

As far as I can see, I see.

## On Seeing and the Limits of Certainty

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Our senses enable us to perceive our surroundings, orient ourselves within them and respond to them. Their functions, essential to survival, have developed over the course of evolution.

The brain interprets sensory impressions in order to recognise dangers, assess situations and guide our actions. In doing so, it draws upon experience, memory and expectation. It recognises patterns, establishes connections and enables us to act even when information is incomplete.

Yet therein lies a particular distinction: what we consider likely on the basis of what we see is not necessarily the case.

Perception enables us to orient ourselves. It does not guarantee certainty.

We usually recognise what appears familiar to us immediately. We do not need to question what we see each time we encounter it. Familiar impressions often acquire meaning without our being aware of the process of interpretation.

Yet our perceptions and assumptions are not shaped by personal experience alone. They are also influenced by upbringing, cultural surroundings and social conditioning.

What we take for granted is therefore not necessarily universal. The same situation can be perceived and interpreted in different ways. The more familiar an interpretation becomes, the less reason we may see to question it.

But familiarity does not mean that we have understood.

Do we recognise what we see, or do we see what we already believe we know?

How aware are we of the influence of our experiences and expectations? And how willing are we to reconsider a familiar assumption when new perceptions contradict it?

These questions concern not only our orientation in space, but also our encounters with other living beings.

The outward appearance of another being can evoke assumptions and expectations that extend far beyond what is immediately perceptible. We connect what we see with what we believe we know.

Yet much of what constitutes a living being remains hidden.

There is thus a distinction between perception and judgement of which we are not always conscious.

Where does what we perceive end, and where does what we attribute to it begin?

But what happens when familiar points of reference are absent? When what we perceive cannot be clearly identified and our previous experiences offer no immediate explanation?

The desire to give meaning to what we perceive does not necessarily find an answer.

Perception remains, while identification is left unresolved.

Perhaps our attention changes at this moment. When we cannot immediately recognise something, we begin to perceive more attentively. What initially seemed self-evident becomes uncertain. What we believed we knew may resist any clear interpretation.

Do we become more aware of our own perception when clear information is absent?

Or does this reveal how accustomed we are to making sense of what we perceive through recognition?

Perhaps this offers a way of reconsidering our relationship with seeing.

Not by attempting to exclude our experiences and expectations. They are part of our perception and enable us to find our way in the world in the first place.

But we may be able to become more conscious of the distinction between what we perceive and what we infer from it.

Perhaps it is not a question of seeing more, but of being less quick to believe that we already know what we see.