

The Nature of Consciousness
Handout [7]
Fred Dretske: *Conscious Experience*

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§ The Goals:

1. To refute the Higher-Order-Thought (HOT) and the Higher-Order-Perception (HOP) theories.
2. To argue for the distinction between thing-awareness and fact-awareness.
3. To show that if we have conscious experiences, beliefs, desires, and fears, it cannot be our introspective awareness of them that makes them conscious.

[A key question for Dretske: What makes an experience *conscious* ?]

§ Awareness of Facts and Awareness of Things

'consciousness' = 'awareness'

[Example]:

___ (i) There is a difference between hearing Clyde play the piano and seeing him play the piano.

___ (ii) A perceptual belief that he is playing the piano must also be distinguished from a perceptual experience of this same event.

*** An initial distinction:**

___ (i) awareness of objects/awareness of events (e.g. Clyde's playing the piano) = **thing-awareness**

___ (ii) awareness of facts (e.g. (that he is playing the piano)) = **fact-awareness**

*** experience \Leftarrow concept-free**

*** belief \Leftarrow concept-charged**

[Question: What is the point about the distinction between awareness of events and awareness of facts?]

*** Features of Awareness of Facts:**

[1] Consciousness of facts implies a deployment of concepts. If S is aware that x is F, then S has the concept F and uses (applies) it in his awareness of x.

e.g. One cannot be conscious that the toast is burning unless one understands what toast is and what it means to burn, unless, that is, one has the concepts needed to classify objects and events in this way.

[2] Our awareness of facts takes the form of a belief.

e.g. To smell that the toast is burning is to be aware that the toast is burning, which is to believe that the toast is burning.

[3] The perceptual awareness of facts is a mental state or attitude that involves the possession and use of concepts, the sort of cognitive or intellectual capacity involved in thought and belief.

[4] Perceptual awareness of facts has a close tie with behavior -- with, in particular, an ability to say what one is aware of.

[Question: Under this description, can any (non-lingual) animal be said to have "fact-awareness?]

e.g. A cat can smell, and thus be aware of, burning toast as well as the cook, but only the cook will be aware that the toast is burning.

§ The Connection between Thing-Awareness and Fact-Awareness:

*** Dretske's Claims:**

(1) S sees (hears, etc.) x (or that P) \Rightarrow S is conscious of x (that P).

[To have an experience of a thing is to be conscious of the thing; to have an experience of a fact is to be conscious of the fact.]

(2) S is conscious of x $\not\Rightarrow$ (does not imply) S is conscious that x is F.

[There is no property F which is such that an awareness of a thing which is F requires an awareness of the fact that it is F.]

[Example 1]

___ Suppose S sees a speckled hen on which there are 27 speckles.

[Example 2]

___ Suppose that Tom at time t_1 differs (perceptibly) from Tom at t_2 only in having a moustache at t_2 . S sees Tom at both times but does not notice the moustache -- is not, therefore, aware that he has grown a moustache.

\Rightarrow To be thing-aware of a difference is to be aware of the thing (some object, event, or condition, x) that makes the difference. To be fact-aware of the difference is to be aware of the fact that there is a difference (not necessarily the fact that x is the difference).

[First Conclusion]:

___ Awareness of things (x) requires no fact-awareness (that x is 'F, for any F) of those things.

§ Conscious Beings and Conscious States

(I) Agents are said to be conscious in an intransitive sense of this word (he regained consciousness) and in a transitive sense (he was conscious of her).

⇒ creature consciousness.

(II) The (always intransitive) sense in which certain internal states, processes, events and attitudes (typically in or of conscious beings) are said to be conscious.

⇒ state consciousness.

* Dretske's Claims:

For any x and P,

(3) S is conscious of x or that P ⇒ S is conscious (a conscious being).

[Transitive (creature) consciousness implies intransitive (creature) consciousness.]

(3) only endorses the innocent idea that beings who are conscious of something are conscious; it does not say that conscious beings must be conscious of something.

(4) S is conscious of x or that P ⇒ S is in a conscious state of some sort.

[Transitive creature consciousness requires state (or the creature) consciousness.]

On Armstrong's case of the truck driver:

___ (i) There is transitive creature consciousness of both things (the roads, the stop signs) and facts (that the road curves left, that the stop sign is red, etc.)

___ (ii) What the driver lacks is an introspective awareness, a perception-like awareness, of the current states and activities of his own mind.

___ (iii) The driver is neither thing-aware nor fact-aware of his own mental states.

___ (iv) **But: the driver's experience of the road was not unconscious.**

___ (v) **Dretske: The truck-driver has thing-awareness but not fact-awareness of the road.**

§ Three Examples in Support of Dretske's Claim

1. [The example of seeing the difference between Alpha and Beta]

2. [The example of seeing two shapes and identifying the third]

3. [The example of monkey's perception of the LARGER THAN relation]

§ Dretske's Tentative Answer to the Key Question:

- 1. Creature consciousness (HOT) is not necessary for state consciousness.**
- 2. Spotlight-consciousness (HOP) is also not necessary for state consciousness.**
- 3. What makes an internal state or process conscious is the role it plays in making one (intransitively) conscious -- normally, the role it plays in making one (transitively) conscious of some thing or fact.**
- 4. Introspection is best understood, not as a thing-awareness, but as fact-awareness.**