

How Dretske Criticized Siegel's Argument to Further Explain Dretske's Argument About How Perception is not Permeated by Cognition

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ABSTRACT

In Fred Dretske's paper Perception versus Conception, he introduced an argument that perception does not have permeability, so that perception is not permeated by cognition. Dretske uses the thought experiment called The Goldilocks test to prove his argument, he also uses a few visual experiments such as the duck/rabbit visual experiment to further prove his argument. In this paper, I will discuss how Dretske argues that perception is not permeated by cognition, and how I find it is convincing to me. I will use the example of how Dretske criticized Siegel's argument to further explain Dretske's argument about how perception is not permeated by cognition.

KEYWORDS

Perception, Conception, Cognition.

INTRODUCTION

In Dretske's paper, he first introduced his argument about how perception is not permeated by cognition, then he explained Siegel's counterexample about how cognition affects perception, then he counter-argued Siegel's example with his Goldilock test. At the end of his paper, he introduced other examples such as the duck and rabbit, and the figure-ground ambiguity to apply the Goldilock test to further support his argument. In order to demonstrate Dretske's argument that perception is not permeated by cognition, he mentioned an example from Susanna Siegel's book The Contents of Visual Experience. He then criticizes Siegel's argument that cognition affects perception. Siegel uses the example of a novice and an expert forester to support her argument that people's perception is strongly affected by their cognition. In her example, when a novice and an expert forester see a pine tree, in this case, both the novice and the expert forester are seeing the same exact pine tree from the same exact angle and position. Siegel argues that the novice only experiences the colors, shapes, and textures arranged together. And

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on the contrary, the expert forester who knows what a pine tree is supposed to look like, not only sees the colors, shapes, and textures arranged together but also sees the pine-tree-ness of the pine tree easily. Which the novice does not see because the novice does not have the cognition of what a pine tree looks like. Siegel thinks because the novice and the expert forester have differences in cognition, which is the novice does not see the pine-tree-ness, and the expert forester sees the pine-tree-ness, the novice, and the expert forester have a difference in visual phenomenology.

TEST

Dretske does not believe Siegel's example could prove that perception is permeated by cognition. He uses his Goldilocks test to criticize Siegel's novice and expert forester example. Dretske thinks that if the expert forester has a different perception of visual experiences than the novice, then there should appear differences in their pictorial representations of the pine tree. Therefore, when showing the expert forester, the painting of the pine tree that the novice drew, Dretske thinks there should be three Goldilocks outcomes. The first Goldilock outcome is "too little", the expert forester thinks that the novice has missed the pine-tree-ness of the pine tree, but the novice has painted the color, shapes, and textures arranged together as what the novice sees exactly. So the expert forester could not tell how this painting could be drawn differently. Therefore, this outcome is not established. The second Goldilock outcome is "too much", which is that the expert forester thinks that the novice has added too much of the pine tree and it turns out to be a white pine tree. But it does not prevent the expert forester from seeing the pine-tree-ness from the novice's painting because the pine-tree-ness is within the white-pine-tree-ness. Therefore, according to Dretske, the second outcome is not a possible reaction of the expert forester either. The third outcome of the Goldilock test is "just right". The expert forester thinks the pine-tree-ness in the novice's painting is just the right amount, but the novice still does not see any pine-tree-ness from either the pine tree or the painting of the pine tree, because the novice does not know what a pine tree looks like, the novice only draws the colors, shapes, and textures arranged together. But the expert forester sees the pine-tree-ness from the novice's painting because the expert forester would not draw the painting any differently than the colors, shapes, and textures arranged together as the novice draws it. Siegel argues that since the novice does not know what a pine tree is, the novice has a different visual experience no matter seeing the pine tree or the painting of the pine tree than the expert forester, therefore the novice's painting is not a pine tree, because it does not have pine-tree-ness in it. And what the expert forester sees of the painting from the novice is just a misrepresentation. Dretske denies her argument by saying that the pine-tree-ness is just the way in which the pine tree is arranged. According to Dretske, the novice just does not know that the arrangement of colors, shapes, and textures is distinguished as pine trees. But both the novice and the expert forester can experience the pine-tree-ness when seeing the pine tree. And only the third Goldilock outcome is right, Dretske thinks that

when the novice and the expert forester see the pine tree, the pine tree looks the same to both parties, they experience the pine tree in the same way.

CONTROL TEST

Dretske then affirms that perception is not permeated by cognition by applying the Goldilock test to another perceptual difference example to support his argument. Dretske uses D as someone who sees the drawing as a duck and R as someone who sees the drawing as a rabbit, but they are looking at the same drawing, R and D just have a different perspective. Dretske argues that in this case, R and D do not have different visual experiences. When applying the Goldilock test in this, when asking D to paint the drawing as D sees, it will appear the same if asking R to paint the drawing. Therefore, the Goldilock test will show that both R and D are having a visual experience of the same drawing, even though they think they are seeing different things cognitively, their perceptual experience is the same. Dretske uses this example to affirm that perception is not permeated by cognition.

PERSONAL ERROR

I find Dretske's argument about perception is not permeated by cognition to be very convincing. Personally, I have an example to further support Dretske's argument. When I was around 4 or 5 years old, my mom wanted to see if I remembered the way home after getting off the bus, so she hid from me when we both got off the bus and started walking home. I did not know that my mom was not by my side, so I walked with an adult who dressed just like my mom. I followed that lady for a very long distance though I was catching up with my mom's steps. But when I finally caught up with her, I found out she was not my mom and I started panicking. This childhood memory shows that cognitively I think that the lady is my mom changed when I see her closely, but my perceptual experience of that lady has not changed, she still looks just like my mom.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, Dretske argued that perception is not permeated by cognition is very convincing by introducing his Goldilock test. In this paper, I have brought up how Dretske has argued that Siegel's pine tree example does not pass the Goldilock test therefore he does not agree that cognition affects perception. I also used a personal example to further support Dretske's skeptical view on the permeability of cognition.

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