

PERCEPTION

“... that which makes the sensation of blue a mental fact seems to escape us: it seems, if I may use a metaphor, to be transparent -- we look through it and see nothing but the blue ...”
 - G.E. Moore, “The Refutation of Idealism,” 1906

Fred Dretske, “How Do You Know You Are Not a Zombie?” (2003)

1. If I know that I am seeing (X), there must be something I am aware of that constitutes good evidence that I am seeing (X).
2. Perception makes you aware only of mind-independent objects and their properties.
3. Mind-independent objects and properties provide no evidence that you see them (even if, in fact, those objects would not exist if you did not see them).
4. Therefore, perception does not tell you that you are seeing (X).
5. Zombies have the same proprioceptive evidence that we do but do not see (X).
6. Therefore, proprioceptive evidence does not tell you that you are seeing (X).
7. Perceptual experiences *would* be good evidence, but introspection, understood as inner sense, does not make you aware of your perceptual experiences.

....

So, when you are seeing (X), how DO you know that you are?

Alex Byrne, “Knowing What I See” (2012)

To know what you see, follow this rule:

SEE: If [... x ...]_v and x is an F, believe that you see an F.

- V-propositions (at least) concern sensible qualities: shape, orientation, depth, color, shading, texture, movement, etc.

Questions

1. Byrne clearly means to reject (1) above. But he also seems to be rejecting (2): he holds that vision makes us aware of V-facts (in addition to objects and their properties?). Does Dretske’s challenge therefore still stand for the direct realist? Does one have to be an intentionalist about perception to solve the zombie problem?

2. Does vision make us aware of V-facts *as such*? That is, do they tell us that they are “cracts?”

a. The worry about confusing actual V-facts with remembered V-facts makes it seem like the answer is ‘yes’. If we are distinguishing V-facts from remembered V-facts by noticing the degradation of the latter, then it seems like we can recognize the former. But then the view no longer seems transparent – indeed, vision would seem to provide us with excellent evidence that we are seeing.

b. If not, then we seem to be back in the position of the zombie, since all the facts about the visual world are the same for the zombie as for us. What then would stop us from using SEE not only in cases of memory, but also in cases of e.g. *reading* a vivid description of the V-facts at Pemberley, or *talking* to Ryle about the view of the North York Moors?

Moore, G. E. *Philosophical Studies*. Harcourt, Brace, & Co., 1922. © Harcourt, Brace, & Co. All rights reserved.

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Dretske, Fred. How do you know you are not a zombie? In Brie Gertler (ed.), *Privileged Access: Philosophical Accounts of Self-Knowledge*. Ashgate 1--14. © Ashgate. All rights reserved. This content is excluded from our Creative Commons license. For more information, see <http://ocw.mit.edu/help/faq-fair-use/>.

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3. Why do we need to *believe* the V-proposition in order to use SEE? Why couldn't the rule be formulated just in terms of access to a V-proposition, since this seems to be what the zombie lacks?

4(a). There seems to be a big difference between KNOW and SEE. The claim is that we get knowledge just from trying to use SEE even if we fail to know the premise because we are illuded and don't realize it. In contrast, KNOW could only be self-verifying if, somehow, we can't use it at all when P is false, or when we fail to meet the other conditions for knowledge. But why would it work that way?

(b) Relatedly, the self-verifying character of KNOW seems compatible with entertaining skeptical worries that we are not actually in a position to know much at all. But it doesn't even seem possible to take seriously that we might be zombies – is SEE able to account for that?

5. Is Byrne's solution consistent with Dretske's conception of knowledge invoked in footnote 15?

“I am, furthermore, skeptical of reliability theories that identify knowledge with reliably produced belief. Unless one has grounds for one's belief, grounds that reliably indicate (carry information about) the conditions one believes to exist (perceptual experience constitutes such grounds in the case of perceptual knowledge-- see Dretske 1981), beliefs, even if reliable, do not qualify as knowledge. I do not, for instance, think one gets (for free, as it were) knowledge of P where P is a physical condition necessary for life--and, therefore, necessary for belief and, in particular, the belief that P. Such beliefs can't be false but they aren't, not for *that* reason, knowledge. Something more is needed.”

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24.805 Topics in Epistemology: Self-Knowledge
Fall 2015

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