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Seeing, Certainty and Apprehension

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Seeing, Certainty and Apprehension¹

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...at one time they dispute eagerly over certainty of thought, though certainty is not a habit of the mind at all, but a quality of propositions, and the speakers are really arguing about certitude... (James Joyce, 1903, *Occasional, Critical and Political Writing*, ed. Kevin Barry, 2000, OUP, 69)

Like many others, I believe that to see is not, in the simplest cases, to believe or judge. This is a purely negative thesis. What sort of attitude, then, *is* involved in simple seeing? The answer set out here is that to see is typically to enjoy a form of primitive certainty which is not any type of belief. In order to make the answer plausible it is important to set out also the relations between seeing, belief, knowledge, and certainty.

1. Simple Seeing and its Relations

At least four choices confront the philosopher of visual perception:

- Is to see always to judge or believe?
- Is to see to conceptualise?
- Is visual perception of things, people or processes always indirect?
- Is seeing fundamentally static?

Positive answers to all four questions form a familiar and venerable package: to see is always to judge and to subsume under concepts and we do not directly see things or processes, rather we see that this or that is the case, where seeing that involves visual judgements. Perhaps the most important part of this package is the positive answer to the third question which, combined with the thesis that what we are directly aware of is sense-data, is often called critical realism. Negative answers to all four questions also form a package much discussed of late: we directly see things and processes and in so doing we do not necessarily judge or conceptualise, for seeing may be simple. If Sam sees Mary in the garden, he sees an object, which is Mary and which is in the garden, but not that Mary is in the garden. (Contrast: if Sam wants that Porsche on Wednesday, then he wants to buy

or own it on Wednesday, he desires that this be the case). The negative answer to the third question is often called naïve or direct realism.

The two packages are not merely packages. There are connections of different strengths between the different negative answers and the same is true of the positive answers. Just what the connections are depends on the details of the full answers to the different questions. Thus on most accounts of judgement and belief these necessarily involve conceptualisation. In the case of the fourth question, some philosophers think it is only a matter of fact that critical realists have often concentrated their attention on static perception (i.e. perception by an immobile subject, of an immobile object, at a moment). For those of us who think it is no accident, but a fateful error, visual perception is essentially dynamic. The way we see what we see is determined by actual and possible movements of what is seen and by actual and possible actions of the subject. To see a house as a house is essentially connected with the possibility of moving towards it, around it, away from it.

Simple seeing can be understood in two very different ways. On one version, we directly see things and processes in virtue of visual content. This visual content can be understood in many different ways compatible with the negative claims that it is non-conceptual, is not any sort of sense, and shares no parts with what is seen. On another version, simple seeing involves no content. According to the first version, visual content is the way we see what we see. According to the second version, the way we see what we see is some feature or aspect of what we see. Yet another choice concerns the nature of what is seen. Things and processes are relatively uncontroversial candidates as far as most naïve realists are concerned. Other candidates are properties and relations, understood as multiply exemplifiable abstract entities and tropes, monadic and relational.

The package of negative answers to our questions constitutes one version of direct realism about perception. If, as I believe, this package is true, if seeing is not believing, then it is important to give a positive account of the relations between simple seeing, on the one hand, and belief, conceptualisation, knowledge and action on the other hand. Such an account will be very different from that envisaged by friends of the positive answers to our questions. In what follows I give an account of these relations that sets the stage for an account (§4) of the relation between simple seeing, on the one hand, and *primitive certainty*, which is not to be confused with what is often called ‘belief’, on the other hand.²

2. Acquaintance, Apprehension, Belief, Knowledge, Action and Externalism

Belief

Belief-reports come in at least four different kinds:

- x believes that p
- x believes y to be F
- x believes y
- x believes in y (Sam believes in science/Mary/the American Way)

Belief of the fourth kind, as Price pointed out, is either evaluative or non-evaluative. Belief in God need not involve any evaluation. Perhaps it is a species of belief of the second kind: to believe in God is to take him to exist. Sometimes it is a belief that, that he exists. The belief in evolution of an educated person is a type of belief that. The belief in evolution of a religious neo-Darwinian, however, is already an evaluative belief

in, and is also a species of belief of the second kind. To believe in something or someone, in this sense, is to believe it or him to be valuable, not to believe *that* it or he is valuable. To believe in science is to believe science to be valuable. To believe in the American Way is to believe the American Way to be a good thing. And so on. In general, we cannot say that:

x believes in y iff x believes y to be valuable.

To believe a book to be valuable is not to believe in it. Evaluative belief in involves restrictions on the object of the belief and on the types of value. (Just what these restrictions are I shall not try to spell out). Evaluative belief in is not belief that, because what a person believes in need not be the object of any conceptualisation by that person. Someone who, when ill, regularly prefers doctors to homeopaths believes in science even if he has no beliefs that science has this or that property.

The property of being valuable is a thin axiological property. The simplest view of the relation between such a property and the various thick, positive axiological properties (being useful, being tolerant, being generous) has it that the latter are determinates of the determinable property of being valuable. Thus the type of positive value involved in belief in can vary enormously.

Similarly, belief of the third kind, believing a person, turns out to be a species of belief in and so to be a species of belief of the second kind, believing y to be F. To believe a person (and only a person or a person-like entity can be believed) is to believe that person to be trustworthy (and to trust him?). To be trustworthy is a thick axiological property. If the relation between thin and thick axiological properties outlined above is correct, then:

If x believes y then x believes in y

And this seems to be right. Of course, Sam might well both believe in Mary (for example believe her to be a promising candidate) and not believe her (not believe her to be trustworthy).

What is it for someone not-to-believe in something, what is it for someone not-to-believe someone? Perhaps there are forms of disbelief corresponding to each of our four types of belief. 'Believe' is a Neg-Raiser in all four constructions. For Sam not to believe in the American way is for Sam to believe the American Way to have a negative value, or for it not to be the case that Sam believes the American Way to have a positive value.

Evaluative belief in and believing a person are very widespread phenomena. If the foregoing is correct, they are forms of believing someone or something to have a certain property. Is this distinct from belief that? Does it not follow from 'a believes b to be F' and 'b = c' that 'a believes c to be F'? Rather than attempt to argue that this is always the case I shall concentrate on the most favourable case, the case where what is believed to have a property is something that the believer perceives or has perceived, where perception fixes the object of belief. Now 'perception' subsumes at least simple seeing, acquaintance and apprehension.

Acquaintance and Apprehension

Episodic acquaintance (*ken, kennen, connaître, conocer*) and apprehension (*erkennen*) are perhaps the simplest types of knowledge. If to see is to judge, then perceptual knowledge

is conceptual through and through. The friend of simple seeing, however, has a number of alternatives available. He may take perceptual, non-propositional knowledge to be a more varied and more fundamental phenomenon than is usually assumed.

Suppose Sam sees Mary. In some sense this is a case of acquaintance. But one might think that it is only if Sam sees Mary, who is a woman, as a woman (a person...) that he comes to be acquainted with her. Simple seeing needs to be appropriate in some way if it is to yield acquaintance. Simple seeing may be of events, processes and states as well as of substances or persons. So events, processes and states (which some identify with tropes) are objects of acquaintance.

A philosopher who allows for states of affairs may hold that we visually apprehend, 'cognise' (*erkennen*) states of affairs. But what is a state of affairs? On one account a state of affairs is an ideal entity that contains an object and some property or two or more objects and some relation. A simpler view has it that a state of affairs contains objects and tropes. On the first account, visual apprehension of a state of affairs is not to be identified with simply seeing episodes and states (tropes) because these are not multiply exemplifiable properties and the exemplification by an object of a property is not the inherence of a trope in, or its dependence on, a thing.

Is visually apprehending an obtaining state of affairs simply a perceptual judgement? If so, it is just seeing that, since this involves a perceptual judgement: to see that is to judge or form an occurrent belief on the basis of visual experience. In what follows I shall distinguish between visual apprehension of a state of affairs and seeing that. Visual apprehension is no judgement and involves no concepts. Whether concept-free visual apprehension involves content-free seeing is a further choice, analogous to that faced by friends of simple seeing of things and processes. Although I have talked so far of 'visual apprehension' the distinction between visual and auditory apprehension is often an artificial one. Apprehension may and typically does involve information from more than one sense.

Is visual apprehension of some obtaining state of affairs a type of acquaintance? In the sense in which any simple seeing is a type of acquaintance, so too visual apprehension is a type of acquaintance. But, as before, it is perhaps advisable to add a further condition to sheer visual apprehension before we speak of acquaintance. Suppose Sam visually apprehends the obtaining state of affairs which is the fact that Mary is falling down the side of the cliff. Suppose this fact is built up out of two objects and a trope, Mary's fall. We may say that Sam's apprehension of this fact is a case of acquaintance only if he sees her fall as a fall and not, for example, as a dive into the lake.

We have, then, three distinct categories: (a) seeing things and tropes; (b) seeing that a certain state of affairs obtains (and two different ways of understanding states of affairs); (c) visual apprehension of a state of affairs. Category (b), unlike (a) and (c), involves belief. How might they hang together? (Readers not interested in ontology should skip the next three paragraphs.)

One can see that certain things or persons have properties, although there is no corresponding trope or, if there is such a trope, it is invisible. Social properties, such as being a judge or the property of voting, correspond to no tropes if tropes are fully localised entities, like falls, although it might be argued that there are particularised social properties that are not tropes. Similarly we often say that someone sees that a is F when he does not see a (seeing that the tank is full). But optimal cases of seeing that involve simply seeing the objects and tropes that are the semantic values of the content of the belief. It is true of

all seeing that that is visual (as opposed to seeing that Derrida is incomprehensible) that to see that a is F is either to see a or to see something closely connected to a.

Even if states of affairs are taken to be entities that contain properties, it might still be the case that visual apprehension of some state of affairs is often correlated with seeing some thing or person and a trope dependent thereon. The same, as we have just noted, is true of seeing that. To visually apprehend that Sam is sad, the fact consisting in the exemplification by Sam of the property of sadness, would then, in the simplest cases, also be to see Sam and the trope that is his sadness. This view is the counterpart of the view that perception of abstract objects occurs together with perception of things and tropes. Is the relation any stronger than a correlation? Perhaps we should say that grasp of idealia takes place on the basis of grasp of temporalia: that visual apprehension of the state of affairs that the table is brown is apprehension on the basis of simple seeing of the table as a table and its brownness as brown (for its brownness to look brown). That 'perception' of the number 2 (or of red) is perception on the basis of seeing a pair as a pair (or a redness trope as red).

The view that we grasp idealia, that we apprehend states of affairs or perceive abstract objects, is open to an objection other than the protest of the nominalist. A perception or apprehension which is not only not visual, nor auditive, nor tactile etc., but is not even capable of any sort of differentiation is incomprehensible. But if perception of idealia and apprehension of states of affairs are based on sensory perception then the objection loses part of its force. The friend of perception of idealia and of apprehension of states of affairs may, however, not welcome the defence. For, he may say, the reply presupposes that perception or intuition of idealia and apprehension of states of affairs is built up on the basis of sensory perception, whereas in reality what we are really dealing with is a top-down rather than a bottom-up type of structure.

In order to simplify what follows, I shall assume that states of affairs consist of substances and tropes, not properties, and that such states of affairs are what is visually apprehended. Friends of the more baroque alternatives just distinguished will know what modifications are required.

Visual apprehension of a state of affairs, then, is apprehension that is based on simple seeing of one or more substances and of a trope. It is acquaintance if what is simply seen is seen appropriately. Seeing that will have a more complex structure. Sam sees that the table is brown, that is to say he judges or believes the table to be brown on the basis of seeing the table as a table, its brownness as brown (of its brownness looking brown); the way he sees the table and the way he sees its brownness justify and perhaps cause his judgement or belief that it is brown.

We can now return to the question about the relation between believing that p and believing y to be F.

Belief again

Belief that p, it is often said, is independent of the way the world is. Sometimes the claim is restricted to beliefs whose content is wholly descriptive. But Sam's occurrent belief which is his seeing the table to be brown, is not of this type. Sam's doxastic state is based on simple seeing and on visual apprehension. Sam believes the table that he sees to be brown, to fall under the concept expressed by 'is brown' and he applies this concept on the basis of his perception of the brownness of the table and on the basis of its looking brown. He believes the brownness of the table to fall under the concept 'is an instance of brownness'. Sam is visually related to a state of affairs and its parts. He is doxastically

related to these same entities and he is doxastically so related because he is visually so related. We may say not only that Sam believes the table he sees to be brown but also that he believes of the table that he sees that it is brown. Believing something to have a property and belief of something that it has a property are not a type of belief that. They are doxastic states. But, unlike belief that, they are relational doxastic states and, in our example, they are relational because they are based on perceptual relations and inherit the object-dependence of perception.

Knowledge and Belief

Knowledge it is often said involves belief. If 'knowledge' covers the very common cognitive episodes described above in which we simply see and visually apprehend parts of the world, this claim is false. Similarly, acquaintance, with people, things and with facts will be examples of knowledge.

'Knowledge', however, is often assumed to apply not merely to such episodes but to long-lasting states. Since belief, too, is a state it has seemed to many philosophers to be the best candidate for understanding what it is for knowledge to be a state. Only belief or conviction, which are clearly long-lasting states, it is thought, can make epistemic contact with the world endure. Such states are often also asserted to be dispositions. But why should knowledge states or dispositions not simply inherit the non-doxastic nature of the cognitive episodes that bring them into being?

There is one type of cognitive disposition that need not be belief-involving. To say of an object or domain that it is knowable, cognisable (*erkennbar*) is not to refer to any sort of doxastic episode, state or disposition provided the manifestations of the relevant disposition are such cognitive episodes as acquaintance or apprehension.

But a person's lasting knowledge, if it is a disposition, is not a disposition of this kind. Cognisability is a relational property of objects. Dispositional knowledge is a relational property of a person. Does, then, for example, the lasting acquaintance to which Sam's episodic acquaintance with Mary, his seeing her once as a woman, standardly gives rise, have to be understood as a belief-involving state? One form of such lasting acquaintance is that attributed by the locution 'know who she is'. This clearly involves more than being able to see Mary as a woman when faced with Mary. It involves being able to distinguish her from other women. The temptation at this point to build in the ability to make judgements of identity, and so concepts and beliefs, as a part of what knowing who amounts to is strong. But it can be resisted. The ability to track a person through time, over long episodes but also at intervals, is fully displayed already at the level of simple perceptual abilities and memory. Rather than pursue such a claim and its even more controversial extensions to the case of visual apprehension of states and affairs, I want to consider what sort of belief is involved in knowledge, and how it is involved, in those cases where it seems plausible to say that knowledge does involve belief.

Let us return to Sam and the brown table. On the basis of simple seeing and visual apprehension Sam forms a belief: he believes the table to be brown. Sam, then, we will assume, knows the table to be brown and we may assume that this piece of knowledge endures for a few months. Sam's knowledge involves belief. But not belief that. Also, Sam's epistemic state or disposition is not doxastic through and through. It began life without the help of any belief at all. Sam's conviction is the trace left by his episodic acquaintance. Sam believes the table to be brown on the basis of his episodic perceptual relations to the table and its colour. The fact that his beliefs are rooted in perceptions

makes him know the table to be brown. If all knowledge states resembled Sam's epistemic state, then knowledge would never involve belief that but it would involve believing objects to have certain properties, which in turn would be grounded in perception or something that functions like perception.

'See' is veridical, 'see that', like 'apprehend', is factive. The mental acts and states these verbs are used to describe are external relations. Perhaps they are relations between cognisers, acts and the world. Perhaps they are relations between cognisers, contents or thoughts, and the world (two options we distinguished in Section 1). Perhaps they are both. (Notice that the claim that these relations are external is compatible with the view that one or more of their constituent relations is not an external relation. An analogy: it is a contingent fact that Mary hits Sam but if her hit is a trope then, on one theory of tropes, her hit requires the existence of Sam. Hitting Sam and seeing Sam are ontologically on a par.)

In each case we may ask whether the fact that certain mental states and episodes are relational is a brute fact or whether it has a ground? The thesis mentioned in Section 1, that perception and action are inseparable, provides a clue to the right answer. To perceive (in a sensory way) is to see or to hear or to touch etc. There are ways of perceiving in a sense in which there are not ways of acting. Thus although sensory perception and action are interdependent the same is not true of seeing and action. All seeing depends on action but it is not the case that all action depends on seeing. All hearing depends on action but not all action depends on hearing. (The case of touch is special: tactile experience and action require each other.) In other words, we see *because* we act; it is not the case that we act because we see. If seeing is grounded in acting in this way, then a familiar feature of the latter may help explain why seeing is an external relation. Action typically involves the actor coming to stand in a new spatial relation to one or more distinct substances or a part of the actor coming to stand in a new spatial relation to the other parts of the actor. (I say 'typically' in order to leave open the possibility that some basic actions are omissions.) Now these spatial relations are external relations. If Sam touches the door and the door is the door of the house then he touches the door of the house. Perhaps, then, the fact that proximity, overlap and similar spatial relations are external relations, together with the fact that action grounds visual perception, explain why seeing is an external relation, make seeing an external relation.

3. Simple Seeing, Sense and Meaning

Sensory perception plays some role in fixing the reference and so the meaning of *singular terms*. Just how important this role is divides philosophers. Does what holds fairly uncontroversially of uses of 'this' to refer to temporal entities carry over to some or all proper names? That perception plays a central role in the explanation of the sense and meaning of *predicates* is a tenet of all varieties of verificationism, a much criticised doctrine. Verification is the process of cognising and results in the possession of knowledge.³

Suppose that to see is always to judge. The relevant judgements will presumably contain a singular term. Then if visual perception does ever fix the reference of any singular term, for example the reference of some use of 'this', the reference-fixing is effected by another singular term. If, on the other hand, the perception that fixes reference is sometimes simple seeing, then reference-fixing ceases to be an intralinguistic affair. Similarly, it is clear that part of the attraction of verificationisms of many stripes is the possibility of explaining sense in terms of something that is sense-free.

Verificationistic accounts of sense have gone out of favour. This is in part due to the simplistic way perception and thus verification and perceptual knowledge have been understood by many verificationists. Or so I believe. Rather than try to defend this grand claim directly I shall illustrate it by contrasting the received view of Wittgenstein's turn from verificationism with an alternative interpretation of this turn. The alternative interpretation employs, once again, the thesis that perception and action are inseparable.

The received view points out, correctly enough, that in the 1930s Wittgenstein adhered to a type of verificationism that claims that a certain fundamental class of truth-bearers get their meaning from their relation to certain sensory states. But the Wittgenstein of the *Philosophical Investigations* had abandoned verificationism about meaning. Indeed he says there (§353) that to reply to a question about the nature and possibility of the verification of a proposition is to provide a 'contribution' to its grammar. An implication of the received view is that Wittgenstein came to think that verifiability provides only a small part of the meaning of a proposition.

Now it is quite clear in general that what a verificationist theory claims will be a function of its account of verification and thus of its account of perception. (It is a function of many other things besides, for example of its account of possibility, of what *verifiable* means.) It is also clear that Wittgenstein's account in the 1930's of the difference between genuine propositions and hypotheses resembles the position of critical realism. Indeed he has even been suspected of phenomenalism. Wittgenstein certainly gave up the view that we are directly aware of our sensory states and that such awareness gives meaning to propositions. There are many indications that the view he came round to was simply naïve, direct realism; at least naïve realism understood as the bundle of platitudes making up our ordinary attitude towards perception, if not to a definite philosophy of perception (sophisticated naïve realism).

The received interpretation points out (correctly) that Wittgenstein came to see the meaning of words as in large measure a matter of use, of what we do with words and of the patterns of use we create and which particular applications of words instantiate. But it claims that Wittgenstein rejected a verificationist account of meaning in favour of an account of meaning in terms of use. This, I submit, is wrong. The view that meaning is to be understood in terms of use in fact requires and is required by verificationism, a verificationism that relies on naïve realism about perception, and in particular simple seeing. And it requires that reference-fixing involves perception understood as the naïve realist understands it and, in particular, simple seeing. The use of words is a type of activity, and action and perception are inseparable. Once verification is understood the way the naïve realist and the friend of simple seeing understand it, the meaning of words has to be understood in terms of use.

4. Simple Seeing and Primitive Certainty

Belief, I have suggested, is not always a propositional attitude, as desire and regret always are. To believe something to be F is to not to believe that. Nevertheless, both types of belief may be thought to involve conceptual content. Now it is uncontroversial to say that belief, disbelief and doubt typically come into existence because of deliberation, reasoning and judgement. Because of this history, and perhaps also because so many philosophers think belief is a component of knowledge, we might call such beliefs 'cognitive beliefs' or 'critical beliefs'.

But our taxonomy of beliefs is incomplete. There is a type of belief or conviction that is too primitive to be any sort of cognitive or critical belief, namely primitive certainty. Primitive certainty underlies cognitive belief, disbelief, doubt etc.. The latter typically emerge from primitive certainty. Primitive certainties are what we count on unquestioningly, what we take for granted or presuppose. To a considerable extent we are our primitive certainties. Primitive certainty does not admit of degrees as do the beliefs engendered by cognitive activity. Primitive certainty has an opposite; primitive uncertainty. One is certain that p or that not-p. But one is uncertain whether p or not-p, simply perplexed. Belief, too, has an opposite; disbelief. But disbelief, like the beliefs distinguished above, is always cognitive, critical. Primitive certainty, unlike cognitive beliefs, is groundless.

What are the best candidates for the category of primitive certainty as so described? One such candidate is the mode or attitude of simple seeing, perceptual acquaintance, in normal contexts. Another is visual apprehension, in normal contexts. Of course, where doubt and difficulties arise, where perception is being consulted in order to confirm hypotheses seeing and visual apprehension cease to be simple affairs and cease to be a matter of primitive certainty.

The categories of simple seeing and visual apprehension were introduced above in purely negative terms. To see Mary, I said, is not to judge or believe. To visually apprehend some state of affairs is not to judge or believe that it obtains. Now we have a *positive* characterisation of the visual mode; seeing and visually apprehending are cases of primitive visual certainty. It is a plausible characterisation because neither of these two acts exhibits any degrees in standard cases. The influential temptation to describe them as judgements or occurrent, critical beliefs that continue life as (critical) belief states disappears once they are seen to be cases of primitive certainty.

If simple seeing, in normal cases, is an example of primitive certainty, and if such seeing is concept-free, then primitive certainty, unlike all other types of belief, is concept-free. If simple seeing and apprehension are cases of knowledge, then knowledge here involves certainty. But it is not knowledge that has emerged from some cognitive enterprise; it is primitive knowledge. A philosopher who thinks that it is essential to knowledge that it has grounds will, however, want to deny that there is primitive knowledge and so deny that simple seeing is a species of knowledge.

Some of the critical perceptual beliefs that are engendered by cognitive activity are very certain. Why are such certainties not primitive? Because certainty and uncertainty have two distinct roles: they characterise beliefs engendered by cognitive activity; they also occur outside such contexts. It is tempting to simply identify primitive certainty with a certain privileged type of cognitive belief, the optimal case. It is also tempting to assimilate cognitive belief to primitive certainty. The first temptation should be resisted because primitive certainty cannot be weakened by being broken down into distinct confirming factors as can heavily confirmed beliefs. Primitive certainty manifests no degrees. The second temptation should be resisted for reasons given below.

The objects of primitive certainty are many and various, over and beyond the objects of simple perception. Not all primitive certainty is perceptual. Sam typically enjoys the primitive certainty that the world exists, that he is part of it. But primitive certainty is above all a feature of perception and action. When Sam turns into the door of a house he is certain that the house exists, that he has a foot. He is also certain that the house has a side he does not yet see. If action grounds visual perception, in the ways set out above, then we should say that the primitive certainties involved in action ground the primitive, visual certainties.

The perception-based beliefs analysed in Section 2 could occur either in contexts that make them primitive certainties or in contexts that make them non-primitive certainties or critical beliefs. If Sam weighs evidence for and against the hypothesis that the table is brown or Mary sad, then his believing the table to be brown or Mary to be sad will be critical beliefs, they will have a certain degree of doxastic strength.

The primitive certainties of perception and other non-perceptual primitive certainties are not, however, independent of each other. The primitive certainties of a *Weltanschauung* or *Weltbild*, the primitive certainties bound up with horizons and backgrounds of all sorts, are typically described in a vocabulary drawn from perception.

Contemporary discussions in naïve physics and cognitive science, for example of the frame problem, often assume that what have to be understood are certain pervasive and fundamental false beliefs or certain fundamental types of knowledge. In the light of the foregoing it would be more accurate to say that what have to be understood are primitive certainties. In some cases, we might say that these are also examples of primitive knowledge but, as noted above, only if it is understood that primitive knowledge stands outside all cognitive enterprises.

Seeing involves criteria or cues. Many philosophers have noted that such criteria or cues do not normally function as symptoms or indicators. On the basis of symptoms and indicators we form critical beliefs and make judgements to the effect that this or that proposition enjoys this or that degree of probability, that this or that is likely. Cognitive beliefs, we said, exhibit degrees. Criteria, on the other hand, provide us with unquestioning certainty. One venerable synonym of ‘belief’ is ‘opinion’. In this sense of the word, Mary is not typically of the opinion that Sam is sad or has a soul; she is certain. But it is always possible to step back from such a certainty in order to ask what the probabilities are. The object of a primitive certainty can become the object of questions, doubt, hypotheses. There is inductive justification and also defeasible, non-inductive justification.

The claim that seeing is often a case of primitive certainty is open to an obvious objection. Simple seeing is of substances and tropes. But certainty is always certainty that. In order to reply to this objection, the first step is to observe that primitive certainty comes in two forms, as an attitude, mode or set, and also as a part of a state of affairs that we describe in three different ways: by means of a nominalisation combined either with a logical predicate or with a functor:

That p is certain
It is certain that p

And also by using predicate-forming adverbs:

The table is certainly brown

The fact that ‘certain’ can play all these three syntactic roles is one of its most important features. It places ‘certain’ together with such expressions as ‘true’ and ‘possible’ in the category of expressions of the most basic kind of formal concepts. We might baptise the distinction between two types of certainty as that between certainty as an attitude (psychological or practical) and non-psychological or formal or objective certainty. Knowledge and belief, unlike certainty, are always psychological. There are, of course, such states of affairs as:

That p is known/believed
It is known/believed that p

But is it equally clear that the property of being believed or known is a derelativisation of the relation of being believed or known *by someone*. This is not true of the formal property of being certain. In other words, non-psychological certainty really is non-psychological. It might, of course, still be the case that non-psychological certainty has to be analysed with the help of psychological or practical certainty. For that p to be certain (non-psychological) might just be for it to be the case that certainty about p (psychological) would be appropriate. This would be compatible with the difference just noted between belief or knowledge, on the one hand, and certainty on the other hand. If this is correct, then psychological certainty may be primitive or critical, and non-psychological certainty may be primitive or critical. In the latter case, it will make sense to say that p is certain and that it is more certain than that q.

The distinction between certainty as an attitude and non-psychological certainty provides us with a plausible solution to our problem. This was the problem of reconciling our claims that simple seeing is of objects and tropes, and that it is a type of primitive certainty, with the fact that certainty is certainty *that*. Simple seeing of substances and tropes, I suggest, involves an attitude towards states of affairs of the form:

That a exists is certain
It is certain that a exists

What sort of an attitude? The attitude of taking for granted or *counting on* (*rechnen mit*) or *standing fast* (*stehen fest*). These are practical attitudes or sets. One attractive feature of this solution is that it reveals why philosophers have so often wanted to say that to see is to judge and that what is judged is an existential state of affairs. These claims are wrong. But to see simply is to have a practical attitude towards a state of affairs which is the certainty of some existential state of affairs.

If this solution is correct, then it is fairly obvious how psychological and non-psychological certainty enter into visual apprehension and non-perceptual certainties. Psychological primitive certainty is a practical attitude, unlike judging. Non-psychological primitive certainty is typically the object of a practical attitude, counting on. May it become the object of a theoretical attitude? As many philosophers have noted, there is something odd about the assertion that it is certain (primitively, non-psychologically) that I have a hand. All action, on the other hand, clearly involves counting on non-psychological, primitive certainties.

If primitive psychological certainties are 'about' states of affairs, articulated or not, then a familiar question arises again: do they come to be about states of affairs in virtue of some content or sense? A philosopher who thinks critical beliefs represent states of affairs in virtue of some propositional content or sense might well be tempted to say that primitive perceptual certainties represent in virtue of content or sense. But does primitive certainty resemble cognitive belief in this respect? Or is it an attitude that involves no doubling, no shadow of reality? A similar question arises about primitive visual certainty, simple seeing.

As we noted in Section 1, one popular account of simple seeing has it that we see things, persons, states, events, processes, and apprehend states of affairs, without the help of any contents or sense. One strong form of disjunctivism says that in visual perception the relation between the act of seeing and its object is like that between the use of a Russellian name and its object; nothing intervenes. Only in the case of illusion or hallucination is it necessary to introduce a mental (non-conceptual) content. We can now see that this view of simple seeing and the intuition that primitive certainty involves no

doubling of reality are made for one another. If simple seeing is just primitive visual certainty then of course it involves no content. To the extent that simple seeing is bound up with mindless, 'stupid', quick, effective activity it involves no thought, perhaps not even non-conceptual content. But wherever slow, 'intelligent' conscious cognitive processing intervenes, contents, if not sense (thoughts), are required. Since primitive certainty stands outside cognitive projects it has no need for the contents and senses so essential to the processes of verification, falsification and illustration. Contents and concepts are intimately connected to cognitive values, for example the value of knowledge, intrinsic and extrinsic, and the value of justification. Primitive certainty is not so connected. This may make us think that primitive, psychological certainty is not a theoretical attitude.

We can, however, do better than simply note that a common view about simple seeing, (that it is content-less) and our account of primitive certainty are congenial. Suppose, as suggested, that primitive psychological certainty, unlike critical doxastic attitudes, involves no degrees. There is an uncontroversial explanation available of the fact that critical or cognitive beliefs manifest degrees, that we are more or less convinced of this or that. Degrees of belief often vary in accordance with the degree to which senses or propositional contents are confirmed or disconfirmed. This factual covariance is distinct from but related to the cognitive ideal that tells us that beliefs should vary in strength as propositional contents are more and more heavily confirmed, that this is what it is for critical beliefs to be rational. Now the best explanation of the fact that there are primitive psychological certainties which exhibit no degrees is simply that such certainties do not contain any contents that could be confirmed or disconfirmed.

Ordinary, simple seeing, I have argued, is a case of primitive certainty. In Section 1 the view that there is 'perception' or intuition of idealia was briefly mentioned. Friends of intuition make much of the similarities between seeing and intuition. We can now see what such similarities amount to. There is a similarity of rôles. Visual seemings can conflict with critical beliefs, as in many perceptual illusions. An analogous type of conflict can occur in our commerce with necessary truths, analytic or synthetic a priori, and necessary states of affairs. Intuition, for example its seeming to me that p is necessarily true, may clash with my well-grounded critical belief that p is not necessarily true. What sort of an attitude might such non-sensory intuition be? A promising answer is that, like simple seeing, it is a type of primitive certainty that some state of affairs obtains necessarily. And, as before, we may distinguish between such a practical attitude and the objective certainty that some state of affairs obtains necessarily. Some philosophers have denied that sentences that appear to express necessary truths really are truth-bearers. Such expressions, they thought, were expressions of rules. They, too, would be well advised to say that we do not typically have knowledge of or critical beliefs about such rules but rather that our relation to rules is that of primitive certainty.⁴

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Notes

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² For fuller accounts of the two packages distinguished here, see Mulligan 'Perception' and 'Perception, Predicates and Particulars', and Mulligan and Smith 'A Husserlian Theory of Indexicality'.

³ Cf. Mulligan 'How Perception Fixes Reference' and 'The Essence of Language: Wittgenstein's Builders and Bühler's Bricks'.

⁴ The roles for simple seeing sketched here are by no means the only roles the phenomenon plays. Elsewhere I have argued that one central type of justification requires non-conceptual visual content ('Perception, Predicates and Particulars'); that the category of emotions the bases of which are non-conceptual contents makes possible a distinctive theory of values ('From Appropriate Emotions to Values'); that non-conceptual content is essential to understanding imagination ('La varietà e l'unità dell'immaginazione'). Many of the roles of simple seeing put forward here are more or less close relatives of claims to be found in the writings of Austrian philosophers such as Husserl and Wittgenstein and the former's pupils (for some documentation see my 'Perception'). Elsewhere ('Getting Geist, Certainty and Us' and 'Certainty, Soil and Sediment') I discuss accounts of primitive certainty given by descriptive psychologists from Marty and Husserl to Ortega and Wittgenstein, in particular their accounts of primitive certainty about as opposed to knowledge of one's own mental states and about what words mean, and their accounts of collective, primitive certainty, and the relation between these accounts and those of Cook Wilson and Price.