

Appearance & Expression

290-4

Handout 2

1. *The Importance of Perceptual Knowledge*

If there is a problem of knowledge, if there is a problem about how we can see what we commonly purport to see, then it would seem that these difficulties affect both our knowledge of objects and our knowledge of other minds. For, as commonly conceived, there are no greater epistemological barriers in the one case than there are in the other. (Dretske, 'Perception and Other Minds', pp.35-6.)

...the problem of sources is the problem of explaining how one could come to know of the existence of other minds, given that knowledge of their existence can't easily be accounted for on the basis of introspection, perception, testimony, or inference. (Quassim Cassam, *The Possibility of Knowledge* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2007), p.157.)

Defenders of what I'm going to call the *inferential model* think that inference can be a source of our knowledge of other minds and that our knowledge of other minds must be a form of inferential knowledge. In contrast, defenders of what I'm going to call the *perceptual model* look to perception as a source of our knowledge of other minds. They think that it's possible to know *that* others think and feel by *perceiving* that others think and feel, and that it's sometimes possible to know *what* others think and feel by *perceiving* that others think and feel, and that it's sometimes possible to know *what* others think and feel on the same basis. (*PoK*, p.158.)

Perception as a source of knowledge =

(?) implicated at all in the explanation of one's being in a position to know

(?) exhausts the explanation of how one is in a position to know

Although it's sometimes suggested that all perception involves inference it's a mistake to think that perceptual knowledge is a disguised form of inferential knowledge. To infer is to reason one's way from premisses to a conclusion, and it's certainly not true that every case in which one sees that b is P is a case in which one has explicitly or implicitly inferred that b is P. (*PoK*, p.160.)

If 'inferential knowledge' marked out positively by the process by which it is arrived at, or negatively, by the absence of other means sufficient to guarantee the status of the state of acceptance as one of knowledge?

Can judgement based on non-deductive reasoning, or grounded in something other than knowledge, issue in a state of knowledge?

For a start, it can't be right to think of inference to the best explanation as the ultimate source of one's knowledge that the Bursar's state of mind if the object of the exercise is to show how my knowledge of his state of mind could be perceptual. If I *infer* that the Bursar is minded from reasonable assumptions about his biology or physiology then I don't *see* that he is minded. In any case, the issue was whether I can *eliminate* the possibility that the Bursar is a zombie and this possibility has yet to be eliminated. What inference to the best explanation shows is that it's highly unlikely that the Bursar is a zombie and that it's therefore reasonable for me to think that he isn't a zombie, but highly unlikely isn't good enough. What is highly unlikely is still

possible so inference to the best explanation can't be a way of meeting the obstacle-generating epistemological requirement on its own terms. (PoK, 166-7.)

S sees that *b* is *P* in a primary epistemic way only if:

- (i) *b* is *P*
- (ii) *S* sees_n *b* [the subscript indicates that Dretske is talking of 'nonepistemic' or 'simple' seeing as we ordinarily report by object-perception reports]
- (iii) The conditions under which *S* sees_n *b* are such that *b* would not look, *L*, the way it now looks to *S* unless it was *P*.
- (iv) *S*, believing the conditions are as described in (iii), takes *b* to be *P*. (Fred Dretske, *Seeing & Knowing*, (London: Routledge, 1969) pp. 79-88)

S sees that *b* is *P* in a secondary epistemic way:

- (i) *b* is *P*
- (ii) *S* sees *c* (*c*≠*b*) and sees (primarily) that *c* is *Q*.
- (iii) Conditions are such that *c* would not be *Q* unless *b* were *P*.
- (iv) *S*, believing conditions are as described in (iii), takes *b* to be *P*.

(*S&K*, p.153)

Primary epistemic seeing earns the epithet 'primary' in virtue of its fundamental epistemological status. The respect in which it is fundamental is revealed in clauses (ii) and (iii) in our various schemata for secondary seeing. Unless we could see that *c* was *Q*, for some value of '*c*' and some value of '*Q*', in a *primary* fashion, we could never see that anything was the case in *anyway* (that was essentially visual). (*S&K* 157-6.)

What is the connection between object (and event) perception, on the one hand, and fact perception on the other?

Dretske and Cassam want to mark a distinction in terms of primary/secondary epistemic seeing and inferential knowledge. Does this draw the distinction in the right place?

Do all explanations of visually grounded perceptual knowledge trace through our sensitivity to the *looks* of objects?

Are we sensitive to the looks of objects in relation to the different judgements we make?

...an argument for the view that in order to see that the Bursar is angry it's not necessary to see his anger has evolved into an argument for the view that it *is possible*, in a sense, to see his anger... What displays or manifestations of the Bursar's anger do is to *reveal* his state of mind without *being* his state of mind; one perceives his anger by perceiving displays of it. (PoK 164-5.)

Compare:

See the anger in his face

See his father in his smile

See the donkey in the photograph