

Lecture 03: Central Themes

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‘If psychologists can really identify something that deserves to be called perception without awareness, they must have an operational grasp on not only what it takes to perceive something, but on what it takes to be conscious of it. (Dretske 2006, p. 148)

1. Simple Seeing

Dretske introduces the notion of *simple seeing* (see Dretske 2000, chapter 6; the same thing is called as ‘nonepistemic seeing’ in (Dretske 1969)). The key characteristic of simple seeing: if X is the F, then *S sees X* is equivalent to *S sees the F* (Dretske 1969, p. 54).

‘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 these internal events carry is information about X (rather than Y). Everything else [...] is [...] something the scientist, not the philosopher, should provide’ (Dretske 2000, p. 112).

‘Perception without awareness [...] is therefore to be understood as perception of some object without awareness [...] of that object’ (Dretske 2006).

2. A Test for Perception?

What does it take to perceive something? By what test could we measure whether someone has perceived a particular object? According to Dretske, to perceive an object:

- you must have got information about the thing; and
- ‘the information in these states should be available for the control and guidance of action’; and
- ‘the information should be extracted from stimulation [...] by accredited receptor systems’ (Dretske 2006, p. 150).

Note Dretske’s qualification: ‘Even with the additional qualifications [not specified here], this ‘test’ for perception of an object is not going to withstand philosophical scrutiny—to too many loose ends and philosophically troublesome qualifiers’ (Dretske 2006, p. 151).

3. Perception without Awareness?

‘Here lies the fatal flaw in [...] the philosophy of mind, for, in using as evidence what seems reasonable or persuasive, philosophers ultimately rely on their own introspections. They look inside themselves in an attempt to discover the design of the mind’ (Bridgeman 2004, p. 380)

Two pieces of evidence (see Lecture 02):

- Sidis (1898)’s letter guessing experiment
- blindsight (Weiskrantz et al. 1995; Cowey 2010)

References

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