom at t2 only in having a moustache at t2. S sees Tom at both times but does not notice the moustache—is not, therefore, aware that he has grown a moustache” {Dretske, 2000 #126@119}

*Recognizing* “Tom at time t1 differs (perceptibly) from Tom at t2 only in having a moustache at t2. S sees Tom at both times. S notices the dark mass under Tom’s nose but does not

recognize it as a moustache—is not, therefore, aware that he has grown a moustache” {Dretske, 2000 #126@119}

I want to claim that there is more to perception than simple seeing and seeing that. I want to argue that we also need a notion of *seeing as*, and I want to argue this on Dretske’s own terms. But the bare existence of this gap doesn’t show that more is needed.

Two arguments for *more is needed*. [1] determining contents of belief; [2] perception as a source of knowledge.

[1] Dretske says simple seeing determines which object a belief is about. I believe *It is smudged*. “What makes the copy, not the original, the referent of “it”? Answer: the fact that I see the copy (not the original) and what I refer to with “it” is what I see.” {Dretske, 2000 #1098@107}. Compare this situation: I believe *It is shaped thus*. What makes the squareness, not any other shape, the shape I believe it to have? The fact that I see the copy’s squareness and what I refer to with “thus” is what I see. Now consider senses for beliefs. I believe *It is smudged* and *It is crumpled*. Both beliefs are about things I see. In some cases, I am immediately entitled to infer *It is smudged and crumpled*, in some cases the rationality of this inference depends on my having some further propositional attitude of the form  $a=b$ . What makes the difference? By definition, it’s the fact that both ‘it’s have the same sense. Talk about sense enables us to rephrase the question, so that the analogy with Dretske’s Belief-Reference Argument is clearer. What determines whether the two ‘it’s have the same sense? Arguably their senses are determined by some aspect of seeing. This seems plausible because the reference is determined by the object of seeing. So what facts about seeing determines whether the ‘it’s have the same sense?

[1.1] Could simple seeing determine sameness of sense? One idea is that whether the senses of the ‘it’s are the same is determined by whether the referents of the ‘it’s are based on seeing the same object.

This idea must be wrong because it amounts to saying that the senses of the 'it's are the same whenever their referents are. To put the same objection differently, the fact that one and the same object was seen on both occasions is not sufficient for being immediately entitled to make the inference. An alternative idea might be that seeing the objects is not enough; one must see some property of them. Just as one can see the shape of an object, perhaps also one can see, or fail to see, the identity of an object with an object. This idea too meets an immediate objection. But because simple seeing is extensional, where  $X=Y$  there is no difference between seeing an object's being identical with  $X$  and seeing an object's being identical with  $Y$ . If we can ever see  $X$ 's being identical with  $Y$  then we ought always to be able to see  $X$ 's being identical with  $X$  (after all, what could prevent us from seeing this?). And so the property in question is one that we either never see or always see. Either way, seeing this property can't determine whether the senses of the two 'it's are the same.

[1.2] Could seeing that determine sameness of sense? Perhaps, then, whether the senses of the 'it's are the same is determined by whether I see that *It is it*? This would be inconsistent with the possibility of *immediate* inference. The inference is immediate if believing both *It is smudged* and *It is crumpled* makes it rational for me to infer *It is smudged and crumpled* without dependence on further propositional attitudes. To insist that the rationality of the inference depends on seeing that *It is it* is to introduce a further propositional attitude. The difference between cases where the inference is immediately rational and cases where it is not is precisely the difference between cases where no further premise is needed and where a further premise, *it=it*, is needed.

[1.2.b] Could it be the *looks* element of clause (iii) of seeing that which determines sameness of sense? Perhaps among the ways objects can look are ways of looking identical to objects. \*\*\*HERE

[1.3] Apparently, then, neither simple seeing nor seeing that determines whether the two 'it's have the same sense. Yet since the referents of these 'it's are determined by seeing, it is plausible that some kind of seeing is also responsible for determining their senses. This is a reason for thinking that simple seeing and seeing that do not exhaustively characterise seeing.

[1.4] What determines whether the two 'it's have the same senses? I must see the same object *as the same object*. How to understand this? Intuitive illustration: An object moves behind a barrier. At some point an object moves out from behind the barrier. In some conditions you will see these as the same object, in other cases you might not see them as the same object. How you see them will show up in intuitive descriptions of the events as well as more primitive reactions to the objects (\*object-specific preview effect). The difference doesn't consist in seeing that they are the same object (for you can see them as the same object without taking them to be the same object \*ref. Mitroff & Scholl?). Nor does the difference consist in *noticing* whether they are the same object.

No substantive characterisation of seeing as yet given. If introduce this, (1) should it be related to seeing aspects (LW), and (2) if allow can see object as square, how does seeing as square relate to (2i) simply seeing the squareness of an object and (2ii) seeing that the object is square? Answer (2i) seeing as is non-extensional whereas simply seeing is extensional; so seeing X as F may imply seeing the Fness of X but certainly not vice versa. Answer (2ii) seeing that the object is square depends on seeing the object as square, plus noticing its squareness plus perhaps other conditions.

Should we say seeing as requires concepts? Not obvious why since it is not a propositional attitude (can't be given that it's supposed to determine sameness of sense). Is seeing as invariably a conscious state? Not obvious why it should be. One of its functions is to determine sameness of sense; it can't determine sameness of sense if it doesn't provide immediate entitlement for inferences; providing

such entitlement arguable implies, or even consists in, being conscious. This is all true, but it only shows that states of seeing as are sometimes conscious. It doesn't show that they could not fail to be conscious. Similarly, it doesn't follow that states of seeing as must be conscious states. From the facts that a function of As is to  $\varphi$  and that As can only  $\varphi$  if they are G, it doesn't follow that all As are G.

[2] Does the existence of a gap support this claim, that there is more to perception than simple seeing and seeing that? Suppose we accept that perception is a source of knowledge. Simple seeing isn't a source of knowledge because of the gap [\*not obvious why the gap is a problem. Answering How p? doesn't obviously require giving a sufficient condition for p]. And seeing that entails knowing. So if when we say perception is a source of knowledge we are thinking of seeing that, then there is a conflict with the principle that seeing is a source of knowledge when this is understood to mean seeing is explanatory of knowledge acquisition. (There's also Williamson's way of understanding the principle which doesn't conflict with spelling it out in terms of seeing that.) Since knowledge is a source of knowledge, knowledge-gained-on-Monday is also a source of knowledge. That's true of course, but arguably carries less explanatory weight than the claim that perception is a source of knowledge. So: if it's true that 'seeing is a source of knowledge' is more illuminating than 'knowledge-gained-on-Monday is a source of knowledge' then the notion of seeing appealed to in 'seeing is a source of knowledge' is neither object seeing nor seeing that, and so a further sort of seeing is needed.

[Seeing that. Why does it entail knowing? According to Dretske because clause (iii) means that S has a conclusive reason for b's being P. So if we accept Dretske's definition, we should also accept that seeing that entails knowing. But it is possible to doubt that condition (iii) is necessary for seeing that {Kvart, 1993 #1675@294}. Kvart offers some examples which he simply asserts

are cases of seeing that. Dretske could simple deny this. On what grounds could this be determined? It seems to me that 'seeing that' is ordinary language is a very flexible construction and that the phenomena these philosophers need to identify are psychological rather than linguistic. Suppose, then, that we allow that each philosopher can use the term in accordance with any reasonably clear definition. This seems reasonable. But what now of the claim that 'seeing that' is a source of knowledge? \*\*\*here

Intuition: conscious/awareness/experience is what's missing from {simple seeing, seeing that}. Simple seeing is not sufficient because it provides no awareness of the object.

Given the intuition, it's maybe ok to stipulate that *seeing as* has the role of plugging the gap between object seeing and seeing that.

Compare Dretske's characterisation of what it takes for a simple seeing to be conscious--it has to play a role as a reason. Dretske's saying this shows that he agrees with the technical specification. But this is only a functional specification of what I am calling *seeing as*. We have seeing as when perception provides reasons. This is like defining the plug in your bath as what holds the water in. It's a reasonable definition but doesn't tell you what it is that holds the water in. What, then, is seeing as?

[2] Perception as a source of knowledge. Nothing wrong with saying I see that Woolworths is closing down. But if there is a substantial question about how I know this, can't answer it by appeal to my seeing that it is closing down. So the bare notion of seeing that isn't useful for understanding the sense in which perception can be a source of knowledge (on this non-minimalist conception). Typically supplemented: primary and secondary seeing that, where the former involves simply seeing the objects involving in seeing that, and does not involve inference.

Is there anything that can be said by way of substantive characterisation? Maybe there is only empirical psychology at this point. The problem with that view is that the concept of seeing *that* is anchored to knowledge and so it's not clear how there could be empirical investigation. The goal is to get to the point where it's possible to make testable predictions from 'S sees a as F'.

Have to be careful with the terminology. It's natural to rephrase 'S sees that a is F' as 'S sees a as F'. In everyday talk about perception there may be nothing wrong with this. In some cases, a statement to the effect that 'S sees a as F' may consist only in S's seeing that a is F. But must distinguish this from the technical sense defined by the role of seeing as in explaining seeing that.

Probably this characterization of 'seeing as' does not give us one thing. There may be several distinct reasons why simple seeing fails to be enough for seeing that:

I fail to *notice* that the object is broken; it doesn't *strike* me as broken

I fail to

Seeing as is (a) non-propositional; (b) doesn't require concepts; (c) non-factive (can see the yellow flowering bush as chalk marks on the wall, Strawson's example)

### **Questions about seeing as**

Does it require concepts?

Only those with the concept of a sphere can have an experience as of a sphere in front of them, and only those with spatial concepts can have experiences which represent things as distributed in depth in space.

{Peacocke, 1983 #101@7}

### **Ways of knowing**

"an explanatory conception of ways of knowing. According to this conception, which is the one that I want to flesh out and defend



here, F-ing that P is a way of knowing that P just if it is possible satisfactorily to explain how S knows that P by pointing out that S Fs that P.” {Cassam, 2007 #1670@340}

“once it is agreed that I see that P then nothing more needs to be done to explain how I know that P.” {Cassam, 2007 #1670@343}

**Here's why Dretske misses the point about sense** -- he assumes identification will be taken care of separately (which seems reasonable only because he is thinking of narratives about what people know where the objects of knowledge are not assumed to be present). I have to push the point that identification of which thing is P can involve perception in some cases. Actually Dretske's argument from the later paper seems to assume this -- so presumably represents a change in his view.

“There is also the fact that in place of ‘b’ we may find a relative pronoun (‘it’, ‘she’, ‘they’,) or a demonstrative pronoun (‘this’, ‘these’, ‘that’). I do not believe that these variations call for special attention. The statement ‘He saw that it was P’ must (if it is to be understood) occur in a context which makes clear what ‘it’ is (e.g. the thing I heard in the bushes, that speck in the sky, the man on the bridge). The only difference here is that one’s proto-knowledge is reflected in the preceding context and is, therefore, deleted from the perceptual claim itself.” (108)