

What Do We See When We See Total Darkness?

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Abstract: Seeing total darkness is a peculiar perceptual state: in it, the subject is visually aware of something while seeming to fail to be aware of anything. Recent treatments of the topic (Sorensen 2008, Soteriou 2000) leave this particular puzzle unsolved. Here, I attempt a solution. Following Dretske, I begin by suggesting that the perceptual report 'S sees (total) darkness' is ambiguous between two distinct kinds of perceptual states: epistemic and non-epistemic. This will lead to an examination of the metaphysics of what is supposed to be seen. I show, on the one hand, the difficulty of reducing the perception of total darkness to the perception of a particular instantiation of a property, and on the other, that it has important similarities with the perception of (non-particular) 'stuff'. I propose, finally, that the solution to the puzzle might involve postulating a novel ontological status for total darkness: that of a 'concrete universal'. Potential implications of interest for particularism and for naïve realism are suggested.

This paper is concerned with seeing total darkness. Darkness is defined as the absence of light, so total darkness is the total absence of light.¹ A *prima facie* way to conceive visibility might be that you can see something either if it emits or reflects light or if it itself is light. Things that absorb rather than reflect light, then, such as the black ink of letters on a white page, may be taken to be visible in virtue of their contrast with the light reflected around them. But in total darkness, of course, there is no light at all—hence, presumably, no visible things. So the question arises if 'seeing total darkness' really amounts to the failure to see anything illuminated.

Let me suggest the trivial response that a sighted subject is in fact not seeing anything when she is in total darkness *if* her eyes are closed. Once she opens them, and given the appropriate conditions, she will become aware of the state of affairs before her, namely, the absence of light. This will be a perceptual achievement because she will have come to it just by opening her eyes, thus making herself visually receptive to whatever state of affairs she happens to be presented with. She'll become aware of the darkness, that is, just like she would become aware of a dimly lit room if there were a candle there that hadn't made a difference to the blackness of her prior closed-eyed experience. So the state we refer to when we speak of 'seeing total darkness' is one in which there *is* perceptual awareness and so not one equivalent to the state of not seeing anything or not being visually aware of anything.

The sheer fact that we have to make this clarification, though, points to a distinctive feature of the state of seeing total darkness: that it is subjectively indistinguishable from the state of not seeing anything. Both the seer of darkness and the non-seer experience total blackness. And the two states might, accordingly, elicit similar behaviours. Both an open-eyed subject in a totally dark room and a

blindfolded subject in an illuminated room will behave as if they're not visually aware of anything, probably relying on their other sense modalities to gain awareness of the states of affairs around them.² So if a subject in a totally dark room is in a state describable as the state of not seeing anything when her eyes are closed but then enters a *different* state describable as the state of seeing total darkness when she opens them, there must be something she becomes aware of in the latter that nevertheless is compatible with it being, like the closed-eyed or the blindfolded state, a state of seeming visual privation. After all, both the open-eyed subject in a totally dark room and the blindfolded subject in an illuminated room lack the stimulation of rods and cones for which light is responsible in normal vision.

The puzzle about seeing total darkness may be, then, that in this state, one is visually aware of something while seeming to fail to be aware of anything. The aim of this paper is to tackle this puzzle.

The plan is roughly as follows. I begin Section 1 by showing an ambiguity that arises when we report that 'someone sees darkness'. Clarifying it will require drawing the distinction Fred Dretske recommends between non-epistemic and epistemic seeing. The minimal conditions for the non-epistemic perceptual state being just the subject's visual reception of information about the seen thing, the puzzle will have to be explained just in terms of this thing's metaphysics. So figuring out the metaphysics of darkness is the task in Section 2. First, I explore the possibility that if darkness is a property, seeing it amounts to seeing a particular instantiation of it, e.g. seeing a dark room. This reduction, however, will face difficulties. Although perceiving darkness *may* be described in the same way as states of seeing other properties (e.g. seeing redness, which amounts seeing a red thing), I will show that it also has commonalities with states of seeing non-particular 'stuff' (e.g. seeing light). While distinguishing between seeing *partial* and *total* darkness will explain the former's straightforward describability as the perception of a property, the latter will continue to count as the perception of a *concrete thing*. Indeed, it will be argued that it has to. Total darkness diverging from typical predictions for property perception, the next step will be to find a different ontological status for it that may account for its *being* a property and its *being perceived as* a concrete entity. In Section 3, then, I explore the possibility that total darkness may count as a concrete universal. I argue that the only other metaphysical entity at work in the perceptual relation between total darkness and the perceiver, the property instance, cannot play the role of what the subject directly sees because property instances may be conceived as the converse of what I suggest total darkness is: conceived as *abstract* particulars. Finally, the alleged concrete universal status of total darkness will be suggested to shed light on our puzzle—but, unsurprisingly, to invite others.

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Something true of seeing total darkness that is not true of not seeing anything is that the subject's open eyes make her visually receptive to the state of affairs before her. So we might have to investigate the nature of this state of affairs, the total

absence of light, to account for our puzzle. Darkness is an example of what Roy Sorensen (2003) calls privational phenomena. Sorensen's view on privations runs against Jean-Paul Sartre's (1969, p.7) famous claim that absences depend for their existence on human consciousness. Paraphrasing Sorensen: if the existence of most things we see is mind-independent such that they must be present in the world in the first place for us to be able to see them, then their privations or absences must be equally mind-independent and out there in the world for us to be able to see them as well, which even Sartre agrees we do.³

This is the assumption Sorensen sets out with in his defence (2008: Ch.13) of the claim that we have a positive visual experience when we see total darkness. Since this paper, like his discussion, will focus on total darkness, I'll refer to it in most of what follows just as darkness. Sorensen's view may be summed up in this thought experiment:

Suppose kidnappers announce that they will blind their two hostages, Mrs. Atheist and Mr. Agnostic, with a laser blast to their retinas. Each of the hostages sees a flash of red light and then blackness. Mrs. Atheist infers that she is blind. Actually, kidnappers merely turned out the light after the red flash. Mrs. Atheist believes she is not seeing anything, but she is really seeing the darkness of the room. [...] Mr. Agnostic neither believes nor disbelieves that he is blind. (p.246-47)

The question of whether the subjects see darkness, then, is answered affirmatively. Mrs. Atheist 'is really seeing the darkness', and if she does, so does Mr. Agnostic. The difference seems to be just the beliefs they form based on the same perceptual state: Mrs. Atheist's seeing of the darkness grounds her belief that she has gone blind and Mr. Agnostic's seeing of the darkness grounds no beliefs about whether he is seeing anything. Consider, by contrast, another subject in the room: 'Mr. Kidnapper'. He must not only see the darkness but also rightly believe he sees it, rather than believing he has gone blind or withholding belief, because he has the appropriate background knowledge—he himself flicked the switch.

That all three subjects see the darkness and only one knows they see it is a bit of a puzzle. One of the jobs perception is taken to do is to ground beliefs about the objects perceived because perceptual states are individuated functionally: one perceptual state is identical with another if they have the function to single out (and so the capacity to ground beliefs about) the same kind of object.⁴ So, other things being equal, one might expect type-identical perceptual states to ground type-identical beliefs. Here, though, other things *aren't* equal: Mr. Agnostic 'is more circumspect' (p.247) and Mr. Kidnapper has privileged background knowledge.

Sorensen's thought experiment serves to draw a clear distinction between the *belief states* differing among the three subjects (and which are penetrable by factors external to their perceptual capacities, such as a circumspect character or relevant background knowledge) and the one *perceptual state* assumed by Sorensen to be the same among them: the state of seeing darkness (not penetrable by those factors). But the claim that all three subjects are in the same perceptual state is at odds with the idea that perceptual states are individuated by the objects they have the

function to single out and ground beliefs about. So we'll have to distinguish not only between belief states but also between kinds of perceptual states, one kind of which will be common to all three and one which only Mr. Kidnapper will enjoy, hence grounding his correct perceptual belief.

In a report like 'Mr. Kidnapper sees the darkness', then, 'seeing' refers to one of two distinct kinds of state. This ambiguity exemplifies Dretske's (2000) remark that philosophers tend to disagree on what 'seeing' amounts to. Let's start by agreeing with Dretske that seeing is a non-cognitive state. Then, we can take up his use of 'perception' and 'sentience', which are opposed to 'sapience' (p.97), to suggest that 'seeing x' can be construed as (i) visually picking out x (being *sentient* of x) or (ii) visually identifying x (being *perceptive* of x). (i) roughly reflects Dretske's notion *non-epistemic seeing* and (ii) his notion of *epistemic seeing*.⁵

The distinction is first introduced in Dretske's (1969) and then refined it in later works (2000, 2004, 2006), throughout which non-epistemic seeing is also labelled simple seeing or, for short, seeing_n. The basic difference is, consistently, that non-epistemic seeing requires no beliefs about the seen object (2000: 99). Devoid of cognitive content, then, non-epistemic seeing is 'the primitive visual ability [...] common to a great variety of sentient beings' (1969: 4). Though rarely separate in actual experience, seeing_n x is a logically distinct state from *seeing x while believing something about x*. It will mostly help Dretske (and us) to provide a minimal definition of seeing.

The basic claim is that seeing x is getting information about x delivered in visual form (2000: 108). In order for the visual system to do this, x must be *picked out* by it. This is normally achieved by visually differentiating x from its immediate environment, but it doesn't need to be if there's no 'environment'—consider seeing a smooth wall while touching it with the tip of your nose such that the wall occupies your entire visual field (1969: 26–7).

Simple seeing is the perception of such things as 'tables, houses, cats, people, games, sunsets, signals, tracks, shadows, movements, flashes and specks' (2000: 98). This list includes what J.L. Austin called medium-sized dry goods (tables, houses, cats...) as well as instances of purely visual entities (shadows, flashes and specks). By contrast, 'events, states of affairs, conditions and situations' (ibid), as well as relationships (1969: 140), are the kinds of entities that count as objects of perception only when the perceiver holds beliefs about them. This means you can only *see* that such and such is the case (a state of affairs) or that x is R to y (a relationship) if you *believe* that such and such is the case or that x is R to y.

So, unlike simple seeing, epistemic seeing requires not only the visual delivery of information by the subject's receptor systems but also its cognitive uptake. So epistemic seeing presupposes non-epistemic seeing. This is why Dretske calls seeing reports *progress* reports: they tell us how the subject got from the primitive state of seeing_n x to the state of believing that x is F (1969: 105), where F is a predicate introducing a property. So a subject S epistemically sees x if and only if (1969: 79–88):

- (i) x is F
- (ii) S sees_n x

- (iii) The conditions under which S sees_n x are such that x would not look, L, the way it does now to S unless it was F.
- (iv) S, believing the conditions are as described in (iii), takes x to be F.

Two points will shortly prove relevant. First: taking x to be F requires awareness of x, and so, for example, you don't epistemically see something if you see_n it just in peripheral vision.⁶ Second: since the epistemic-seeing report 'S sees that the cat is asleep' has the form 'S sees that x is F', reports on the perception of properties (e.g. the property of being asleep) are also reports on the perception of facts (e.g. the fact that x is asleep). In sum: reports where seeing takes a concrete noun phrase as a direct object ('S sees o') will normally refer to non-epistemic seeing states, and reports where seeing takes a factive nominal ('S sees that o is F') or a question word ('S sees what, where, how F... o is') will normally refer to epistemic seeing states (2000: 98). 'S sees the cat' is non-epistemic whereas 'S sees *that* the cat is asleep' or 'S sees *what* the cat is doing' are epistemic.

Although some philosophers disagree with Dretske's view⁷ and some take it to have consequences he might not accept,⁸ it captures well our need for a distinction between two kinds of perceptual states—one of which was to be impenetrable by our subjects' beliefs.⁹ But before seeing how it applies to them, let me suggest the addition of an implicit commitment we might be able to reveal Dretske as having.

One thing to note about the list he gave us of objects one can see_n ('tables, houses, cats...') is that they're all concrete particulars. While we can imply their concreteness from the claim that non-epistemic-seeing reports take *concrete* noun phrases as direct objects (p.100), there are reasons to also assume their necessary *particularity*. In his (1999) paper, Dretske distinguishes between the awareness one may have of the objects, properties and facts that one perceives, all of which are compatible with each other but not all of which are necessary for each other. Most notably, one can be aware of F-ness without being aware of the object that is F or of the fact that this object is F. Objects, properties and facts being ontologically distinct kinds of entities, states of awareness of each will be distinct kinds of mental states: awareness of objects is labelled o-awareness, of properties p-awareness, and of facts f-awareness (ibid: 104). The mark of o-awareness is that objects are *particulars*: 'token events, states and conditions are spatiotemporal particulars, which are (like apples and stars) distinct from both the facts and properties from which I distinguish objects' (p.121).

So medium-sized dry goods are just as particular objects of perception as events, states and conditions. But events, states and conditions can only be *epistemically* seen, and epistemic-seeing reports, we'd learnt, can take a factive nominal as its complement, so the report 'S sees that the cat is asleep' is epistemic even though it is a situation, and situations count as *objects* rather than *facts* of awareness. This might seem strange, but it only points at the non-correspondence between what you can see_n and the *objects* you can be aware of: something you epistemically see, for example, can count as an *object* of awareness. So your (i) o-awareness of some *particular* situation (the cat being asleep) is a state distinct from your

(ii) p-awareness of the cat's *non-particular* property of being asleep and your (iii) f-awareness of the *non-particular* fact that the situation is currently taking place.

This is all to say that o-awareness can be awareness of something you see_n or epistemically see, but all awareness of something you see_n will be o-awareness. And since non-epistemic seeing is of concrete entities and all o-awareness is awareness of particulars, all non-epistemic seeing is of concrete particulars.

So Dretske seems committed to particularity in non-epistemic seeing. Further, this puts him in the position to share the view we mentioned earlier that, in Susanna Schellenberg's (2013) formulation, perceptual states are individuated by the kind of *particulars they have the function to single out*. But since epistemic seeing requires non-epistemic seeing, commitment to particularity in the latter means that *any* state of seeing in which the subject is aware of the seen thing relates her to some particular. So Dretske is a particularist about perception in general. In fellow particularist Matthew Soteriou's (2000: 173) words, particularism is the view that 'when a subject succeeds in visually perceiving the world, the subject is perceptually aware of *particular* items in the world'—certainly a reasonable feature to take perception to have if it is to ground beliefs about such particulars!

Now, to go back to our subjects, it seems obvious that only Mr. Kidnapper's state will count as epistemic because only he takes the darkness he sees_n to be darkness. Additionally, it seems obvious that if epistemically seeing the darkness requires non-epistemically seeing it and if Mr. Kidnapper was supposed to share one perceptual state with his hostages, the one impenetrable by non-perceptual factors, then they all non-epistemically see the darkness. But recall seeing_n x involves visually distinguishing x. This squares with the commitment that x be a distinguishable particular. Unfortunately for us, it's not clear that darkness can be thus picked out because it is, in fact, not a particular but a universal.

Consider a tomato's redness. Redness is a property. As introduced by a predicate ('the tomato *is red*'), properties say something about some particular—that some x is F. So redness being an F rather than x, it counts as a universal. We can likewise say of something that 'it is dark'. And if darkness is a universal, it's not something one can see_n, in which case it is already disqualified as something one can epistemically see. The result is that not even Mr. Kidnapper sees the darkness! Surely, this cannot be right. It runs against our plausible conclusions, and it contradicts Sorensen. So let's go back to our notion of non-epistemic seeing and revise it.

We can start by noticing that Dretske takes knowing to imply believing: if a seer_n doesn't *believe* anything about what she sees, then she doesn't *know* anything about it. Against this, I suggest a non-epistemic seer *does* know one thing about what she sees: that it is present before her. The information visually delivered in seeing_n x is, precisely, that 'x is present'—this is what the requirement of 'picking out x' must be about.

We should, of course, continue to agree with Dretske that the non-epistemic seer of x needn't believe anything about x's properties, or in the terms I suggest, that in non-epistemic seeing, the knowledge 'there is some x present' is not followed by 'such that x is F'. But there is good reason not to call this knowledge a belief: Non-epistemic seeing must be belief-neutral for it to be as primitive as any other non-cognitive interactions one may have with the perceived object—as primitive

as 'stepping on it' (2000: 101). So maybe we should call it 'non-doxastic knowledge' or just what Dretske calls it: 'proto-knowledge'. Proto-knowledge, Dretske says, is the 'totality of information which S possesses about the identity or character of the b (which he sees to be P) at the time he sees that b is P *minus* only that increment in information whose manner of acquisition is described by saying that S can see that the b is P' (1969: 96, my italics). If proto-knowledge is the information S would be left with if she were subtracted the information that epistemic seeing has delivered to her (that is, after subtracting the information that 'x is F'), then proto-knowledge is the information she must have acquired in non-epistemic seeing for her to be ready to learn that x is F—the information, that is, that 'x is present'.

To summarise this move: we've rejected the implication between knowledge and belief and asserted that in non-epistemic seeing one acquires the (proto)knowledge that x is present. Though this is a step away from Dretske, it might not be a problem for our adherence to his view. I believe Dretske is not interested in defending the claim that the state of seeing_n x is devoid of *knowledge* about x (that seeing_n x might not imply knowing that 'x is present') but just the claim that *beliefs* about x are not essential to seeing x (that seeing x does not imply believing that 'x is F'). And the latter still holds. The question about non-epistemic seeing, he writes, 'is a question about whether [a perceiver's] having a belief *about the perceptual object is essential* to its being a perceptual object—essential, that is, to its *being seen*' (2000: 99).

For our subjects to be non-epistemic seers of the darkness, then, they must (proto)know that darkness is present. But this sounds strange: we noted that darkness is a universal and suggested that x's particularity is probably implied in visually receiving the information that 'x is present'. So darkness seems ill fitting for replacing the variable x. Yet *that* is what it must do for our subjects to see_n it.

So the task in what follows will be to explain for how darkness manages to replace the x variable in the subjects' perceptual states without the comfort of being a particular. This, in turn, will help to explain our puzzle.

2

One obvious strategy might be to explore the possibility that, actually, what the subjects see *is* a particular. The x that they know is present, this proposal would go, is just a particular instantiating darkness; in their case, a dark room. This would allow us to test more straightforwardly whether Mr. Kidnapper's perceptual state meets Dretske's conditions for epistemic seeing.

Mr. Kidnapper sees that the room is dark if and only if

- (i) The room is dark.
- (ii) Mr. Kidnapper sees_n the room.
- (iii) The conditions under which Mr. Kidnapper sees_n the room are such that the room would not look totally black to him (once he's flicked the switch) unless it was dark.
- (iv) Mr. Kidnapper, believing the conditions are as described in (iii), takes the room to be dark.

For the sake of argument, suppose Mr. Kidnapper meets the conditions. His hostages evidently don't take the room to be dark: one takes herself to be blind and the other just suspends judgement. This means condition (iv) does not hold in the case of their perceptual states. But if they're to be seers of the darkness even though they don't see the fact that the room is dark, they must join Mr. Kidnapper at least in meeting the non-epistemic seeing condition, (ii). It makes no sense, however, to say that *any* of them meet it—that any of them see_n the room! Seeing total darkness, we'd said, is a state of seeming visual privation. This means, in our new terms, not being visually delivered information that a room or anything (but darkness) is present before you. So all three subjects fail to meet condition (ii).

Another difficulty with this approach is that it's not always clear what the particular might be. Consider an astronaut who, while floating in outer space, finds herself for a moment at a position in which there are no illuminated objects in her visual field. While perhaps she, unlike Mr. Kidnapper and his hostages, does receive retinal stimulation—if she can partly see the inside of her helmet—she may nevertheless be said to see darkness *through the helmet's opening* because what she sees through it is the absence of light or of anything illuminated before her (Figure 1).

However, it's not clear that her case features a determinate particular object that can be said to instantiate darkness, as at least our dark room could be argued to. So what might the alleged particular be? One way to answer would be to take up Soteriou's suggestion that a perceiver of darkness is 'aware of regions of *empty space*—i.e. regions of space that are empty of visible objects' (2011: 192). And, one might argue, the empty space of which the astronaut is aware counts as a *particular region* because, like non-empty regions, it has a particular spatiotemporal location: 'any region of space in front of you that you are thereby aware of is presented as a *sub-region* of a region of space that has that sub-region as part' (p.193, my italics).

This approach seems plausible. A particular is necessarily distinct from things that are not it, and the sub-region of space the astronaut is aware of is obviously distinct from sub-regions she is *not* aware of the sub-region behind her head, for example, or the sub-region before her occluded by the beginning of the inside of her helmet. Again, though, how do we determine the specific location of the particular—the *x*—the astronaut is supposed to see_n? We might begin by outlining the



Figure 1 How the astronaut sees darkness versus how our subjects see it

region of space that the edge of her helmet's opening allows her to see. But, from that region, does each, say, cubic inch of empty space count as a particular, their sum counting in turn as another—the particular region of space we'd say she's aware of? One feature of particular objects is that we can count them because they normally have well-defined limits. In the case of the astronaut, by contrast, it is unclear whether the x in the 'seeing_n x ' condition would be 'the' region of space she is aware of as empty of visible objects (as *dark*) or, instead, there would be several x s—several units the region can be divided into, each (arbitrarily) defined as a cubic inch.

This is problematic. But the uncertainty is not exclusive to darkness: consider seeing water. In order to 'see water', you must certainly see a particular, e.g. as a glass of it, or at least a part of a particular, e.g. the reach of your visual field in the presence of an ocean or a river. However continuous oceans and rivers may seem, we can count them: there are 5 oceans and 165 major rivers in the world. Never mind counting glasses or ice cubes. But while you may be related to one particular in the state of seeing a glass of water and to another in the state of seeing a river, both states relate you to one and the same sort of *stuff*: water, as distinct from other sorts of stuff like soup or wine.

'Sorts of stuff' are the reference of mass nouns, and they raise ontological issues: water itself doesn't seem to be a particular like glasses of it are. So could it be a universal? One suggestion would be that water is what P.F. Strawson (1959: 167-8) calls a 'sortal universal' or, elsewhere (2006), a 'substance-sortal': the kind of universal that names a *sort* of thing and is related to its particulars by *exemplification*. The universal 'horse', for example, is something you don't see directly but are aware of when seeing some particular horse that exemplifies it. In terms of properties, the universal 'horse' can be identified with the property of horseness, a kind distinct from the horse's whiteness, which rather than naming the sort of thing the horse is, it names a characteristic it has, and so is a 'characterising universal' or a 'property-universal': the kind related to its particulars by *instantiation*. Neither kind of universals, says Strawson, are themselves sense-perceptible. But, he writes, 'perception of their instances is essentially perception of them either *as* instances of precisely the property-universal of which they are instances or *as* instances of some substance-sortal' (ibid: 50). So when you see something and are aware that it's a white horse, you see it as an example of the sortal-universal 'horse' and as an instantiation of the characterising universal 'whiteness'. But you do not see the *universals* horseness or whiteness themselves because what stimulates your perceptual system directly is the *particular* white horse.

Is this also true of the perception of water? And so, can water be just a sortal-universal exemplified by the content of your glass? Strawson thinks of universals as abstract entities. Water is, on the contrary, concrete: it has mind-independent existence. When you see a glass full of water and the glass is transparent, you are directly aware of it in a way that you're not directly aware of horseness and whiteness when you see a white horse. The fact that you can't count water the way you count glasses (because it's the reference of a *mass* noun, which is uncountable) might prevent it from being a particular, but not a concrete entity.

So it seems water is not a universal. But could it then be, against our initial impression, a particular? One suggestion to reduce the existence of stuff to the existence of particulars would be to think, for example, of the water in your glass as a portion or parcel of one single object: the one you'd get if you gathered, in one particular location with well-defined limits, all the water in the world. This view, as rehearsed originally by Quine (1960) and more recently by P.K. Sen (2006: 43-45), suggests that mass nouns refer to the plurality of *particular* parcels of one scattered object, the smallest parcels of water being, I suppose, individual molecules of H₂O. Every particular molecule would be an example of the sortal universal 'water' just like every particular horse is an example of the sortal universal 'horse'. Following this path might lead us to making the same case for the perception of *purely visual* stuff: e.g., the case of seeing light. When you see light, then what you're seeing is not only a particular beam but, more specifically, particular photons. So would seeing darkness, the absence of light, amount to seeing the absence of particular photons?

Sen says, and I agree, that we don't have conclusive reasons to accept this view. Putting darkness aside for a moment, Sen joins us in thinking that we can't treat water and other stuffs as (abstract) universals. Water has concrete existence and sense-perceptible properties. So does, of course, light. So we're left to choose between treating it as an unusual particular, because it is a single object scattered throughout the world as discrete parcels, or 'it is still more of an unusual object which can be neither categorized as a particular nor as a universal' (p.45). One reason to favour this latter option, he points out, is that 'our deployment of the particular-universal distinction [...] presupposes that we are presented with a discrete plurality of objects, and this condition is not fulfilled in the cases of masses of matter' (ibid). In other words: when we see water or light, it is not clear that we really just see a collection of H₂O molecules or of photons in the same way that when we see the reference of the also uncountable noun 'clothing', we really do just see individual clothes. Now, this problem is starker in the case of seeing darkness. Would it be any less arbitrary to define the minimal sub-region of empty space the astronaut is aware of as *the sub-region a photon is absent from* than to define it as an empty cubic inch? When dealing with the reference of mass nouns, says more boldly Tom McKay, 'we seem to be in new territory ontologically, not just grammatically' (2008: 311).

So water and light seem irreducible to either sortal universals or particular, scattered objects. But it might still be reasonable to say that a particular river is an 'instance', as in a particular case, of water. So let's say water manifests in *instances* (such that an instance of water is also water itself) as opposed to in *instantiations*, like properties do (such that a horse is an instantiation of horseness but isn't horseness itself).

The first lesson to draw from the perception of stuffs is that it gives us a reason to challenge the particularity commitment I attributed to Dretske. Presuming it is unproblematic to report that 'S sees water', its non-particular nature provides a counterexample to it. So we can keep Dretske's commitment that objects of non-epistemic seeing be *concrete* but reject the requirement that objects of o-awareness

be *particulars*, such that non-epistemic seeing does not necessarily relate the subject to *concrete particulars*.

The second lesson brings us back to darkness. One first point is that the perception of darkness, like the perception of stuffs, is not straightforwardly reducible to the perception of particulars. A second, related point stems from the fact that when you see a particular instance of stuff you're directly related not only to the particular instance but also to the non-particular stuff itself. I suggest to put this by saying that the perception of the particular instance *constitutes* the perception of the non-particular stuff: you see light *by way of* seeing the beam of light. This means there is a *constitutive relation* between the perception of the particular and the perception of the non-particular, where both count as concrete. This relation might also hold between the perception of particular instances of an entity and the perception of that non-particular entity even if the latter is not concrete: one might be said to 'see colour', for example, *by way of* seeing the particular colours of things, such that one's capacity to see red light and green apples *constitutes* one's capacity to see colour. The constitutive relation, then seems to apply to perceptions both of (concrete) sorts of stuff and their (concrete) instances and of (non-concrete) sorts of properties¹⁰ and their (concrete) instances.

This seems true of the perception of darkness as well: both Sorensen's subjects and the astronaut can be said to see instances of total darkness while seeing total darkness itself. So the constitutive relation holds. All four of them see total darkness *by way of* seeing their respective particular instances of it—their particular 'regions of empty space', in outer space and in the room.

All of this is *not* to say, however, that darkness is a sort of stuff, along with water and light, or even just a sort of visual stuff, along with light. We'd established in Section 1 that darkness is a property. Just to restate why: although both our subjects and the astronaut see darkness, our subjects' situation features, unlike the astronaut's, a *clear* instantiation of darkness by a particular. The room they're in is dark. The *particular* room has the *property* of darkness. So darkness is a characterising universal or a property-universal. This is why darkness proved problematic, in the first place, to replace the *x* in the 'seeing_n *x*' condition.

Let's pause for a moment and reflect on what this carries. Darkness must have the features of any universal. One such feature is that universals are introduced by predicates in statements, i.e. the *F* in '*x* is *F*', and can be nominalised, often as '*F*-ness'. Now, Strawson's point that universals are not objects of direct sense-perception predicts that attempting to use an '*F*-ness' noun phrase as the direct object of the verb 'to see' will prove strained. And, sure enough, it does: statements like '*S* sees roundness' or '*S* sees blueness' are unnatural; they seem to leave it unclear what exactly the object of direct perception is. One would have to construe them, really, as strange ways to report the perception of a *particular* instantiation of roundness or blueness, better reported as '*S* sees a round ball' or '*S* sees the blue sky'. So '*S* sees *F*-ness' reports are nothing but perceptual reports of particulars. This might be true even if, actually, the subject's perceptual experience is *best described* by a report of the first kind. Consider the ganzfeld effect, in which the subject's perceptual experience is of a structureless visual field. As Sorensen (2008:

244) explains, pilots experience this when flying in a homogeneously blue sky, but the effect may be replicated in a laboratory by sticking the two halves of a ping-pong ball in each of a subject's eyes and having her sit under the constant illumination of a light bulb. While the pilot might report that 'she sees the blue sky' because she knows what it is that she sees, the experimental subject will plausibly report, if the light is blue, that 'she sees blueness', because all she sees is a homogeneous blue visual field (Figure 2).

We know, however, that both see some particular instantiation of blueness (a blue sky and a blue light) rather than *blueness* itself. (This is the same point we made earlier in our discussion of seeing a particular white horse.)

So neither sortal nor characterising universals are objects of direct perception. But Strawson also suggests that the perception of a particular *as* an instance of a universal is part of what allows for the awareness of the particular itself: 'we perceive instances of universals as being such and such and could not otherwise be sensibly aware of them at all' (2006: 50). So direct awareness of the blue sky is partly made possible by some non-direct kind of awareness of blueness.¹¹ Following D.M. Armstrong's (1978) view on universals, which for present purposes I'll paraphrase as the claim that their spatiotemporality is derivative on the spatiotemporality of the particulars that instantiate them,¹² perhaps we can think of our awareness of universals as derivative on our awareness of the particulars that instantiate them. I suggest to put this by saying that we're aware of blueness only *by means of* seeing blue things and are aware of horseness only *by means of* seeing horses. In contrast to the *constitutive* or *by-way-of* relation between the perception of stuff and the perception of particular instances of stuff, the *derivative* or *by-means-of* relation between awareness of properties and awareness of their instances does not entail direct awareness of the relata.

So the upshot of this property discussion is two points. If darkness is a property, (i) it will be strained to use its referring noun phrase as the direct object of the verb in a perceptual report and (ii) awareness of it should be derivative on the awareness of a particular that instantiates it.

Let's test these. To begin with (ii), consider seeing a dark photograph. If the photograph is not totally but just partially dark, you are indeed aware of the



Figure 2 How a pilot sees the ganzfeld effect versus how an experimental subject sees it [Colour figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]

partial absence of light either in the photographed scene, if the photo is not underexposed, or the photographic image itself, if it is; the former perhaps caused by weak illumination at the time that the photo was taken and the latter either by insufficient light captured by the camera's receptor systems or insufficient light in the medium of presentation of the image, e.g. an underexposed print. Similarly, if the photo is totally dark (because it looks totally black), then you're aware of the total absence of light either in the original scene or in the image. In any case, and regardless of whether you're aware of the fact that the dark particular was the original scene or is just its image, you are aware of darkness. But you're aware of it *derivatively: by means of* seeing the dark photograph. Seeing it requires, in turn, that you see the dark photo as an example of the sortal universal 'photograph' and as an instantiation of the characterising universal 'darkness'.

So (ii) is confirmed. But there's a caveat: if your awareness of darkness is derivative, you're not seeing *total* darkness. Even if we grant that you're aware of total darkness by means of seeing a totally dark photo (because you're aware of the total absence of light in the original scene, in the printing process or whatever), in order to see the photo in the first place, there has to be currently *some* light. This means that the state of being derivatively aware of total darkness is incompatible with the state of seeing total darkness, which, we'd said, is a state of seeming visual privation: a state subjectively indistinguishable from the state of not seeing anything at all.

If the perception of actual *total* darkness cannot be derivative, then perhaps it can only be *direct*.¹³ This might be reflected in the fact, considering now point (i), that it is *not* strained to use the noun phrase 'darkness' as the direct object of the verb in a perceptual report in the same way it *is* to use 'blueness'. While the reports 'S sees a dark photo' and 'S sees the blue sky' refer comfortably to the *derivative* perception of the properties they introduce, the report 'S sees darkness' refers to the *direct* perception of the property it introduces in a way 'S sees blueness' can't. So 'S sees darkness' might refer exclusively to the perception of *total* darkness. Indeed, this is how the report is used by Sorensen and Soteriou—and, presumably, anybody who finds themselves in a dark room.

The perception of total darkness being direct would explain the earlier implausibility of reducing it to the perception of particulars and also its kinship with water and light, fellow entities of direct perception. So let's add the further point that partial darkness is seen *by means of* seeing an *instantiation* of it (as properties manifest in particular instantiations), whereas total darkness is seen *by way of* seeing an *instance* of it (as non-particular entities of direct perception, including stuffs, manifest in particular instances).

So darkness enters *both* the *derivative* relation other properties enter in perception (when it's partial) and the *constitutive* relation sorts of stuff do (when it's total). Now the puzzle must be explained that, while being a property, in perception, darkness resembles a sort of stuff. But before tackling that, let me finish this section by pointing out one commonality and one difference between the two groups.

The commonality is non-particularity. Properties are universals and sorts of stuff are neither particulars nor universals. If the kinship of total darkness to stuff might

tempt us to doubt darkness' status as a property, we should remember that this resemblance only arises when darkness is total and that darkness can manifest not only in instances, like stuffs, but also in instantiations, like properties, which is why it can enter both the constitutive and the derivative relations. So it's probably safe to assume darkness is not only non-particular but in fact a (characterising) universal.

Now, the difference is concreteness. Properties are not concrete, which accounts for their not being direct objects of seeing, and stuffs are, which accounts for the contrary. If we've agreed with Dretske that objects of non-epistemic seeing must be concrete, then darkness must be, when an object of direct perceptual awareness, a concrete entity. We've suggested you're only directly aware of it when it's total. So total darkness must be a concrete entity.

The conclusion is that total darkness is both a universal *and* a concrete entity. But could we defend the seemingly odd idea that it is a concrete universal?

3

We've suggested that, like seeing water, light and colour, one sees total darkness by way of seeing an instance of it. This instance must be a concrete entity—the x in our 'seeing_n x ' condition. The dissimilarity is that when you see water, light and colour, you see something that *also* counts as something else (a particular body of water, a particular beam of light or a coloured particular) whereas when you see total darkness you *don't* see something that also counts as something else: neither a particular dark room nor the absence of particular photons—or such were the suggestions in Section 2. So it must be total darkness *itself* the concrete entity satisfying the 'seeing_n x ' condition.

Let's explore the possibility, then, that the subjects may be perceptually related to a concrete universal. First, we need to introduce the notion of property instances. Strawson writes:

One point accorded due weight in the Nyāya tradition in Indian philosophy but largely, thought not wholly, neglected in our own [...] is the point that every case in which a universal or quality, say happiness or redness, characterizes a particular individual, say a man or surface, is necessarily also a case in which that property has, as a particular instance, *the* happiness (*the* redness) of that particular man (that particular surface). Particulars of this class I now call "property instances" (2006: 49).

The relation between the sky's blueness, a particular property instance, and the sky is not characterising or instancial but *attributive* (Strawson 1959: 168). While the universal blueness is a *characteristic* of the sky, its particular blueness is an *attribute* of it. Though both the sky and *its* blueness are particulars, Strawson says, 'particulars tied by the attributive tie will be of different types from each other' (ibid). This leaves the way open for us to call the particular blueness of the sky, in opposition to the concrete nature of the particular sky, an abstract particular. To be sure, this is a leap from Strawson, as he does not think property instances are abstract

(2006: 50).¹⁴ But what exactly, then, makes them a 'different type' of particular from the concrete particulars they're attributes of is unclear. One might think Strawson doesn't conceive of property instances as abstract because they have spatiotemporal location. If we've accepted, however, Armstrong's defence of the spatiotemporal location of universals, then, presuming Strawson conceives of universals as abstract, abstractness might not be incompatible with spatiotemporal location. Consider, in addition, Strawson's point that the attributive tie, in which *y* is attributed to *x*, is asymmetric: 'let us express this feature of attributive ties by speaking of the *dependent* member and the *independent* member of any such tie' (1959: 70, my italics), the property instance being the dependent member and the particular object it's an attribute of being the independent member. Let me extract from this the claim that particular property instances are *ontologically* dependent on some concrete entity even if they're *conceptually* separable from it. Now, it is this conceptual separation (of 'secondary qualities' from objects) that John Locke famously called the psychological process of 'abstraction', and it is in this sense that Keith Campbell (1990: 2–3) suggests we should understand an entity to be abstract: i.e., if its existence depends on some other entity of which it might be conceptually independent.

I want to propose these as reasons not to reject the idea that property instances are abstract particulars. In any case, they do seem to depend for their existence on the concrete entity of which they're an attribute (a famous though fictional exception being the Cheshire cat's smile). Universal properties, in turn, must be instantiated to exist.¹⁵

Wherever there is darkness, then, there is *the* universal property darkness and its instantiation: *a* particular property instance. What Mr. Agnostic and hostages see is the same universal the astronaut sees, but a distinct particular instance of it—something we'd shown they have common with a seer of a river and a seer of a glass of water: distinct 'stuff instances'. Those two particular property instances, however, depend on some concrete entity to exist in a way stuff instances don't because they're themselves concrete. We'd established that in seeing total darkness, there are no other concrete entities but the darkness itself. So those particular property instances depend on the darkness to exist. This concrete darkness, darkness being a property, is in turn instantiated by those particular property instances in the room and in outer space. What all four perceivers are directly related to, however, is the (concrete) universal itself, total darkness, which the (abstract) particular property instances exemplify.

To summarise, let's first recall the ties Strawson suggests there are among particulars and universals. He speaks of 'an "instantial" tie between a sortal [...] universal and its particular instances; a "characterising tie" between a property-universal and the particulars which exemplify it; and an "attributive tie" between a particular property-instance and the particular it belongs to' (2006: 49).

In the case of a blue light, for example, there is:

- (i) An instantial tie between *the* sortal-universal light and *that* particular light,
- (ii) A characterising tie between *the* property-universal blueness and *that* particular light, which exemplifies it, and

- (iii) An attributive tie between *that* particular blueness and *that* particular light it belongs to or is an attribute of.

When a ganzfeld-effect experimental subject sees the blue light, further, there is a constitutive and a derivative relation of awareness:

- (iv) She's aware of light by way of seeing *that* light from *that* light bulb, which is an instance of it (the constitutive relation), and
 (v) She's aware of *the* property-universal blueness by means of seeing *that* particular light (the derivative relation).

Following this model, in the case of an instance of darkness, there is

- (i') An instantial tie between *the* sortal-universal darkness and *that* particular darkness,
 (ii') A characterising tie between *the* property-universal darkness and *that* particular darkness, which exemplifies it, and
 (iii') An attributive tie between *that* particular darkness and *the* concrete universal darkness it belongs to or is an attribute of.

Note that (iii') puts under slight strain Strawson's point that the attributive tie holds between two particulars. Indeed, it is a modification of it to accommodate a non-particular but still concrete entity being the independent member (the *x*) of the tie. (translated into an '*x* is *F*' predication, this attribution will turn out to be 'darkness is darkness', of which we'll make sense when revisiting Dretske's conditions below.) Qualifying the independent member of the attributive tie as concrete rather than particular, however, leaves untouched Strawson's examples of dependent members (Socrates' particular death [p.168], smile and oration [p.170]) that are attributes of the *concrete* entity Socrates is.

So when our subjects see the darkness, further:

- (iv) They're aware of darkness by way of seeing *that* particular darkness in *that* region of space, which is an instance of it (the constitutive relation).

The constitutive relation between the perception of an instance of *x* and the perception of *x* itself is a relation between concrete entities just if *x* is a sort of stuff. So in (iv), both the expression 'light' and the expression '*that* light from *that* light bulb' refer to concrete entities, whereas in (iv'), only the expression 'darkness' does, because the expression '*that* darkness in *that* region of space' refers to a property instance: an *abstract* particular. The only particular at play being abstract, there is no derivative awareness of the property of darkness via direct awareness of some concrete particular instantiation of it, as there would be in seeing partial darkness, so no (v') equivalent here to the (v) of the light case.

That darkness only counts as concrete if it's *total* because only then is the perceiver directly aware of it might tempt us to think darkness stops counting as a

property in that case. But perhaps we can bypass this non-property possibility by appealing to Dretske's (1999, p.106, 121–122) point, introduced earlier, that it is intelligible to be aware of a property without being aware of the object that instantiates it, which in my terms means that it is conceivable to be aware of a property directly rather than derivatively.

So, to sum up the argument:

1. In a report of the form 'S sees_n x', x must be a concrete entity.
2. In the report 'S sees_n darkness', the term 'darkness' introduces only (i) a property-universal and (ii) its instance.
3. Either (i) or (ii) must be concrete.
4. Property instances are abstract particulars. Therefore,
5. The property-universal must be concrete.

Now, here I've just defended here the plausibility, not the necessary truth, of (4). So one way to resist the conclusion might be to side with Strawson and argue for the concreteness of property instances or, alternatively, to go back and pursue the possibility that total darkness might stop counting as a property. In such a line of thought, one might argue: a particular instance of darkness would count as an instance of visual stuff, in which case it would be concrete, and darkness itself would count as a sortal-universal along with 'light', rather than as a property-universal along with blueness.

Though this might seem plausible, I'd like to offer two final points in favour of the concrete-universal account and against the darkness-as-stuff account.

First, a negative point. I see no room to think of darkness as anything but a property. Darkness is a privation or an absence, and absence is essentially something you predicate of a substance: 'light is absent'. Sorensen's point that absences must be mind-independent and out there in the world for us to see them means they're ontologically as primitive as the presence of substances, not as primitive as substances themselves. So darkness cannot be thought of as a sort of stuff or substance but only as a property *predicated of* them—the contrary of the property of being present. Additionally, it is unclear, first, how the identity of a substance could be a matter of degree (x being 'partially light or water') in the way darkness can be partial or total, and second, unclear how this gradual identity could be subjective in the way light can appear as totally absent to a human but not to a different animal with receptor systems that are sensitive to a different portion of the electromagnetic spectrum. Now, while the latter point might mean darkness is hardly ever *absolutely* total but only *relatively* (depending on the subject's sensitivity) that doesn't make Sartre right. Isn't it conceivable that there would be *absolutely total* darkness in some room that were devoid of any photons and of any perceivers?

The second point is just a subtlety. Darkness can be realised in multiple locations because it can have multiple instances, partial or total. So it is a universal. The subtlety is to remind ourselves that the particular introduced by the 'S sees darkness' report, the property instance, is just *the way* the subject can be directly aware of the universal. This might just be a feature of what I suggested to call constitutive

relations: that the perception of light is possible *by way of* the perception of an instance of light doesn't mean the perceiver is directly aware of the particular relatum *rather than* of the non-particular one.

Now, the kinship with stuff total darkness keeps displaying might be just explained empirically: according to Sorensen (2003: 95), 'the visual system does not treat darkness as a privation of light' even though *that's what it is*. While the information about *what darkness is* might be of the form 'there is no x present' because it is an absence, the information one gets in its perception must nevertheless be of the form 'x is present' in order for it to be a positive perceptual experience. So it seems that while the total absence of light is ontologically as primitive as the presence of light, it is *perceptually* as primitive as light itself. But, of course, how your visual system treats darkness doesn't impact what it *is*. And that in the state of seeing total darkness what you're aware of *is* a universal, even though it's a concrete entity of perception, is the main thesis of this paper.

This discrepancy between what total darkness *is* and how it *is perceived* suggests two important points. First, it seems to explain why perceiving total darkness resembles an illusion: our original puzzle was that a seer of darkness is aware of something while seeming to fail to be aware of anything. 'The culprit [again] is our pre-Newtonian visual system' (ibid). The solution to the puzzle might be, then, that in total darkness you seem not to be visually aware of anything because there is, in fact, no awareness of objects—no o-awareness, *just* p-awareness. Dretske's restriction of o-awareness to particulars and of non-epistemic seeing to concrete entities does not strictly speaking prevent non-epistemic p-awareness being of concrete entities, though perhaps Dretske might find that unlikely and here we're pushing him to his limits.

A second, tangential point is that this discrepancy might be, while not a challenge, an interesting thing for naïve realists to think about. As Crane and French (2016) summarise it, the naïve realist theory of perception holds that a veridical visual experience, in which one sees some subject-matter 'for what it is', consists in one's being in a presentational (rather than representational) relation to the subject-matter. Further, the phenomenal character of the experience is explained by this presentational relation; it is explained, in other words, 'by the real *presence* of ordinary aspects of mind-independent reality in experience' (ibid, my italics).¹⁶ Consider, additionally, M.G.F. Martin's (2002: 421) suggestion that non-naïve-realist views (sense-datum and intentionalist theories, in his discussion) are 'error theories', as they charge introspection with *erroneously* taking perceptual experience to be directly of mind-independent reality. By contrast, Martin writes, 'the disjunctivist [naïve realist] can claim that veridical perceptual experiences are exactly as they seem to us to be: states in which parts of how the world is are manifest to us'. The only error theory naïve realism can endorse, then, concerns illusions and hallucinations. But what the present discussion and the input from Sorensen suggest is that seeing total darkness effectively *consists* in mistaking¹⁷ what one sees, an absence, for something it's not: a present thing. This makes it a veridical visual experience in which one nevertheless *does not* see the subject-matter for what it is. In order not to end up categorising it as an illusion, one is well advised by the

naïve realist to explain it primarily by appeal to the nature of the subject-matter itself—hence the need for a claim about its metaphysics. It is not clear, however, that accepting total darkness as a concrete entity would satisfy the naïve realist, as it is still a privation, and it is this latter metaphysical feature of it that is not manifest to us when non-epistemically seeing it.¹⁸

A much more nuanced characterisation of naïve realism is required to tell whether the perception of total darkness would really be an issue for it; however, it would be interesting to see how the case might be treated without appeal to representation.¹⁹ But that is a separate discussion. So, to go back to ours, let us finally show how our subjects are all non-epistemic seers of darkness while Mr. Kidnapper (and now perhaps our guest star, the astronaut) are epistemic seers of it. All we have to do is prove Mr. Kidnapper meets Dretske's conditions; the rest get a free ride on account of condition (ii).

Mr. Kidnapper non-epistemically sees darkness if and only if

- (i) x is F: darkness is darkness. (The one entity introduced by the perceptual report is both a concrete entity, thus the value of the x variable, and a property, thus the value of the F variable.)
- (ii) S sees_n x : Mr. Kidnapper sees_n darkness.
- (iii) The conditions under which S sees_n x are such that x would not look, L, the way it does now to S unless it was F: The conditions under which Mr. Kidnapper sees_n darkness are such that darkness would not look the way it does now to him (totally black) unless it was darkness.
- (iv) S, believing the conditions are as described in (iii), takes x to be F: Mr. Kidnapper, believing the conditions are as described in (iii), takes darkness to be darkness.

Mrs. Atheist and Mr. Agnostic's perceptual states meet condition (ii) and fail to meet condition (iv), because Mrs. Atheist takes darkness to be evidence that she's gone blind (a belief about herself rather than a belief about what she perceives), and Mr. Agnostic doesn't take it to be anything. The non-epistemic perceptual state they're all in is individuated, then, not by the kind of particular it has the function to single out, as Schellenberg might otherwise suppose, but by the *concrete* entity it has the function to single out. This might be, while not a challenge, an interesting thing for perceptual particularists to think about.

The fact remains that our conclusion, total darkness counting as a concrete universal, nearly amounts in the earlier argument to *it's got to*. But perhaps I may offer one last support for it. Though I don't know whether the Nyāya tradition explicitly endorses concrete universals, it might accommodate them. In their view, says G. Dreyfus, universals 'are timeless and ubiquitous entities but they manifest only in their instances', whereas 'concrete things can be described meaningfully as having spatio-temporal location' (1997: 138). Total darkness is timeless and ubiquitous because it's multiply realisable in space and time. At the same time, though, it has spatiotemporal location because it's wholly present (in Armstrong's terms) or directly rather than derivatively present (in mine) when

the subjects see it by way of seeing an instance of it. More work would be required to see whether this is something that Strawson, who seems to sympathise with Nyāya philosophy, and Armstrong, who defends the spatiotemporality of universals, would accept. But until we find a better account of the peculiar perceptual state in question, why shouldn't we?²⁰

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ENDNOTES

¹ 'Total', while meaning roughly 'in all parts', does not mean here 'in all parts of the universe' but is restricted to the particular region of the universe where the perceiver is.

² The similarity in behaviour, however, stops there, as the means to 'gain awareness' might be different in both cases. The blindfolded subject might try to regain sight by detecting gaps in the blindfold, for example, whereas the subject in a dark room might try to regain sight by looking for the light switch, waiting for his eyes to readjust, or altogether give up sight and rely on her other senses. The limited way in which similarity in behaviour holds, hence, might follow from the limited way in which we can say both states are subjectively indistinguishable, namely, in terms *just* of the *visual* character of the experience and of the first few seconds of it (before the eyes of the subject in the dark room readjust). However, this limited indistinguishability, however, i.e. seeing pitch black, suffices for our purposes.

³ Sartre agrees that absences, though in his view mind-dependent, are perceived as mind-independent or 'discovered' by us in perception (p.10).

⁴ Schellenberg's (2013:13) way to put this is that perceptual capacities are individuated by the kind of particulars they have the function to single out, but here I want to avoid calling the objects *particulars* because particularity is part of what I will suggest is at issue.

⁵ One might also think of seeing in terms of sense experience rather than sense perception, such that *seeing x* is construed as (iii) having the visual experience of x. Though related, *experience* is a distinct notion from sense *perception*, so we're not going to consider (iii) here.

⁶ As the case of peripheral vision shows, visually receiving information about an object doesn't imply becoming aware of it.

⁷ Davidson (1986), e.g., rejects epistemic perception.

⁸ McDowell (1994), e.g., claims the defence of epistemic perception entails that all perceptual experience is a propositional attitude.

⁹ Indeed, if my exposition of the case is correct—if the case does track distinct kinds of perceptual states—it might support Dretske in taking the distinction to be necessary.

¹⁰ Perhaps I may characterise 'colour' here merely as a *sort* of properties including the property of redness, blueness and so on, just like 'shape' would be another *sort* of properties including squareness, roundness and so on.

¹¹ We had discussed briefly Dretske's (1999) distinction between o-awareness and p-awareness. Dretske claims we can be o-aware of a clock's minute hand, for example, without being p-aware of its property of being in movement. In this case, of course, awareness of the object is not made possible by awareness of this property of it. But it is left open whether p-awareness of the hand's colour or its property of handness *do* help, perhaps jointly, to

our being o-aware of it. So accepting Dretske's account of kinds of awareness might not prevent us from accepting what I take to be a consequence of Strawson's claim: that awareness of particulars is made possible partly by awareness of their properties.

¹² In his (1988), Armstrong wants to show the compatibility of two views he embraces: naturalism, which assumes that only spatiotemporal entities exist, and realism about universals, which assumes universals exist. Monadic universals, such as properties, are located wherever the things that instantiate them are located, and polyadic universals, such as spatiotemporal relations (in terms of which causal relations may be analysed), are not located spatiotemporally but help to constitute space-time, and if 'the space-time continuum essentially a world of causally related particulars' (p.112) then the spatiotemporality of both polyadic and monadic universals depends on the spatiotemporality of particulars, such that uninstantiated universals do not have spatiotemporality and so don't exist. It is this asymmetric dependence that I suggest to call, following Magalhaes' (2006) discussion of Armstrong, *derivative*.

¹³ A clarification is in order: by 'seeing total darkness' I mean that the absence of light one is aware of is total, not that one is necessarily aware that light is absent in the *totality* of one's surroundings. In a totally dark room, for example, one might become disoriented so as to have sampled each part of it (in search for a tiny source of light, say) without realising one's search is complete. Or perhaps the experience is so arresting that one just doesn't move. In these cases, one might not be aware of the totality of the absence of light in one's surroundings but *is* aware of the total absence of light in one's visual field. Being aware of the former, though, might be correlated to the epistemic reading of latter. While the hostages in our experiment might not be aware that light is absent from the entire room though they are non-epistemically aware of the total absence of light in their visual field, Mr. Kidnapper certainly is aware of both things.

¹⁴ In addition to rejecting the attribution of abstractness to property instances, Strawson rejects the term 'trope' for them—and I follow. This is mainly because of the associations the term carries from literary theory, which is where metaphysics imported it from. One such association is, of course, repeatability, the *opposite* of particularity, which is what the term is meant to convey in metaphysics.

¹⁵ This point is Armstrong's and was made mentioned in note 12.

¹⁶ While often the relation is said to be between the subject of experience and an *object*, in his own summary of the view, Bonjour (2016) speaks of 'present physical objects and situations' (my italics). Though the term 'situation' is less problematic than 'object', I'll keep to Crane and French's term 'subject-matter', which is neutral enough to treat darkness as an entity one can directly see along with medium-sized dry objects of perception.

¹⁷ Just to be clear: the 'mistake', as we've seen, does not happen at the cognitive level but, fundamentally, at the perceptual level, because non-epistemic seers make it as well. It is the *visual system* that does not treat darkness as the privation it is. I might put this in Dretskeian terms by saying it is a sort of 'necessary misrepresentation', but I don't aim to defend a representationalist rather than a naïve realist theory here. The aim is just to point out the issue.

¹⁸ I take the perceived thing's being manifest to us in visual experience to require that information about what the thing is be received visually. As argued before, this is what doesn't happen in the perception of total darkness.

¹⁹ Another discrepancy between what a thing *is* and how it *is perceived* that is so treated, the case of illusion, is explained by naïve realists by appeal to shared appearances. Brewer (2011), Kalderon (2011) and Martin (2010) suggest, roughly, that some x that is G can be perceived as F if it objectively does have an F-appearance, which is to say that it has both

G-ness and F-likeness as properties—the latter being a property it shares with genuine Fs. While this seems convincing, it's not clear that it will explain our case: not one of misperceiving the state of affairs 'x is G' as 'x is F' but of misperceiving the state of affairs 'there is no x present' as 'there is some x present'. Total darkness does 'look black' to the perceiver, but can something that's not there (because it's not a substance) have an *objective* appearance or a look?

²⁰ Thanks are due to Mike Martin, who, as the supervisor of the thesis work this paper came from, provided insightful comments and key ideas. Thanks are also due to an anonymous referee of this journal, whose feedback significantly contributed to the final form of the paper.

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