

# Perceptual experience and seeing that $p$

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**Abstract** I open my eyes and see that the lemon before me is yellow. States like this—states of seeing that  $p$ —appear to be visual perceptual states, in some sense. They also appear to be propositional attitudes (and so states with propositional representational contents). It might seem, then, like a view of perceptual experience on which experiences have propositional representational contents—a Propositional View—has to be the correct sort of view for states of seeing that  $p$ . And thus we can't sustain fully general non-Propositional but Representational, or Relational Views of experience. But despite what we might initially be inclined to think when reflecting upon the apparent features of states of seeing that  $p$ , a non-propositional view of seeing that  $p$  is, I argue, perfectly intelligible.

**Keywords** Perception · Seeing · Perceptual Experience · Perceptual Vocabulary

## 1 Introduction

Some think that it is of the nature of perceptual experiences that they represent the world as being some way(s). I'll call such views *Representational Views*. Some hold, more specifically, that perceptual experience is representational because it is a certain sort of propositional attitude. I'll call such views *Propositional Views*. In contrast to these views, some think that perceptual experiences, at least those involved in genuine perceptions, are fundamentally non-representational, non-propositional *relations* of acquaintance, or sensory awareness, to aspects of the world. I'll call such views *Relational Views*. This essay concerns how these views may be applied in accounting

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for states in which one sees that  $p$ —states in which one sees that, say, *the cube is red*. (I discuss these views and give references in Sect. 2 below.)

States of seeing that  $p$  seem to be (A) *perceptual*, and (B) *propositional*. In light of these apparent features, a Propositional View of seeing that  $p$  seems very natural (see Sect. 3). I will suggest that if one accepts that states in which one sees that  $p$  have these features, then there is an explanatory challenge for non-propositional views of perceptual experience. The challenge is to explain how states of seeing that  $p$  can be perceptual and propositional, without appeal to some Propositional View of perceptual experience (see Sect. 4). I will argue that the explanatory challenge can be met (see Sects. 5 and 6). The point of this is not to favour or disfavour any of the views of experience I have mentioned. It is rather to show that, and how, non-propositional views of seeing that  $p$  are intelligible, despite what we might otherwise be inclined to think when we reflect upon the features of seeing that  $p$ . It is then a further question how we are to work out, fully, an account of seeing that  $p$ , and which perspective on perceptual experience is the most *plausible* perspective to take in doing that. I don't address this further question, but hope that what I say here provides a useful framework in which this question can be addressed.

## 2 Perceptual experience

On a Propositional View of perceptual experience, perceptual experiences are propositional attitudes—they have structures which involve propositional contents and relations to those contents. This can be illustrated as follows. Consider the fact that I have a belief concerning a yellow station wagon (to adapt an example from Searle 1983, p. 41). Since belief is a propositional attitude, my belief concerning the yellow station wagon must have a propositional content. For example, it might be the belief *that there is a yellow station wagon present*. Given that belief is a propositional attitude, my particular belief concerning the yellow station wagon must be a belief that  $p$ , for some  $p$  which concerns or is about a yellow station wagon—if a mental state doesn't satisfy this condition then it is just not a belief concerning a yellow station wagon. On Propositional Views we are to think of perceptual experience in a similar way. Suppose I have a visual experience (as) of a yellow station wagon (for instance, perhaps I *see* one, or hallucinate the presence of a yellow station wagon). If experience is a propositional attitude, then my experience must have a propositional content. For example, it might be that I visually experience *that there is a yellow station wagon present* (Searle, p. 41). If perceptual experience is a propositional attitude, my particular experience concerning the yellow station wagon must be an experience that  $p$ , for some  $p$  which concerns or is about a yellow station wagon—if a mental state doesn't satisfy this condition then it is just not, on Propositional Views, an experience (as) of a yellow station wagon.

Propositional Views sustain the idea that experiences are representational. For experiences, on Propositional Views, represent a subject matter (to their subjects) through their propositional contents. Such views also involve two further claims. First, the entities represented in perceptual experience are aspects of the world—ordinary non-mental perceptible entities, e.g., material objects, events, quantities of stuff, and so

on. Second, on Propositional Views, experiences are propositional attitudes with a mind-to-world direction of fit (Searle 1983, p. 42). That is, experiences are, as Martin (2002) puts it, *committal* on the things they represent (p. 391), committal, that is, on how those things are. Experiences are thus more like beliefs than desires or hopes. Accordingly, an experience with the propositional content  $p$  has correctness or accuracy or veridicality conditions determined by  $p$ : an experience with the content  $p$  is correct (accurate, veridical) only if  $p$ —only if the perceived things are as the experience conveys that they are.

A Propositional View with just the features mentioned is inclusive in a number of ways, here are some: (a) It isn't committed to what *kind* of propositional attitude experiences are. (b) It isn't committed on what can go into the attributive element of perceptual propositional contents. (For helpful discussion on the issues mentioned in (a) and (b) see Glüer (2009)). (c) A generic Propositional View is neutral on what *propositions*—and so propositional contents—are and (d) whether propositional content is conceptual. (One author who thinks that the propositional content of perceptual experience is non-conceptual is Stalnaker (1998). See also the papers in Gunther (2003) for discussion of conceptual and non-conceptual content.)

I will call perceptual experiences which are thought to be propositional attitudes with the properties discussed *perceptual propositional attitudes*. A Propositional View of perceptual experience, then, is any view on which perceptual experiences are perceptual propositional attitudes. Authors such as Searle (1983), Peacocke (1983), McDowell (1996) adopt, in different forms, Propositional Views of perceptual experience. (For instructive discussion see Crane 2006 and Siegel 2011.) There are a number of kinds of alternatives to Propositional Views of experience, I'll focus here on just two kinds.

One non-propositional approach keeps the idea that perceptual experiences are representational, but rejects the idea that the best account of this is one which appeals to propositional content. For instance, Crane (2006) notes that on a fairly standard usage the notion of the representational 'content of experience... is the notion of the way the world is represented in experience' (p. 87). But, Crane suggests, this idea is even more general than the idea that the world is represented in experience by *propositional* content. Crane himself rejects the Propositional View whilst maintaining that experience has representational content. On the alternative Crane prefers 'what is represented in experience are objects, properties and events, in what might loosely be called a 'manifold', but which does not have the structure of judgeable [propositional] content' (p. 96). (See also McDowell (2008) who invokes representational notions in his recent account of experience—in the form of intuitional content—but not propositional content, in contrast to his former propositional view, which I discuss below).

A more radical way of departing from the Propositional View involves rejecting the idea that perceptual experience is representational. That is, it involves rejecting the idea that perceptual experience involves representational content, propositional or otherwise. One approach here is to hold that perceptual experience, at least of the sort involved in genuine cases of perception (e.g., cases where there is seeing, or some other form of perceptual contact with the environment), 'consists most fundamentally in a relation of conscious acquaintance with particular direct objects... these direct objects are mind-independent physical objects themselves' (Brewer 2011, pp. xi–xii).

And here the relation of conscious acquaintance is *not* a form of representation, nor does it imply representation. (So, on Brewer's view, to be acquainted with an object in experience is not to enjoy a perceptual experience with representational content the singular element of which successfully *refers* to an object).

In general terms, the alternative perspective to representational and propositional approaches which Brewer's view instantiates is a perspective on which the perceptual experiences involved in genuine perceptions fundamentally involve some non-representational relation to a mind-independent subject matter. (Versions of this approach can be found in, e.g., [Campbell \(2002\)](#), [Travis \(2004\)](#), and [Kalderon \(2011\)](#), see also [Martin \(2006\)](#), and for helpful discussion see [Crane \(2006\)](#).) In line with the jargon employed in the contemporary literature we can call views of this sort Relational Views. This terminology is not entirely happy, though. For some authors, notably McDowell, think that perceptual experience is both relational *and* representational (or 'intentional')—see especially Lecture III of [McDowell \(1998\)](#). But Relational (or 'relationalist') Views as I understand them, and as they are commonly understood in the literature, involve a denial that experience is representational, and hence a denial that we can understand the relationality of experience in terms of representation. (This comes out clearly in [Soteriou \(2011\)](#), see also Chap. 5 of [French \(2012b\)](#)).

I turn now to relate this discussion of perceptual experience to states of seeing that *p*.

### 3 A propositional view of seeing that *p*

When thinking about seeing, one might focus on visual states of the form: *S* sees *x*. That is, states in which one sees some perceptible entity. For instance, I see the screen before me. This is a visual state the object of which is a material object—the screen. As another example, suppose I see a ceremony (e.g., a wedding ceremony, or an award ceremony). Or suppose I see the train arrive. In these further examples I am in a visual state the object of which is an event—the ceremony, the arrival of the train. Let's refer to seeing understood in this way as *object seeing*—and here 'object' means perceptible entity, and so isn't restricted to just material objects, but includes events, quantities of stuff, and all sorts of other entities. (For a classic discussion of such seeing, see [Dretske 1969](#), Chap. 2.) In contrast, some authors (e.g., [McDowell 1996](#)) focus instead on states in which subjects see *that* things are thus and so (states in which one sees that *p*). For instance, states in which one sees that the screen is there, or that the ceremony is taking place, and so on.

Object seeing is obviously perceptual. To see some perceptible entity *x* is just to *perceive* it, in a specific way (*visually*). At least some states of seeing that *p*—the states authors such as McDowell are interested in—appear, also, to be perceptual (in *some* sense). Intuitively, my seeing that the screen is before me involves an exercise of a capacity I have for visual perception. I could hardly *see* that the screen is before me with my eyes closed. (I exclude here states such as those in which one sees that the argument is valid—more on such states below).

This is to register one apparent similarity between states of object seeing and states of seeing that *p*. But one apparent difference between such states, which is relevant to

us here, is the following. On first reflection, there is nothing *apparently* propositional about states of object seeing. The description of their form just given doesn't attribute to them a propositional structure. Yet there *is* something apparently propositional about states of seeing that *p*. They seem to have a propositional structure.

Now, the fact that there is nothing apparently propositional about states of object seeing shouldn't lead us to think that we could not apply a Propositional View of experience to them. A proponent of a Propositional View might suggest that what we have noted so far is merely superficial. On deeper reflection, they might suggest, even states in which one simply sees some perceptible entity have a propositional structure. This is because, they might say, such states are or constitutively involve visual experiences, understood as visual perceptual propositional attitudes. So, when I see the yellow station wagon, this is in part a matter of having a visual experience of a yellow station wagon, and this is to be understood propositionally.

But what about seeing that *p*? Such states are apparently perceptual, and apparently propositional. A Propositional View of experience, applied to states of seeing that *p*, surely seems very natural in light of these apparent features. For on such a view, we can say that seeing that *p* is exactly as it seems to be: in some sense it is perceptual, and it is propositional. Those features can be captured straightforwardly on a Propositional View, for instance, as follows: states of seeing that *p* are perceptual experiences (they are thus, straightforwardly perceptual) and perceptual experiences just are propositional attitudes (so states of seeing that *p* are straightforwardly propositional).

One author who adopts such a Propositional View of seeing that *p* is McDowell. McDowell proposes a view of experience on which it has *propositional* content, and more specifically, propositional content which is *conceptual* (see, e.g., [McDowell 1996](#), p. 9, p. 26). And to *see* that *p*, for McDowell, is a sort of experience. McDowell talks of the *experience* of seeing that something is red (p. 30). And a theme running throughout *Mind and World* is that *experiences* in which one is not misled, include experiences such as seeing that things are thus and so. Thus McDowell's view of seeing that *p* is that it is, in my terms, a sort of perceptual attitude to a proposition. (For a much more detailed discussion of McDowell's view see Chap. 4 of my (2012a).)

McDowell's view isn't the only view of seeing that *p*, but it is a prominent example. Let's define the Propositional View of seeing that *p* just in terms of what is essential to *any* Propositional View of seeing that *p*:

(P) Seeing that *p* either is or at least involves a visual perceptual propositional attitude (a visual experience understood as a sort of propositional attitude).

If seeing that *p* is to be understood along the lines of (P) then some experiences are propositional. The Propositional View of seeing that *p* is thus inconsistent with fully general non-propositional views of experience, e.g., fully general Relational Views. I turn now to how what we have said so far about seeing that *p* leaves proponents of fully general forms of non-propositional views with an explanatory challenge.

#### 4 An explanatory challenge for non-propositional views

In the discussion above I observed that the following are features that states of seeing that *p* at least *seem* to have (now with metalinguistic flourishes):

- (A) Seeing that  $p$  is in some sense perceptual (in some sense: ‘ $S$  sees that  $p$ ’ ascribes to  $S$  a state or episode of visual perception (at least in one sense of ‘see’)).
- (B) Seeing that  $p$  is propositional (‘ $S$  sees that  $p$ ’ ascribes to  $S$  a propositional attitude of which  $p$  is the propositional content).

In light of these apparent features, I noted, a Propositional View of seeing that  $p$  seems very natural. This, I think, puts the defender of a non-propositional view on the back foot, so to speak. They have to say either (A) and (B) don’t state *genuine* features of seeing that  $p$ , but merely apparent features; or else, they have to claim that they *do* state genuine features of seeing that  $p$ , but, despite how natural a Propositional View of seeing that  $p$  looks in the light of them, they don’t lead, inevitably, to such a view.

I want to pursue, on behalf of proponents of non-propositional views, the second of these options. So let’s assume that all sides agree that (A) and (B) state genuine, not merely apparent, features of states of seeing that  $p$ . There is then an explanatory challenge for defenders of non-propositional views of experience. The challenge is one of explaining how such views of experience are consistent with taking (A) and (B) to be genuine features of states in which one sees that  $p$ . It is easy to see, as noted above, how a Propositional View of experience could account for these features. It is less easy to see how a Representational but non-Propositional View, or a Relational View, might.

Below I will attempt to meet this challenge. I will explain how we can intelligibly sustain a non-propositional view of experience even when we accept that states of seeing that  $p$  have the features they seem to have. The way I will argue for this is of independent interest, for I will offer a view of the semantics of ‘ $S$  sees that  $p$ ’ sentences (of the type we are interested in) which one might be interested in even if one is not interested, as I am here, in the prospects for views of perceptual experience (this builds upon work I have published elsewhere, see my [French 2012a](#)). I will outline the semantics in Sect. 5 and then explain how it is relevant to meeting the explanatory challenge in Sect. 6.

## 5 The semantics of ‘see’

### 5.1 Three senses of ‘see’

The verb ‘see’ is a massively polysemous verb ([Gisborne 2010](#), p. 118). It has many different senses. In a corpus based study Alm-Arvius distinguishes nine different senses of ‘see’ (see her [1993](#)), and in a recent book Gisborne distinguishes yet more (see especially Chap. 4 of his [2010](#)). Not every sense of ‘see’ is a perceptual sense. It is clear from the examples below that ‘see’ can mean, as Gisborne (p. 118) notes

in rough paraphrase, ‘perceive visually’, ‘understand’, ‘date’, and ‘escort’ among other senses.

- a. Jane saw the Taj Mahal.
- b. I see what you mean.
- c. Jen is seeing Brad.
- d. Kim saw the salesman to the door.

On the readings Gisborne highlights, (b), (c), and (d) involve non-perceptual senses of ‘see’—in contrast to (a). I’ll call the sense of ‘see’ involved in (a) the *basic perceptual sense* of ‘see’ (for, as we’ll see below, it is basic to our understanding of other senses of ‘see’). The following examples also involve ‘see’ in this sense:

- (5) I just saw Jane, she looked tired.
- (6) I looked out of the window and saw him crossing the road.

In the basic perceptual sense ‘see’ means, roughly, *perceive visually*. It is part of the meaning of sentences of the form ‘*S* sees *x*’ which involve the basic perceptual sense of ‘see’ that uses of sentences of these forms get to be ascriptions of visual perception, that is, *object seeing*. A typical use of a sentence of the form ‘*S* sees *x*’ ascribes the visual perception of whatever is denoted by the term for ‘*x*’ to whatever is denoted by the term for ‘*S*’ (e.g., a typical use of (5) would say of the speaker that they visually perceived Jane).

But my primary interest in this section is on the sense of ‘see’ in propositional contexts, as it occurs in sentences of the form ‘*S* sees that *p*’. Is ‘see’ in such contexts the basic perceptual ‘see’? I will argue now that it is not.

Let’s consider first the sense of ‘see’ present in the following examples:

- (7) Matt spoke carefully, picking his words in such a way that Piet saw that he was no friend; one did not have to speak so carefully to friends (adapted from [Alm-Arvius 1993](#), p. 265).
- (8) They argued about it, but in the end Jane saw that Peter was right (adapted from [Gisborne 2010](#), p. 122).
- (9) I see that Jane’s argument is valid.

It is clear that ‘see’ as it occurs in these examples is not the basic perceptual ‘see’. It doesn’t mean: *perceive visually*. In these constructions ‘see’ doesn’t have a perceptual meaning at all. (7)–(9) could all be true of an individual who was blind. In these examples ‘see’ seems to have more of a cognitive meaning. But how are we to understand this cognitive meaning further? In these examples ‘see’ is like ‘believes’ or ‘thinks’ on propositional readings of those verbs: it ascribes a propositional attitude. But in these constructions ‘see’ doesn’t *just* mean *believes* or *thinks*, since it picks out a *factive* attitude—believing that *p*, and thinking that *p* aren’t factive attitudes, since a factive attitude is an attitude one can have only to truths, and one can believe, or think, that *p* when *p* is not true (for helpful discussion of factive attitudes and verbs see [Williamson \(2000\)](#)). Furthermore, paraphrase data reveals that there is more to the meaning of ‘see’ in these constructions than merely *believes* and *thinks*. Rather, ‘see’ in these constructions is closely connected in meaning to the meaning of ‘know’ on its propositional reading:

- (7)<sup>t</sup> Matt spoke carefully, picking his words in such a way that Piet saw [realized, understood] that he was no friend; one did not have to speak so carefully to friends.
- (8)<sup>t</sup> They argued about it, but in the end Jane saw [knew, realized] that Peter was right.
- (9)<sup>t</sup> I see [I know, realize, understand] that Jane’s argument is valid.

The appropriateness of the rough paraphrases included in the brackets above reveals that in these examples ‘see’ means something like *understand* or *realize*, or *know*. As such, uses of ‘see’ in this sense ascribe knowledge that  $p$  or a state which entails such knowledge to  $S$  (where  $p$  is the proposition expressed by the relevant THAT clause). I’ll call the sense of ‘see’ which these examples exemplify the *purely epistemic sense*.

But now consider the following examples, which are more directly relevant to us here:

- (10) She was pale the next day and he could see that she had not slept (Alm-Arvius 1993, p. 73).
- (11) I see from your news pages that the feature films and past TV shows will soon be on the market for owners of video cassette recorders (Gisborne 2010, p. 120).
- (12) I see by the angle of the sun that the morning is almost ended (Gisborne, p. 120).
- (13) I see that Jack is wearing his pink sweater again, it looks horrible.

How should we think of ‘see’ as it occurs in these examples (on their most natural readings)? Is the sense of ‘see’ in *these* examples the basic perceptual sense? For despite being similar in structure to the examples which suggest the purely epistemic sense, these examples, unlike those other examples, *do* suggest a meaning of ‘see’ associated with visual perception. We would most naturally take a use of (13), for instance, to be, in part at least, a report on what one can see with their eyes. However, as Gisborne (2010) argues, the linguistic evidence supports the claim that (10)–(13) *don’t* involve the basic perceptual sense of ‘see’ (this *doesn’t* mean that it is not a *perceptual* sense, just that if it is, it is a distinct perceptual sense from the basic perceptual sense). Gisborne reasons as follows:

One way of diagnosing polysemy is to exploit evidence from selection restrictions, and the referents of THAT clauses belong in a different ontological class from things and events. [...] There is a real difference between the examples [in (5)–(6) which involve the basic perceptual sense] and the other examples in [(10)–(13)]: the semantics of the THAT clausal complement are different from the semantics of the complements in [the basic perceptual examples]. A THAT clausal complement denotes a proposition—it is timeless and placeless. [The complements in, say, (5) and (6)] refer to a thing and an event respectively, and things and events both have a time and a place, which means that they can both be physically perceived. The contents of a THAT clause cannot be physically perceived, because they are not physical. It is reasonable, therefore, to argue that although [the basic perceptual examples] can be treated together because they both involve the physical perception sense, the examples in [(10)–(13)] express a separate sense which has the same selection restrictions as the sense in [(7)–(9), the purely epistemic sense] (p. 120).

I think we can capture Gisborne’s line of reasoning here in the following way. A semantic selection restriction on a verb has to do with the semantic constraints there are on the verb’s arguments. The idea, then, is that given what ‘see’ means in the basic perceptual sense (that is, given that it means, roughly, *perceive visually*), it is subject to the following selection restriction: its complement expression must be a term which denotes a perceptible thing (so, e.g., a concrete noun phrase, a small clause, or



something like that). But ‘see’ as it occurs in (10)–(13) doesn’t satisfy this semantic constraint. In these constructions the complements of ‘see’ are THAT clauses, and the semantic values of such clauses are propositions (or Thoughts or conceptual contents), which are not perceptible entities.

Given what we have observed about the meaning of ‘see’ in its basic perceptual sense, if an utterance of a sentence of the form ‘*S* sees that *p*’ involved that sense of ‘see’ it would ascribe to *S* the visual perception of the proposition: *p*—just like a use of the sentence ‘Jane saw John’, with the basic perceptual sense of ‘see’, ascribes to Jane the visual perception of John. But, intuitively, we can’t be related to propositions in *that* way. As Frege notes, ‘[t]hat the sun has risen is not an object emitting rays that reach my eyes; it is not a visible thing like the sun itself’ (Frege 1918, p. 328); see Travis (2007) for an elaboration of Frege’s point). Intuitively, that is, you cannot visually perceive, or clap your eyes upon, a proposition. (This helps to explain also why you can’t watch a proposition, or stare at one, or gaze at one, or look at one, or visually inspect one, and so on). Propositions are not among the things we can see. Given that we regard many uses of sentences just like those in (10)–(13) as (capable of being) straightforwardly true, we can’t be understanding ‘see’ in them as the basic perceptual ‘see’.

Thus, ‘see’ in (10)–(13) is not the basic perceptual ‘see’. It doesn’t simply mean: *perceive visually*. So, should we treat ‘see’ in these constructions as just the purely epistemic sense? After all, as Gisborne notes, in these constructions ‘see’ has the same selection restrictions as it does in the purely epistemic sense (in (10)–(13) ‘see’ takes a THAT clausal complement, as it does in the purely epistemic sense). Also in (10)–(13) ‘see’ is, like the purely epistemic ‘see’, factive.

But despite these similarities, Gisborne (2010) argues that there are ‘linguistic ways of differentiating’ examples which exhibit the purely epistemic sense, and the examples in (10)–(13) (p. 146). This suggests that we have distinct senses here. Gisborne presents evidence for this in the form of the following examples (my numbering):

(14) Jane saw through the window that Peter had crossed safely.

(15) !Jane saw through the window that Peter was right.

From these examples we can appreciate that some occurrences of ‘see’ in propositional contexts can be embellished with certain prepositions (such as ‘through the window’), yet some can’t—the occurrence in (14) is fine, yet (15) is, on its most natural understanding, infelicitous. The question is, why is there this difference in felicity? Gisborne’s answer is that there are distinct senses of ‘see’ within the class of occurrences of ‘see’ in propositional contexts. If the sense of ‘see’ was the same in both cases, we shouldn’t get these differences in felicity—that is, given sameness of sense, then if (14) sounds fine then (15) should too, and if (15) sounds odd, then (14) should too. So there is clear evidence that there are distinct senses of ‘see’ within the class of occurrences of ‘see’ in propositional contexts.

These examples also help to support the idea that there is a *perceptual* dimension to ‘see’ in some occurrences of ‘see’ in propositional contexts. Visual perception is directional, it involves looking in a certain direction (for creatures like us and other animals, it involves one’s eyes pointing in a certain direction). Unsurprisingly then, when we attribute visual perception to a subject, we can embellish such attributions by

representing the direction of the subject's gaze. When we use 'see' in its basic perceptual sense we can do this. For instance we can say things like: "I was looking through the window and I saw him cross the road" and "I saw the bird through my binoculars". (14) doesn't involve the basic perceptual sense of 'see' yet it is an occurrence of 'see' which can also be embellished by representing a gaze, or direction of looking. The fact that some propositional occurrences of 'see' can be embellished with *such* directional phrases is evidence that those occurrences are *like* the basic perceptual 'see' in having a perceptual aspect to their meaning.

And from this we can bolster the idea that some occurrences of 'see' in propositional contexts are not perceptual at all, but purely epistemic. Namely, those occurrences which just don't admit of embellishment with directional phrases (such as in (15)). We can explain why (15) is infelicitous, since 'see' in such occurrences has a purely epistemic sense—it doesn't make sense to think that mere knowing or understanding requires a *visual* perspective or point of view from which one directs a gaze.

The linguistic evidence we have considered so far suggests, then, that in addition to the basic perceptual sense of 'see' there are two distinct propositional senses of 'see': there is the purely epistemic sense (which we encountered in examples (7)–(9)), but also a distinct sense suggested by examples (10)–(13) and (14). This latter sense is not the basic perceptual 'see', but it is similar in that it has a perceptual dimension to its meaning. According to Gisborne this further sense combines elements of the basic perceptual sense of 'see', *and* the purely epistemic sense of 'see' (p. 146).

One thing we haven't yet made explicit is that 'see' in this further sense is not just similar to 'see' in the purely epistemic sense in virtue of having the same selection restrictions, and being factive. It is similar too in that it is *epistemic*. That is, sentences of the form '*S* sees that *p*', where 'see' has the epistemic perceptual sense, represent their subjects as *knowledgeable*—that is, as either knowing that *p*, or as being in a state, such as noticing that *p*, realizing that *p*, understanding that *p*, recognizing that *p*, and so on, which entails knowledge that *p*. Thus, as noted above, I'll call this latter sense of 'see' the *epistemic perceptual sense*. That this sense of 'see' is epistemic in this way is supported by the paraphrase data. Consider the following rough paraphrases of (10)–(13):

- (10)<sup>†</sup> She was pale the next day and he could see [tell by looking] that she had not slept (Alm-Arvius 1993, p. 73).
- (11)<sup>†</sup> I see [understand, know, notice, realize] from [what I see in] your news pages that the feature films and past TV shows will soon be on the market for owners of video cassette recorders (Gisborne 2010, p. 120).
- (12)<sup>†</sup> I see by the angle of the sun [I can tell by looking at the angle of the sun] that the morning is almost ended (Gisborne, p. 120).
- (13)<sup>†</sup> I see [notice by sight] that Jack is wearing his pink sweater again, it looks horrible.

The appropriateness of these paraphrases indicates that like the purely epistemic 'see', 'see' in (10)–(13) has an *epistemic* meaning—uses of 'see' in this sense ascribe knowledge or a state which entails knowledge.

To be clear, then, we have been discussing three senses of 'see':

- See<sub>1</sub> The basic perceptual sense (e.g., ‘I saw Jane, she looked tired’).  
 See<sub>2</sub> The purely epistemic sense (e.g., ‘They argued about it, but in the end Jane saw that Peter was right’).  
 See<sub>3</sub> The epistemic perceptual sense (e.g., ‘I see that Jack is wearing his pink sweater again, it looks horrible’).

The selection restrictions on the basic perceptual ‘see’ include the constraint that its complement expression denotes a perceptible entity. This is not so of ‘see’ in the other senses. In both the purely epistemic and epistemic perceptual sense, ‘see’ takes a THAT clausal complement, and the semantic values of such clauses are not perceptible entities, but rather abstract entities, propositions. In both epistemic senses ‘see’ functions as a factive verb. In the purely epistemic sense sentences of the form ‘*S* sees that *p*’ represent *S* as knowledgeable with respect to *p*. This is also true of ‘see’ in the epistemic perceptual sense, but ‘see’ in that sense also has a *perceptual* dimension to its meaning.

## 5.2 The epistemic perceptual ‘see’

I now want to consider how we are to understand the epistemic perceptual sense of ‘see’ further, and how it can be understood with reference to elements of the purely epistemic and basic perceptual senses.

From the above paraphrases of (10)–(13) we can appreciate that the epistemic dimension to the meaning of ‘see’ in these constructions isn’t *pure*. Sentences of the form ‘*S* sees that *p*’ which involve the perceptual epistemic sense of ‘see’ represent *S* as *knowledgeable* with respect to *p on the basis of vision*. That is, ‘see’ attributes knowledge (or a state which entails knowledge) in (10)–(13), but it doesn’t *just* attribute that. Rather in (10)–(13) the meaning of ‘see’ is such that it attributes knowledge (or a knowledge entailing state), but also indicates that the knowledge (or knowledge entailing state) is *visually based*—that is, had by visual means, or sight, or by looking. (In this way ‘see’ in the epistemic perceptual sense is an *evidential* verb, just in that it indicates the *source* of the information in the THAT clause.)

Clearly, then, it is part of the meaning of ‘see’ in the epistemic perceptual sense that uses of sentences of the form ‘*S* sees that *p*’, with ‘see’ in that sense, are knowledge ascriptions (or ascriptions which ascribe knowledge entailing states). But they are also, in a sense, ascriptions of visual perception (object seeing). This is how the epistemic perceptual sense is similar to the basic perceptual sense. But we need to be careful with this last point. For there are two important differences between the way in which uses of ‘see’ in the basic perceptual sense ascribe object seeing, and the way in which uses of ‘see’ in the epistemic perceptual sense ascribe object seeing. I will discuss these differences now.

The first difference pertains to something we have already considered. Namely, the fact that there is more to ‘see’ in the epistemic perceptual sense than its perceptual dimension. The way in which this is so, I want to suggest, is part of what distinguishes uses of ‘see’ in the epistemic perceptual sense from uses of ‘see’ in the basic perceptual sense insofar as both sorts of uses count as ascriptions of object seeing.

Some verbs have a meaning which is particularly well suited to the ascription of visual perception. Obviously ‘see’ in the basic perceptual sense is one such verb. Uses of sentences of the form ‘*S* sees *x*’ where ‘see’ has the basic perceptual sense, ascribe visual perception in what we can call a *pure* way. That is, insofar as ‘sees *x*’ in such uses ascribes visual perception it doesn’t do so in virtue of, or by being part of, ascribing something which is not itself visual perception. But other verbs, which like ‘see’ in the basic perceptual sense have a meaning which makes them particularly well suited to ascribing visual perception, can ascribe visual perception in a non-pure way. That is, there are some such verbs which ascribe visual perception in virtue of, or by being part of, ascribing something which is not itself visual perception. Here are some examples:

- (14) He gazed at the night sky.
- (15) She looked at the painting carefully.
- (16) Jane watched the car crash into the wall.
- (17) John spent most of the evening staring into space.

The term ‘gaze’, with the sense suggested by its occurrence in (14), is a verb of visual perception insofar as *gazing at* something is an exercise of a visual capacity. To gaze at the night sky is (in part) to direct one’s visual attention towards the night sky in a certain way, and it involves seeing the night sky. So although ‘gaze’ clearly doesn’t just mean *perceive visually* it still has a meaning which is such that uses of it, in a way, ascribe visual perception. Similar things can be said of ‘look’, ‘watch’, and ‘stare’ (given the readings suggested by the linguistic contexts above). None of these verbs (in the intended senses) simply means *perceive visually*. Yet they still have meanings which is such that uses of them, in a way, ascribe visual perception. To look at something is to engage with it visually, in a certain way (and this involves seeing it). Watching something happening is a sort of visual activity which involves seeing a happening or event (e.g., watching a car crash involves seeing the car crash). And staring also involves seeing (you can’t stare at something or into some space with your eyes closed). Obviously there is much more to be said about such verbs and the visual activities they denote, but the basic point is just that these verbs (and many others) are in some sense verbs of visual perception—uses of them in some sense ascribe visual perception—even though they don’t simply mean *perceive visually*.

Uses of (14)–(17) are, in a sense, ascriptions of object seeing, but, for the reasons given above, they are not *pure* ascriptions of visual perception. That is, they ascribe object seeing only because of the constitutive connection between object seeing and the visual activities or exercises of visual capacities that they ascribe. There is more to what uses of such sentences ascribe than just object seeing, and their main function (or at least an important function they have) is to ascribe something which is not object seeing.

With respect to being ascriptions of object seeing uses of sentences of the form ‘*S* sees that *p*’ where ‘see’ has the epistemic perceptual sense are somewhat like uses of (14)–(17). They ascribe some state or episode of object seeing *as the source of the knowledge* which they ascribe. There is more to what uses of such sentences ascribe than just object seeing, and their main function (or at least an important function they

have) is to ascribe something which is not object seeing, namely knowledge or a state in which *S* is knowledgeable (a knowledge entailing state).

There is a further way in which uses of sentences of the form ‘*S* sees that *p*’, which involve the epistemic perceptual sense of ‘see’, differ as ascriptions of object seeing from uses of sentences of the form ‘*S* sees *x*’, which involve the basic perceptual sense of ‘see’. This further way is also a way in which uses of sentences involving ‘see’ in the epistemic perceptual sense differ, *qua* ascriptions of object seeing, from uses of sentences such as those in (14)–(17). To illustrate this, consider the following examples, one of which we have already encountered:

(5) I just saw Jane, she looked tired.

(18) I stared at Jane.

It is part of the meaning of (5) that a use of it ascribes to the speaker a state of object seeing of a specific type. Namely, one which has *Jane* as its object. That is, the state type (sees *Jane*) is specified as part of the meaning of the sentence. The same is true of (18) (though of course, as discussed above, a use of (18) isn’t a *pure* ascription of visual perception). But now consider the following example:

(19) I see that Jane is tired.

Suppose that (19) involves the epistemic perceptual sense of ‘see’. I have been suggesting that it is part of the meaning of such sentences (specifically, the perceptual dimension of their meaning) that uses of such sentences ascribe object seeing. However, it is *not* part of the meaning of such sentences that there is a specification of a visual perceptual state type. This is the further way in which uses of such sentences and uses of sentences such as (14)–(17) differ with respect to being ascriptions of object seeing. Let me illustrate this point.

What a use of (19) says then is something like: I [the speaker] can tell by sight that Jane is tired. Insofar as such a use ascribes to the speaker a state of object seeing as the basis for the ascribed knowledge (or knowledge entailing state), there is no specification of the type of state of object seeing. Given what ‘see’ means in the epistemic perceptual sense, part of what uses of ‘*S* sees that *p*’ say is: there is some state or episode of visual perception *v*, of which *S* is the subject, and which is such that *S* knows that *p* on the basis of *v*. (The ascription of object seeing comes thanks to the quantificational content.) Which type of visual perceptual state *v* is doesn’t enter into the semantic content of the sentence type. This chimes well with the idea that an utterance involving (19) could be true thanks to any of the following states of affairs (indicated in italics), each of which involves a different type of state of object seeing, where the different types are individuated by the different objects of perception (remember here that ‘object’ just means *perceptible entity*):

- I can tell that Jane is tired because *I can see the tired look in her eyes*
- I can tell that Jane is tired because *I can see her slouching around*
- I can tell that Jane is tired because *I can see her yawning*
- I can tell that Jane is tired because *I can see her nodding off*
- I could tell that Jane was tired because *I saw her*

And so on...

In a conversational context in which one utters (19) it may be quite obvious what the *specific* visual basis for the knowledge is—which specific type of state of object seeing is in play. But it is not part of the meaning of ‘see’ in the epistemic perceptual sense that such information is communicated. That is, such information is not encoded in the meaning of ‘see’.

To summarize, it is part of the meaning of ‘see’ in the epistemic perceptual sense that it is both epistemic and perceptual. (It is thus similar to the purely epistemic sense and similar to the basic perceptual sense.) It is epistemic in that sentences of the form ‘*S* sees that *p*’ represent *S* as *knowledgeable*, with respect to *p*. It is perceptual in that such sentences say of *S* that *there is some state of visual perception (object seeing), v*, of *S*’s, which is such that *S* knows that *p* (or is in a state which entails such knowledge) on the basis of *v*. (Thus, ‘see’ in the epistemic perceptual sense is evidential in that it indicates the source of the information specified in the THAT clause, and more specifically, indicates that it is *visual*). Sentences of the form ‘*S* sees that *p*’ which involve ‘see’ in the epistemic perceptual sense have a meaning which is such that uses of them ascribe visual perception. But such ascriptions of visual perception are not pure. And it is not part of the meaning of such ascriptions of visual perception to include a specification of the type of state of visual perception which is ascribed.

Let’s call this the *visuo-epistemic view* of the semantics of ‘see’ in the epistemic perceptual sense. I now want to suggest that, with this view in hand, we can meet the explanatory challenge for non-propositional views of experience considered above.

## 6 The explanatory challenge revisited

As I have presented matters, all sides agree that states of seeing that *p* have the following features:

- (A) Seeing that *p* is in some sense perceptual (in some sense: ‘*S* sees that *p*’ ascribes to *S* a state or episode of visual perception (at least in one sense of ‘see’)).
- (B) Seeing that *p* is propositional (‘*S* sees that *p*’ ascribes to *S* a propositional attitude of which *p* is the propositional content).

I noted that the Propositional View of seeing that *p* can account for these features in a straightforward way. But how can we sustain a (fully general) *non*-propositional view of experience if we also accept that states of seeing that *p* have these features? If we accept that states of seeing that *p* have these features why are we not just stuck with a Propositional View of seeing that *p*?

First of all, let’s note that by adopting the visuo-epistemic semantics *all* of the views of experience we have discussed so far are consistent with the meta-linguistic formulations in (A) and (B). For the visuo-epistemic semantics is metaphysically neutral, in a way that I’ll now explain.

Above we observed that on the visuo-epistemic view, sentences of the form ‘*S* sees that *p*’, where ‘see’ has the epistemic perceptual sense, don’t involve, as part of their meaning, a specification of the type of state of object seeing which uses of such sentences ascribe. We can add to this that, on the visuo-epistemic view, they don’t

involve, as part of their meaning, a specification of the *nature* of the states or episodes of object seeing that uses of them ascribe (that is, a specification of the nature of the visual experiences which states or episodes of object seeing involve or constitute). In this way, the visuo-epistemic semantics is, as it should be, a metaphysically neutral semantics.

For all the visuo-epistemic *semantics* of ‘see’ requires, insofar as ‘see’ ascribes a state or episode of visual perception, in propositional contexts, it can ascribe, for instance, a state or episode of object seeing which constitutively involves a visual experience understood as a perceptual propositional attitude. On the visuo-epistemic view, if, say, ‘Jane sees that the book before her is blue’ is true, then there is a state or episode of visual perception which grounds Jane’s knowledge that the book before her is blue. If one endorses the metaphysics of the Propositional View, one can say that that state or episode of visual perception—whichever state that might be—is or involves a visual perceptual propositional attitude. For instance, suppose it is a state in which Jane sees a blue book. A defender of the Propositional View can say that this state constitutively involves a visual experience with some propositional content (e.g., the content *that book is blue*). Thus, the visuo-epistemic view is clearly *consistent* with, and may be heartily embraced by, those who endorse the Propositional View of perceptual experience. Likewise, for all the visuo-epistemic *semantics* of ‘see’ requires, insofar as ‘see’ ascribes a state or episode of visual perception it can ascribe a state or episode of object seeing which *doesn’t* constitutively involve a perceptual propositional attitude. Consistently with the visuo-epistemic view one might hold that when Jane sees a book this involves a visual experience, but this visual experience is to be understood in terms of a Representational but non-Propositional View, or a Relational View of experience.

How, then, can a defender of a non-propositional view of experience explain how (A) and (B) are satisfied, in their *non*-metalinguistic formulations, in a way that is consistent with non-propositional views of perceptual experience? By pointing out that there can be such a thing as a visuo-epistemic view of *seeing that p*. (That is, a visuo-epistemic view of *states* in which one sees that *p*, not, now, a visuo-epistemic view of the *semantics* of sentences which ascribe such states.) On such a view to see that *p* is to *know* that *p* on the basis of *visual perception*. Understood in this way, seeing that *p* is obviously propositional—for knowledge is a propositional attitude. Thus (B) is satisfied. But also, understood in this way, seeing that *p* is perceptual in that it is individuated in terms of visual perception: to see that *p* is to know that *p* by means of *visual perception* (as opposed to some other source, e.g., auditory perception, or memory). Thus, in *this* sense seeing that *p* is perceptual, and so (A) is satisfied as well.

The visuo-epistemic view of seeing that *p* is consistent with all of the views of experience I have discussed in this essay. A *Propositional* visuo-epistemic view can be obtained by specifying that the perceptual aspect of seeing that *p*—the visual states, states of object seeing, which ground the knowledge that *p*—are constitutively propositional. But a *non*-Propositional view of seeing that *p* can be obtained by specifying that such states are *not* constitutively propositional. If one added to the visuo-epistemic view of seeing that *p* just the claim that in its perceptual aspect it is non-propositional one would obtain a minimally committed non-propositional view of seeing that *p*. Such a view counts as *minimally* committed, for it is neutral between the

different forms non-propositional views of experience come in (e.g., Representational but non-Propositional Views, and Relational Views—and, of course, other views of experience we haven't discussed here). How one approaches states of seeing that  $p$  in a more committed way, from the non-propositional point of view, will depend upon what one thinks of the nature of visual perception; that is, what *non-propositional* account of object seeing one wants to give.

A non-propositional view of seeing that  $p$  is intelligible, even in the light of (A) and (B). I have attempted to explain how this is so by outlining a view of states in which one sees that  $p$ , available to non-propositional theorists, which is coherent, and which captures both of (A) and (B) on their non-metalinguistic formulations. This is the visuo-epistemic view of seeing that  $p$ , and it is modelled on the visuo-epistemic view of the semantics of perceptual 'sees that  $p$ ' ascriptions.

The way in which (A) and (B) can be satisfied, in their *non-metalinguistic* formulations, consistently with non-propositional views of experience, simply mirrors, or reflects, the metaphysically neutral way in which (A) and (B) can be satisfied, in their *metalinguistic* formulations. So it is not that in responding to the explanatory challenge I am taking semantic claims to settle any metaphysical issues. It is, rather, that, with the semantics in place, as a sort of model, we can understand how the *non-metalinguistic* formulations in (A) and (B) can be satisfied in a way that is consistent with non-propositional and non-Representational views of experience. And this gives us just the sort of explanation sought in taking on the explanatory burden which non-propositional views of perceptual experience face.

## 7 Conclusion

Despite what we might initially be inclined to think on reflecting upon the apparent features of states of seeing that  $p$ , a non-propositional view of seeing that  $p$  is, I have argued, intelligible. I have tried to explain how this is so. I have approached the point by looking into the semantics of 'see'—which I hope is of independent interest. I have framed the main claims I have made here in terms of taking up an explanatory burden on behalf of those who endorse some non-propositional view of experience. But I have said nothing about which of the views of experience I have considered here are more favourable.

Just in the light of the fact that states of seeing that  $p$  are perceptual in some sense, and propositional, there is no particular reason to discount *non-propositional* views, but that is not to say that there are no *other* problems with such views.

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