

Appearance & Expression

290-4

Handout 3

1. Main Points of Last Week

Question: What is the importance of the contrast between *perceptual* knowledge and *inferential* knowledge?

First proposal: perceptual knowledge is knowledge whose source is perceptual (visual/tactual etc).

Is this to say that its *sole* source is perceptual? If only *partly* perceptual, most occasional knowledge will be perceptual and not inferential.

Second proposal: the presence (explicit or implicit?) of reasoning is necessary for inferential knowledge. Why should this make an important *epistemological* difference, particularly if perceptual processes involve unconscious (but presumably not implicit) inferences?

Hypothesis: non-deductive inference from knowledge does not rule out the falsity of what one reasons to; a perceiver to whom how things are is 'plainly in view' seems to have all alternatives ruled out.

If this contrast between perception and inference is used directly, then 'inferential knowledge' would not be knowledge on a McDowellian infallibilist (or even conclusive reason infallibilist) story.

But *one* way to use it consistent with McDowell is this:

- a.) in the perceptual case, the subject's explanation of how he or she is in a position to know appeals to something, their perceptual encounter, which itself connects with the fact known;
- b.) in the inferential case, the subject's explanation of how he or she is in a position to know underdetermines the fact that she is a knower – it is consistent with not being a knower.

If this is a proper way to interpret the Cassam, then the importance of stressing that we can have *perceptual* knowledge of the mental states of others – that we should on occasion be in a position just to take that fact in.

2. Dissolving Other Minds Scepticism

Both Dretske and Cassam take a deflationary attitude towards seeing this as a problem: it should be no more problematic to have perceptual knowledge of other's minds than it is to have perceptual knowledge of many of the features of the environment around us. There can be no special problem of other minds.

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.)

Question: what warrants the deflationary attitude?

If a subject is only in a position of perceptual (visual) knowledge if they can correctly explain their position as one in which the relevant fact is plainly in view, what does this take?

Cassam appeals to Dretske's original account of epistemic seeing in $S\hat{C}K$.

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 ($c \neq b$) 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 .

($S\hat{C}K$, 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). ($S\hat{C}K$ 157-6.)

Note that Dretske himself revises his views of perceptual knowledge in later work (most obviously in *Knowledge & the Flow of Information*). And, as we shall see, sticking with this formulation has certain consequences.

Two footnotes about the formulation here:

- a.) (ii) is presumably a redundant condition given (iii). As (iii) is normally understood in English, it can only be true if (ii) is also true;
- b.) (iv) seems to entail that S believes that b looks L – the relevant conditional mentioned by (iv) would not normally be assertible in English if one did not believe its antecedent; moreover, even if we chose a different form of conditional, it is not clear that one would be in a position to believe the conditional if one did not already accept the antecedent. (That is, suppose S is entirely ignorant of the way b looks, then exactly what expectations does S have about how it would look were it not one way or another.)

3. *The Dialectic in Non- $S\hat{C}K$ Terms*

Simple model of basic perceptual acceptance:

- (A) Perception puts S in a position to know that p through manifesting to one the fact that p ;
- (B) Visual perception manifests to S that p in having a perceptual content as of p ;

(C) *S* can come to know that *p* through epistemically responsibly accepting that things are as they appear.

Note that the condition in (C) may entail that *S* believes that the conditions of perception are normal, but it doesn't require that *S* have any belief about the specific features of how things are appearing to him or her, nor any other attitude towards her own visual experience or other state of mind.

In this context, to argue that *S* has *visual* knowledge of the Bursar's state of mind is to argue either:

(S1) When we look to particular examples of genuinely visual knowledge, there is no good reason to think that all such examples fit the pattern (A)-(C); e.g. coming to know by sight that the rod is hot;

(S2) When we look to examples of knowledge of the mental states of others, e.g. the Bursar, we can see there is no good reason to deny that the pattern (A)-(C) is exemplified in this case – i.e. that the content of one's visual state concerns the mental state of the Bursar.

While I don't feel his anger in the way that he feels his anger it doesn't follow that his anger is invisible, any more than it really follows from the fact that I don't feel the heat of a piece of red hot metal that its heat is invisible. We can stipulate that heat or anger can only be felt rather than seen but it's no longer clear what the point of this stipulation is supposed to be once it is conceded that it is possible to see that a piece of metal is hot or that the Bursar is angry. (*PoK*, 164.)

In the context in which the contrast between *inferential* and *perceptual* knowledge is taken to be a significant one, (S1), seems an unsatisfactory manoeuvre. Even if it is obvious that we do have knowledge of the mental states of others, it is not obvious that this should count as perceptual rather than inferential.

Cf.

(1) Mary saw that Jim had cirrhosis of the liver

Suppose that Mary sees liver spots on Jim's skin and works out that this is because he has a specific liver complaint.

If the weight of argument is to rest on (S2), then we need to be sure that there is no reason to reject the idea that mental properties can feature in the content of visual experience which is peculiar to the case of social perception and does not carry over to other non-visually observational features of the world.

4. *Troubles & Virtues of the S&K Account*

a.) Does condition (iv) demand too much of us? In the simpler view, all that is required is that one be sensitive to whether one is in a good position to be telling by using one's senses in a given situation. (iv) requires that one have beliefs about aspects of the look of objects in the situation and the ways in which they would vary with the facts.

Suppose you can tell just by looking in a given situation that the Bursar is angry. Need you have a belief about some way that the Bursar now looks that if he wasn't angry he wouldn't look quite that way?

- b.) Does (iii) track the proper visual grounds for basic perceptual judgement in all cases? Suppose that in the situation you can just see that the Bursar angry not just because of the way he looks, but also because of the way that QC looks in response (perhaps there is an amused curl of the lip on his face). Then there is no way of looking that the Bursar alone has in virtue of which you tell that the Bursar is angry. But this case does not fit either relational epistemic seeing nor secondary epistemic seeing. (You don't see that the Bursar is angry just in virtue of the way that Quassim looks; nor in virtue of any relation between them.)
- c.) Does (iii) make too many cases examples of basic epistemic seeing? Suppose that under the rather unusual lights of *Banana Republic*, a pair of trousers looks purple. You know that deep blue trousers will look that way under *BR* lighting. This makes your knowledge that the trousers are blue a case of primary epistemic seeing, even though there is something potentially deceptive about the conditions of viewing.

Dretske's conditions in *S&K* require that you know something about the presented scene; that there be a further fact that you correctly believe to co-vary with what you know of the scene; but that you do not need to have any knowledge of how the correlation is effected. Why should we accept this etiolated picture of perceptual knowledge? Without it, the deflationary approach has no force.

5. A Further Consideration for Perceptual Content of Emotional States

...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