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## Problems with Seeing: On the Philosophically Significant Uses of the Expression ‘To See’

**Abstract** The aim of the paper is to distinguish two common notions of the expression “to see” – objective and subjective without attributing beliefs to the observer. Thus, the main aim can be characterized as extensional explication. This gives us the ability to describe visual perception without assuming anything about higher cognitive abilities of the agent. Subsequent addition of the notion of belief enables me to characterize more visual categories present in the literature of the subject.

**Keywords** perception, seeing, nonconceptual perception

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### 1.

It surely need not be emphasized that the verb “to see” is part of the vernacular nontechnical language we use every day. However, it turns out that even its ordinary daily use provokes philosophically significant questions and difficult cognitive puzzles. The task I set myself in this article is to explore the ways in which this expression is used and to introduce certain conceptual restrictions that should help solve these puzzles.

Let us begin by exploring the difficulties alluded to above. Let us imagine that we witness the following exchange:

A: I saw a red mug here yesterday.

B: You couldn’t have seen a red mug because I don’t have one.

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A: I surely know better what I saw – unless it was an illusion.

Which interlocutor is right? One may say that the dispute concerns the question of whose perspective should be considered privileged in describing perception: that of the subject of perception or that of a third person (who may, for example, be in possession of additional information). I will argue that the most convenient solution is to assume that here we are dealing with two senses of the expression “to see”: the objective sense (employed by interlocutor B) and the subjective sense (employed by interlocutor A). Before we clearly demarcate these two senses, I would like to indicate several more problematic examples of the use of the expression in question.

The most readily recognizable phenomena which lead to misunderstandings of the type cited in the above dialog are hallucinations and illusions. Does a hallucinating person who utters the sentence “I see a black dog” utter a false sentence or perhaps an ambiguous one since he or she does see the dog in some sense of the word “to see”? Does the type of hallucination this person is having impact the truth conditions of the sentence? For instance: will the situation differ depending on whether the hallucination is a typical one or one experienced while the subject’s eyes are closed? And what about the relatively similar, at least *prima facie*, situation of dreaming: when I say that I saw a dog in a dream, do I use the expression “to see” in a way that is significantly different from the case of hallucination? Perhaps this is its metaphorical use?

Equal difficulties are caused by illusions and their subset: ordinary misperceptions that may nonetheless be quite awkward to describe. Let us illustrate this with an example. Let us say that I am at a club and I notice a person I associate with a friend I have not seen for a long time. Importantly, I am not under the impression that I see my friend – I believe that I see someone else who merely resembles him. After a while I bump into my friend and find out that he really was at that club that day around the same time I was. It is therefore highly likely that the person who triggered my association was none other than my friend<sup>2</sup>. How should I describe the situation now, *ex post*? Should I simply say that I saw my friend, or should I use a formulation like this one: I saw him then but I saw him as someone else? Perhaps, as some would prefer it, every act of visual perception is an act of “seeing as” (Strawson 1979)? Does seeing an object “as a postman” differ radically from “believing that one sees a postman”?

This situation points to yet another problem related to the description

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<sup>2</sup> I owe this example to Michał Zawadzki.

of sensory perception. I have in mind the relation between sentences of the form “O sees that  $\varphi$ ” (let us call this version “propositional”) and those of the form “O sees  $f$ ” where  $f$  is a name created from  $\varphi$  (let us call this version “nominal”)<sup>3</sup>. The possibility of describing a perceptual act in these two ways raises the following questions: Is this a merely stylistic difference with no significant philosophical consequences? Does each perceptual act allow this dual description? Is describing a given perceptual act using the propositional form equivalent to ascribing a belief to the subject of perception?

To understand why belief ascription in the context of perception is philosophically significant, one must realize the specificity of sensory perception. A common though rarely explicitly articulated intuition regarding perception is that it is, if I may say so, conceptually innocent. Even if I can describe, in more than one way, what I saw or heard, the experience itself is independent of the description. This intuition has repeatedly manifested itself in philosophy, from the belief about the existence of pure sense data (resulting from equally conceptually pure perceptual acts) to protocol sentences to the division between knowledge by description and knowledge by acquaintance. The identification of perception with the possession of some kind of a belief significantly complicates this picture since beliefs seem not to be independent from their description. There is no doubt that “John’s belief that his dog is black” differs from “John’s belief that his dog is the colour of coal” since John could possess the first without possessing the latter. It would be difficult to find anything equally obvious in the case of visual sensations: is the sensation of a black dog definitely different from the sensation of a “coaly” dog?

This question becomes even trickier to answer in the context of the perception of creatures that we would rather not, for one reason or another, imbue with the capacity to form beliefs (Stich 1978; Glock 2000).<sup>4</sup> As is not too hard to guess, at issue are infants and animals whose capacity to form beliefs, according to most philosophers, is rather limited.<sup>5</sup> Sensory perception seems to be an absolutely basic cognitive function shared across many cognitive systems – the same cannot be said about the capacity to

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<sup>3</sup> This can be done in many ways, which is not significant for my analysis. For example, the nominal equivalent of the sentence “John sees that the dog is black” can have the form “John sees a black dog” or “John sees the dog’s being black,” or “John sees a dog that is black.”

<sup>4</sup> Or a capacity to form beliefs characterized by a specific (for example sufficiently complex) kind of content.

<sup>5</sup> This problem also pertains, for obvious reasons, to philosophers who do not want to ascribe any propositions to these creatures, or perhaps to anyone at all.

form and to hold beliefs. The view that perception should depend on the possession of beliefs thus appears to be entirely counterintuitive.

## 2.

Let us now distinguish the particular senses in which the expression “to see” is used and whose conflation or insufficient differentiation entangles us in the difficulties mentioned above. Let us begin with the metaphorical sense which I will not analyze in detail in this article. We occasionally say that we “see” or “saw” something, by which we really mean that we understand or understood it. When I say that “I see a solution,” I mean that the solution has become evident or clear to me.<sup>6</sup> Metaphors like this one emphasize the absence of inferential reasoning – to see that  $p$  is simply to come to believe that  $p$  without the help of inference. This metaphorical use is an expression of the belief in the direct nature of sensory perception, the belief that, as McDowell (1994a) put it, perception is “openness to the world.”

The first literal sense I would like to distinguish in this article seems to be the exact opposite of the metaphorical sense touched on above. Here I mean cases where the object of perception is not literally perceived but putative, or where its existence is deduced from another (implicit) perceptual act. Let us call this sense indirect.<sup>7</sup> Despite this slightly convoluted description, it is a rather frequent phenomenon likely well known to the reader. Let us illustrate it with an example. Let us assume that someone tells us she saw that there was nobody in the basement. On closer examination, we learn that what that person actually saw was a door locked with a padlock. The sentence “ $O$  sees that  $\psi$ ” should therefore be interpreted as shorthand for the conjunction: “ $O$  sees that  $\varphi$  and  $O$  believes that if  $\varphi$  then  $\psi$ .” As can easily be observed, this leads to two difficulties. First of all, the first operand of the conjunction features the expression “to see” that we are seeking to explain. Secondly, the latter operand settles the issue we would like to explore by ascribing to the subject a belief.<sup>8</sup> For this reason, I will not take this sense into consideration in further analysis but will assume that it is parasitic on direct use. Luckily, the contexts where the predicate “to see” is used indirectly are easy to recognize. One striking feature of the indirect

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<sup>6</sup> Both these adjectives are obviously mere confirmations of this visual metaphor.

<sup>7</sup> This category corresponds to what Dretske (2000) calls “epistemic seeing.”

<sup>8</sup> This sense can be associated with the doxastic sense introduced by Dretske (1996). I do not have enough room in this article to indicate the differences between Dretske’s proposition and mine.

sense is that it forces a propositional context. Let us cite our example again. Could I, in the situation described above, substitute the sentence “I saw that there was nobody in the basement” with the sentence “I saw there being nobody in the basement”? Certainly not, since the latter sentence suggests that I looked into the basement. Let us note that this is not the case when the word “to see” is used directly: we do not feel the same resistance when substituting the sentence “I saw that the padlock was locked” with “I saw a locked padlock” or “I saw the padlock locked.”

Is the impossibility to change the propositional context into the nominal one invariably due to the direct use of the expression “to see”? Unfortunately, I cannot answer this question definitively, although I have not been able to find an example to the contrary. Therefore, I will adopt the hypothesis that in the case of the direct sense of the expression “to see” the difference between the nominal and the propositional formulation is purely stylistic. Accordingly, I will treat every sentence of the form “*O* sees that  $\varphi$ ” as equivalent to the appropriate nominal form “*O* sees *f*.”

Let us now turn to the analysis of the two most significant literal senses of the expression “to see” we referred to as objective and subjective in the context of the introductory dialog. Let us say that the observer *O* utters the sentence:

(S) I see a postman.

At first glance, it may seem that the difference between the objective and the subjective sense of the expression “to see” boils down to the fact that in the case of the objective sense we require that it be true that:

(1) There is a postman in *O*’s field of vision.<sup>9</sup>

As can easily be noticed, (1) is the necessary condition, although not a sufficient one, of the truth of sentence S understood objectively.<sup>10</sup> Let us now consider the following example found in Grice (1961: 142). Let us imagine that, through some surgical or pharmacological intervention, we can induce in an observer the impression that he sees a clock on the shelf. Let us

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<sup>9</sup> Robinson (1994) calls this intuition the phenomenal principle – if it seems to the subject of cognition that a certain object possesses a certain sense property, then there exists something this subject is conscious of and this something possesses this property.

<sup>10</sup> By talking about sentence S understood objectively or subjectively I clearly mean a sentence where the expression “to see” is used in the objective or the subjective sense, respectively.

additionally assume that it so happens, by sheer accident, that there is actually an appropriately looking clock on some shelf in front of the observer. Would we say that this person sees a clock? Probably not, despite the fact that (1) is satisfied. A natural supplement to this condition should thus be a reference to the causal relation. Our stimulated observer does not see the clock because it was not the clock that induced in him the visual reaction. This solution is accepted, after Grice, by Searle, according to whom the following restriction should be added in addition to the presence of the seen object in the given situation: the observed object is not only in the observer's field of vision but it also induces the visual experience.

Unfortunately, I am worried that this restriction does not provide much. The following modification to Grice's thought experiment is sufficient to withstand it: Let us assume that a surgeon induces in my brain a reaction identical with the one I would be having if I opened my eyes – I would see a surgeon manipulating some apparatus. Here, we have a situation where the object (the surgeon) induces in me a visual experience but I would hesitate to conclude that I see the surgeon. In order to realize how inadequate Searle's objection is, however, we do not even need to rely on such atypical scenarios. As I press my closed eye, my finger induces in me a visual experience. However, we do not claim that the effect brought about by the pressing is a "view of the finger," although the visual experience has been caused by it. This kind of skepticism is usually responded to by noting that the difference between a visual experience brought about by a viewed finger and one brought about by a pressing finger lies in the fact that the first impression is somehow similar to the view of the finger (this is what "being an image" is supposed to mean; Crane 1995: 14). However, the details of this postulated relation of resemblance remain shrouded in mist. Luckily, we need not stop at this explanation. I think that the intuition behind distinguishing the pressing of the eye and the reflection of light reaching it is precisely that seeing – even if it were to produce an image most dissimilar from the represented object – should be mediated by this and no other physiological mechanism. The point is not just that the observed object should induce in us the visual experience but that it should induce it in a way appropriate to the given sensory modality. Luckily, we are after all in a very comfortable situation here: we do not need to introduce any technical terminology to render Searle's restriction more precise since the vernacular already contains an appropriate expression indicating the particular narrowly understood causal relation. It is the relation "*x* is looking at *y*." That *O* is looking at a postman means that the postman is reflecting light which then affects *O*'s

eyes in a causally relevant way.

This condition may seem too restrictive to the reader. Moreover, does looking at something truly ensure the obtaining of the right causal relation anyway? In order to find out, let us consider the following thought experiment. Let us imagine that I am looking at a postman through a pair of glasses. Let us also assume that at the last moment the glasses block the light reflected off of the postman that hereby does not reach my eyes, although everything else is the same. Should we still say that I am looking at the postman? I am looking “in the direction of the postman” at best but this is an entirely different relation than “looking at” him. This allows us to extend the condition which must be satisfied if S is interpreted objectively.

(1a) *O* is looking at a postman who is in *O*'s field of vision.

The difference between the objective and the subjective sense would thus be that in the latter case condition (1a) does not have to be satisfied in order that sentence S be true.

That said, someone might raise an absolutely fundamental question here: do we really have to distinguish the objective and the subjective sense of the expression “to see”? Perhaps we should assume that only the first is appropriate and each time condition (1a) is not satisfied the expression “to see” is used deviously: *O* did not see a postman in any sense but merely had the impression of seeing one. Could we not stop at this reductive interpretation?

The problem is that this way we risk identifying a mistake due to flawed perception with one due to erroneous belief. After all, *O* could falsely think that he sees a postman because he possessed erroneous beliefs as to what a postman should look like. Let us illustrate it with an example. Let us assume that I am observing a session of the university senate and am trying to find my dean. Although I barely know her, I have a chance since I know that on a day like this she will be the only one wearing a brown toga. Let us now assume that I see a person in a brown toga and assume that I have seen the dean. The two situations that we would like to distinguish and that are conflated under the reductive interpretation are the following: (A) perhaps the dean is not present in the room and I have fallen prey to a misperception in that a toga looks brown to me even though it is not brown; and (B) my belief that the dean will be wearing a brown toga is false and I have seen someone else since someone wearing a brown toga is actually there. We are under the impression that a misperception is something completely different

than being misled by an error and we would like to be able to somehow express this difference.<sup>11</sup>

Another example of a situation where the reductive interpretation fails is describing illusions we have already unmasked. If I am under the illusion described by Mario Ponzo (1911) and know what it consists in, then I risk a misunderstanding by saying “I nonetheless have the impression that one of the lines is longer.” Namely, this utterance can be interpreted such that it will entail the sentence “I nonetheless believe that one line is longer,” which is not what I wanted to say. In order to avoid the misunderstanding, I should say “One line still looks longer” or “I still see one line as longer.”

Another phenomenon whose description benefits from the opposition between the subjective and the objective sense is our ability to notice or ignore (depending on our needs) such phenomena as a difference in size resulting from perspective or a difference in colour resulting from different lighting (Cohen 2010). Observing two mutually spaced rods we may say that in some sense we see that they are equal and in some sense, that one is longer than the other.

Yet another instance where we clearly use the expression “to see” in the subjective sense is when we describe our hallucinations (or illusions) knowing that we are experiencing them. If I wanted to inform my doctor about some strange side effect of a drug I am taking, I would say that “I see red patches after taking it” rather than that “I have the impression that I see red patches after taking it.” The latter formulation has a meaning different from the subjective use of the expression “to see” since it informs the interlocutor that I am not sure about the content of my hallucination. We use the subjective sense when we merely wish to report what visual impression we experience without settling the issue of whether anything actually corresponds to our perception, that is, when we want to utter S without suggesting that condition (1a) is satisfied.

The main culprit in this confusion is the risky step from the formulation “I have an impression...” to “I have the impression that...” This step is erroneous insofar as the term “impression” used in the first formulation is shorthand for “visual impression” (this is what we are after). It is erroneous because there is no such thing as “the visual impression that...”

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<sup>11</sup> A similar example is described by Anscombe (1981b: 45).



### 3.

The above discussion implies that a relatively safe paraphrase of sentence S in the subjective sense is the sentence:

(S') I have the visual impression of a postman.

However, reference to impressions leads us into a miry terrain as we hereby introduce a non-extensional context (Anscombe 1981a).<sup>12</sup> Let us cite, once more, the example used at the beginning: Is “the impression of a black dog”<sup>13</sup> the same as “the impression of a coaly dog” or are they two different impressions? Does everyone who has the first also have the latter? Let us imagine that Caesar was once intently staring at a piece of red fabric. Am I allowed to say that Caesar then had the impression of the colour of my shirt?

Reference to impressions also leads to many grave difficulties in the description of animal and infant perception. Can I, uttering the sentence “The dog sees ten cats,” assume that there is such a thing as “the impression of ten cats” or do I silently presume that the dog can count to ten? The equivalent of sentence S does not fare much better. Let us assume I say that “The dog sees a postman.” The aforementioned difficulty stemming from imbuing animals with beliefs aside (the point is certainly not that the dog sees something of which it knows that it is a postman), we still face the following dilemmas. First of all, we should consider whether there is anything like “the impression of a postman” in the first place. Perhaps there is some kind of a gestalt quality suitable to serve as such a visual impression. Or perhaps not – perhaps “the impression of a postman” is something highly specific, like a bag, a hat, or the colour of a piece of clothing? Regardless of whether we could reach a consensus on this issue, it is rather beyond doubt that to speculate as to what “the impression of a postman” might be in the case of a creature that cannot be asked about it and one we do not wish to imbue with too much knowledge regarding postal workers seems to be an utterly sterile activity.

A seemingly attractive solution is to refer to some version of Locke’s division into simple and complex ideas. Perhaps we can ascribe “the impression of a postman” to a dog as shorthand for something like “the impression

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<sup>12</sup> Some confusion may arise as Anscombe uses the expression “intentional” in reference to the phenomenon of intensionality (which she justifies on philological grounds).

<sup>13</sup> “The impression of a black dog” is clearly an amphiboly. It can refer to an impression had by some black dog or an impression had by some observer (who might incidentally be a black dog). Throughout this article only the latter sense is implied.

of a so and so coloured shape.” This solution, however, is inadequate for at least two reasons. First of all, difficulties related to reducing predicates such as “to be a postman” to a conjunction of “to be red” and the like carry over to the analogous reduction from “to be the impression of a postman” to “to be the impression of red.” Secondly – and this is particularly clear in the case of animal perception – there is no way to establish the degree of detail required for simple ideas. At some point the whole charm of their simplicity vanishes: Is “the impression of red” simple or do we need an impression of a shade of red, for example “the impression of crimson”? Is “the impression of crimson” simply “the impression of red” for those who are not familiar with the relevant palette of shades (small children could serve as an example here)? Let us note that if we go even further down the ladder of detail, we will reach differences in shade which, although given in perception, are not distinguishable conceptually (we could at best distinguish them artificially using expressions such as “red<sub>29</sub>”).<sup>14</sup> Given that we want to talk about perception in other species as well, we should allow the distinction of differences that are beyond our grasp not only conceptually but also perceptually.

This is why it would be advantageous if we could explicate the notion of a visual impression in a way free from this kind of trouble. I think that this can be managed if we begin with a certain observation commonly shared by philosophers. Even though we can understand sentence S in the subjective sense, we do not have access to someone else’s impressions. In order to know what our hypothetical observer *O* is talking about I must understand his words in roughly the following way: *O* is in a specific state in which *O* is when looking at a postman. Let us develop this intuition. We again assume that *O* utters sentence S but this time that he uses the word “to see” in the subjective sense. We have already noted that this sense means that sentence S does not entail (1a). It does seem, however, that it entails the following two sentences:

- (2) At the time of uttering the sentence S, *O* is in a particular state *P*.
- (3) Every time *O* is looking at a postman, *O* is in the state *P*.

I intentionally do not precisely determine the kind of a state featuring in sentence (2). It may be *O*’s brain state, the state of a larger part of his

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<sup>14</sup>This example has not been chosen at random. The problem of the perceptual grain seemingly exceeding the conceptual grain not only in the case of animals and infants but also in the case of adult and competent users of language has been intensively discussed in the literature (McDowell 1994b; Peacocke 1998; McDowell 1998). This example has been used, among others.

body (for example the brain plus the stimulated receptors) or the state of his mind ( $P$  may for example be a *quale*).<sup>15</sup> Let us also note that (3) is an implication and not an equivalence. We do not exclude the possibility that  $O$  can be in the state  $P$  due to causes other than seeing a postman (including hallucinating).

Can sentences 2 and 3 be viewed as an explication of the notion of “the impression of a postman”? Unfortunately, this characterization is still too modest and thus susceptible to the following counterexample. Let us imagine that  $O$  is always nervous in the company of a postman. Nervousness will satisfy conditions (2) and (3) but we will probably not say that this is what seeing in the subjective sense is about. This is why instead of “the state  $P$ ” we should speak of “the state of visual perception  $P$ .” This qualification should be read in the following way: the states we are in can be divided into various subsets such as emotional, audial or visual perceptual states. Let us note that I do not determine here whether this classification is made based on introspection or knowledge of physiology. There is no need for this since we are able to make this classification (however imperfectly) using both methods. Even if we had difficulty defining such categories, there is no doubt that we employ them very skillfully – we do not mistake visual impressions for audial ones or for an emotion.<sup>16</sup> The corrected conditions will look like this:

- (2a) At the time of uttering sentence  $S$ ,  $O$  is in a particular state of visual perception  $P$ .
- (3a) Every time  $O$  is looking at a postman,  $O$  is in the state of visual perception  $P$ .

Condition (3a) leads to a consequence which is hard to accept. Both conditions are satisfied when the implication (3a) is emptily satisfied. Let us show this based on an example, by assuming that our observer  $O$  is looking at a wall and is in a certain state of visual perception. The unwanted consequence of (2a) and (3a) is that this state is also automatically the state in which the observer always is when looking at dragons (since he has never looked

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<sup>15</sup> Let us note that the condition thus formulated fits conceptions that construe impressions as intentional (for instance, Dretske 1969; Tye 1995) as well as those that treat them as a kind of “mental paint” (see e.g. Block 2003).

<sup>16</sup> A complication, which I have no room to analyze here, is introduced by the phenomenon of synesthesia as well as by properties such as “good” or “formidable” which some would like to classify as specific visual impressions (Tye 2006).

at any and never will). In order to bar this consequence, we must rework the relevant condition once more:

- (3b) There is a time such that  $O$  is looking at a postman at this time and every time  $O$  is looking at a postman,  $O$  is in the state of visual perception  $P$ .<sup>17</sup>

Condition (3b) may seem too restrictive at first glance but it means merely that one cannot have an impression of something one has never seen, and in particular of something that cannot be seen – this is highly likely. If there are no dragons, then no one knows what they look like and thus also which impression might be “the impression of them.” If there is anything problematic, it is the dragon and not condition (3b).

Another striking feature of the notion of “the impression of a postman” thus explicated is that it is purely functional. The possibility is allowed that the state  $P_1$  I am in every time I am looking at a postman is the same as the state  $P_2$  my interlocutor is in every time she is looking at a police officer.<sup>18</sup> Perhaps this consequence should be considered a flaw in the context of a theory of perception. However, I am interested in the use of the expression “to see” and in this case the consequence is advantageous since the skepticism evoked here is part and parcel of this usage. Precisely this is why inverted spectrum thought experiments are so suggestive. They show that we could have very different impressions without noticing the fact since language, including the expression “to see,” would function the same. “The impression of a postman” is what people have when they are looking at postal workers even if the relevant state is not identical across all people. From the perspective of the semantics of the expression “to see,” impressions are very much like the Wittgensteinian beetle in the box.<sup>19</sup>

The above characterization of the internal sense of the expression “to see” allows us to clarify an ambivalence mentioned earlier. I was considering whether we may say that Caesar had the impression of the colour of my shirt.

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<sup>17</sup> For the sake of simplification, I skip another complication here: condition (3b) should be supplemented with the restriction that the circumstances in which  $O$  is looking at a postman are “normal” or “typical.” By “circumstances” I mean both the state of  $O$ ’s surroundings and of  $O$ ’s perceptual apparatus. “Normalcy” should thus be defined in the following way: normal circumstances are circumstances that accompanied the acquisition by  $O$  of the disposition to enter the state  $P$  at the sight of a postman.

<sup>18</sup> For the sake of this argumentation I rather generously assume that internal states of different observers can somehow be compared.

<sup>19</sup> This distinguishes my explication from an analogous proposition by Susan Haack (1993: 80).

As can be seen, we do not have to ponder Caesar's beliefs – whether he had the right impression depends on whether he had ever had the opportunity to look at anything of the colour of my shirt and whether he then acquired the state of visual perception he is always in when looking at things of that colour. We may not know the answer to this question but it ceases to trouble us nonetheless.

To summarize, the expression “to see” is used in sentence S in the subjective sense if it's a matter of the satisfaction of conditions (2a) and (3b), while it is used in the external sense if it's a matter of satisfying condition (1a). This corresponds to the following popular intuition: in one sense of the expression “to see” we are only interested in the object that affected our perceptual apparatus, while in the other sense we are interested in the perceptual state we were in.

#### 4.

The advantage of the fact that we have so far managed not to refer to the observer's beliefs is that we can now add this factor and use the thus construed conceptual apparatus to describe various kinds of seeing, especially those frequently discussed by cognitive scientists and philosophers of mind. In order to do that, we must introduce one more distinction: between “believing in the broad sense” and “believing in the narrow sense.” By “narrowly believing that  $p$ ” I mean the disposition to affirm the sentence  $p$  (or its utterances). By “broadly believing that  $p$ ” I mean the disposition to the kind of behaviour I, as an observer, find the most convenient to describe by reference to the possession of the belief that  $p$ .<sup>20</sup> It is the broad sense that we often employ while describing the behaviour of animals and infants. Colloquially speaking, we then mean that the given animal behaves as if it thought that  $p$ . From now on I will mark this broad sense of “believing” with an asterisk.<sup>21</sup> Let us now introduce the following additional conditions, the satisfaction of which will be taken into account in further analysis:

(4)  $O$  believes that (1a).

(5)  $O$  believes\* that (1a).

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<sup>20</sup> Which I can also do using many other synonymous sentences such as “ $x$  thinks that  $p$ ” or “ $x$  is of the opinion that  $p$ ” etc.

<sup>21</sup> The ascription to animals of beliefs even in this broad sense is obviously problematic (Bermudez 2003, in particular Chapter 5).

(6) *O* believes that (2a).

(7) *O* believes that (3b).

Let us begin with the situation where all the above conditions are satisfied: (1a), (2a), (3b), (4), (5), (6), and (7). This will be our model noncontroversial example of correct visual perception.<sup>22</sup> The observer has a particular impression correlated with postal workers and believes that he has it. In addition, he is actually looking at a postman, who is in his field of vision, and is rightly convinced of this. The result of denying condition (1a) will be that instead of the model correct visual perception we will arrive at a description of a hallucination or an illusion – the observer is in the internal state he is always in when looking at a postman, is convinced of this and behaves as if he was so convinced, but is in fact not looking at a postman.

If we revive condition (1a) but omit conditions (4), (6) and (7), we will obtain an understanding of seeing well suited for describing correct perception in animals and infants. There is thus no need to deny a dog the capacity to see a postman as long as it is actually looking at one, behaves as if it recognizes that it is looking at one and is “equipped” with an internal state associated with postal workers. If a dog is not in the possession of such a state, then we should say that, although in the objective sense it does see a postman, in the subjective sense it sees something else (for example a “man” – this would depend on the state the dog was actually in). The possession by the dog of an appropriate state correlated with postal workers, on the other hand, does not automatically oblige us to accept the risky thesis that the dog can form beliefs regarding postal workers or that it knows it is looking at a postman etc. The required internal state can be correlated with any property or set of properties coextensive with the property of being a postman. We can even unproblematically assume that it is a set for which we do not have a name because we are not able to distinguish it (but the dog is). We would then say that, in the objective sense, the dog sees a postman, although in the subjective sense it sees something we are not able to express. The case of looking at ten cats is similar. If a dog has the disposition to enter a particular internal state every time it is looking at ten cats, then it sees ten cats. Up to what number of cats this kind of state is distinguishable is an empirical issue.

If we negate condition (1a) (and maintain conditions (5), (2a) and (3b)) we will arrive at the sense of the word “to see” appropriate for describing

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<sup>22</sup>By this I understand perception usually referred to in the literature as *veridical perception*.

hallucinations and illusions in animals and infants (Fujita et al. 1991 and Fish 2009 write about hallucinations in animals). Here again, we can go ahead without implying the possession of beliefs.

Another interesting combination is one where only conditions (1a) and (5) are satisfied – this is the phenomenon of blind sight described by Block, among others. The observer is looking at a postman, who is in his field of vision, behaves as if he believed that he is looking at one but, first of all, when asked, he does not confirm that he is looking at a postman (and thus condition (4) is not satisfied), and secondly, does not have any visual impression (and thus conditions (2a) and (3b) do not obtain) or any belief regarding the impressions possessed at this time (hence conditions (6) and (7) are not satisfied).

A subtle distinction that is easily described using the conceptual apparatus developed above is the type of consciousness Kim calls *executive access consciousness* (Kim 1995) where the subject is experiencing something that impacts his behaviour, has an appropriate impression and believes that he is feeling something specific; however, the subject is unable to report this experience (for example because the language at his disposal is too poor). This situation would be the combination of conditions (1a), (2a), (3b), (5), and (6).

Another well-known instance widely discussed by philosophers of mind and cognitive scientists is the situation where conditions (1a), (4), (5), (6) and (7) are satisfied but not conditions (2a) and (3b). It seems that this situation relatively closely reflects the idea of a zombie developed, for example, by David Chalmers. A zombie is an observer who behaves as if he was seeing a postman (and does so in the right circumstances, i.e. when there is a postman in the vicinity) and believes both that he sees a postman and that he has the right visual impression, both of which beliefs are expressed by him; however, in fact the observer does not have any impressions whatsoever.

If conditions (1a), (2a) and (3b) obtain, but not conditions (4), (5), (6) and (7), we have to do with the situation where the subject is looking at a postman, who is present in front of him, is in the right state and has the right disposition to systematically enter it but for some reason does not realize it. This instance would popularly be described in the following way: the person sees a postman but does not realize that it is a postman.

If instead of conditions (4), (5), (6) and (7) alternative conditions (4'), (5'), (6') and (7') obtained, such that instead of “to be a postman” some other predicate was used, for example “to be a police officer,” and instead of the constant  $P$  marking a specific state of visual perception a different constant  $R$

was employed marking some other state of visual perception, then we would have the situation where the observer sees a postman, who is present in front of him, is in the right state and has the right disposition to systematically enter it but for some reason believes that he is in a different state and sees a different object. This would be an instant popularly describable as: I saw a postman but took him for a police officer.

The last possibility I would like to point out, since it entails cognitively interesting consequences, is the situation where conditions (3b), (4), (5), (6) and (7) are met but not conditions (1a) and (2a) and where the alternative condition (2a') obtains according to which the observer is in some alternative state of visual perception *R*. This is the situation where the observer is suffering a hallucination but nonetheless believes that he is in the specific state in which he usually is when he sees a postman – here the observer has the disposition to enter the state *P* when seeing a postman but is now in some other nondescript state *R*. This combination allows us to express the disjunctivist thesis, according to which while hallucinating or experiencing an illusion the subject is, against his own recognition, in a state different from the one he is in when he is actually looking at the object now given in a hallucination or an illusion but he is unable to perceptually distinguish between the two, which finds its reflection in his beliefs (Byrne, Logue 2008).

## 5.

The main goal of this article was to clearly differentiate two senses of the verb “to see” functioning in the vernacular language: the subjective sense and the objective sense. I have tried to arrive at this distinction at minimum cost, without ascribing beliefs to observers (which would make it difficult to speak of the perceptual acts of animals and infants) and without referring to the non-extensional expression “the impression. . .” To satisfy the latter restriction, I have provided an extensional explication of this expression. Owing to this, I have been able to describe visual perception without committing myself to any position regarding the subject’s higher cognitive capacities (such as the possession of beliefs or the capacity to count) and thus to maintain the intuition that perception is primary relative to other forms of cognition. The subsequent introduction of the observer’s beliefs allowed me to express further distinctions, including those employed in specialized literature dedicated to philosophical problems revolving around the phenomenon of sensory perception. I do not exclude the possibility that more distinctions useful to research on perception and the mind could



be drawn in addition to the ones I have proposed here. Cases where the observer's beliefs regard states other than the one he is in seem to be particularly intriguing and worthy of further inquiry.

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