How speckled is the hen?

BENCE NANAY

1. We can see a number of entities without seeing a determinate number of entities. For example, when we see the speckled hen, we do not see it as having a determinate number of speckles, although we do see it as having a lot of speckles. How is this possible?

Michael Tye argues that while we see all of the speckles, we do not see each individual speckle. That is why we do not see the hen as having *N* speckles (for some determinate number *N*). In short, Tye holds the following three claims (Tye 2009):

(T1) We see all the speckles.
(T2) We do not see each individual speckle.
(T3) We do not see the hen as having 27 speckles.

But Tye's explanation is not the only possible one. Here is Fred Dretske's version that suggests the exact opposite:

> Suppose S sees a speckled hen on which there are (on the facing side) 27 speckles. Each speckle is clearly visible. Not troubling to count, S does not realize that (hence, is not aware that) there are 27 speckles. Nonetheless, we assume that S looked long enough, and carefully enough, to *see each speckle*. In such a case, although S is aware of all 27 speckles (things), he is not aware of the number of speckles because being aware of the number of speckles requires being aware that there is that number of speckles (a fact), and S is not aware of this fact. (Dretske 1993: 267, emphasis added.)

In other words, Dretske holds the following (see also, Dretske, forthcoming):

(D1) We see all the speckles.
(D2) We see each individual speckle.
(D3) We do not see the hen as having 27 speckles.

The task then would be to adjudicate between these two ways of thinking about the speckled hen. Tye can explain (T3) in terms of (T2): the reason why we do not see the hen as having 27 speckles is that we do not see each of the speckles (see Tye 2009: ???). But the price he pays is that he needs to deny the intuitively plausible claim that if we see all Xs, we see each X. Thus, he needs a separate story about how both (T1) and (T2) can be true.

Dretske, in contrast, preserves this intuition and therefore can explain (D2) in terms of (D1). But, as a result, he cannot explain (D3) in terms of

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(D2): he needs separate considerations (some version of a distinction between object-seeing and fact-seeing) to do so.[1]

I do not think that the debate between Tye and Dretske can be decided in absolute terms – our intuitions will pull in different directions depending on the details of the examples we consider. If the hen is very speckled or if we see it from very far away, Tye's account will seem more convincing. If it is less speckled, or if it is right in front of us, Dretske's explanation will capture our intuitions more. Further, there are cases of seeing the speckled hen where neither Tye's nor Dretske's account captures what we experience.

2. I want to use a slightly different example to demonstrate this point. The example is from Dretske (forthcoming). Suppose that I am looking at a flock of geese. Dretske argues that I see each individual goose. Tye would presumably say that although I see all of the geese (I see the flock), I do not see each individual goose. My claim is that the example, like the example of the speckled hen, is under-described. There are four possible scenarios that yield different analyses:

(i) If the flock is really far away, I may not even see all the geese – I may not see geese at all, just a dark cloud, which I (non-perceptually) take to be a flock of geese. I see some dark cloud and I infer that it must be a flock of geese. I could be described as seeing the flock, but it would be wrong to say that I see any geese. In short:

(F1) We do not see all the geese.
(F2) We do not see each individual goose.
(F3) We do not see the flock as consisting of 27 geese.

This scenario does not lead to the puzzle the original speckled hen example is supposed to pose: it should not be surprising that we do not see the flock as consisting of a determinate number of geese if we do not see the geese at all.

(ii) If the flock is a bit closer to me, so that I can make out that it consists of little dots, then we get different results. This is Tye's scenario:

(T1) We see all the geese.
(T2) We do not see each individual goose.
(T3) We do not see the flock as consisting of 27 geese.

As I now see the little dots (that are the geese), we could say that I do see all the geese. But, as there are just too many of them and they look so small that I cannot track (or keep my eyes on) any one of them, we could say that I do not see each individual goose. This scenario is somewhat reminiscent of watching

1 It is important that both Tye and Dretske use 'seeing' in an intentional sense: as a synonym of consciously experiencing (see Tye forthcoming: ???, Dretske forthcoming, § I). So the disagreement between them is not a merely verbal one.

'snow' noise on television: I see dots on the screen, but I do not see each of them.

(iii) If the flock of geese is even closer, so that I can attend to any of the individual geese and track it for a long time, then we should agree with Dretske: I see all of them and I see each of them.

(D1) We see all the geese.
(D2) We see each individual goose.
(D3) We do not see the flock as consisting of 27 geese.

I cannot attend to all the geese at the same time, of course. But if I want to, I can attend to any of them. So we can say that I can see each individual goose. It is important that this is true even if we observe Tye's necessary condition for seeing. Tye says that 'you cannot see a thing if you *cannot* attend to it' (Tye 2009: ???). But in this scenario we *can* attend to each goose. Hence, Tye's necessary condition is satisfied.

(iv) Finally, if the flock is really close to me and if there are very few geese in it, then in principle it is possible that I can see all of them, each of them and I can even see the flock as consisting of, say, five geese (admittedly, that's not much of a flock).

(C1) We see all the geese.
(C2) We see each individual goose.
(C3) We see the flock as consisting of five geese.

As in the case of the far away flock, the puzzle that is posed by the speckled hen example is missing. We see all the geese and we see a determinate number of geese.

The puzzle that we can see a number of entities without seeing a determinate number of entities only arises in the two intermediate scenarios. But there is a significant difference between the two intermediate scenarios in terms of what we see. In other words, there is a significant difference between Dretske-style speckled hen scenarios and Tye-style speckled hen scenarios.

The conclusion is that both Tye and Dretske are right. Speckled hen experiences come in many varieties. Tye is right about some of them: we don't see each of the speckles. But Dretske is right about some others. The puzzle of the speckled hen – the puzzle that we can see a number of entities without seeing a determinate number of entities – does not have a universal solution.

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