

## Predication in Perception

In *Origins of Objectivity* Tyler Burge develops a theory of perception advocating the philosophical benefits of perceptual psychology. The central task of this seminal monograph is to investigate the constitutive conditions for objective representation: what does it take for an individual to represent the world as it is? According to Burge most philosophers addressing this question show a tendency to ‘over-intellectualize’ perception: they claim that for an individual to represent the world *objectively*, perception is not sufficient—the individual has to represent the conditions for representation, too. This additional requirement is the core of Burge’s attack against hyper-intellectualization. He argues that objective empirical representation can stand on its own and does not require beliefs, concepts, language, or an appreciation of the distinction between appearance and reality.

The role the intellect is supposed to play in perception is a recurring and fiercely debated topic. The issue of distinguishing the sensory part of perception from its cognitive part, and to find where perception ends and thinking begins is discussed by psychologists, neuroscientists, as well as philosophers. In the philosophy of perception the debate between intellectualists and anti-intellectualists comes to a head; many intellectualists propound that perception is essentially *propositional*, many anti-intellectualists claim that perception is fundamentally *objectual*. Burge seems to take a middle way; he explicitly denies that perception is propositional, but he vindicates the idea that perception is *attributional* or *predicational*. In my talk I shall examine Burge’s arguments for the predicational structure of perception. I am prepared to argue, that if perception is structured at all, the structure derives from propositional structures. Although I have to restrict myself to considering the paradigmatic case of visual perception, I conjecture that at least some of the results will be applicable to other sense modalities, too.

Reports of visual perception can have different grammatical structures: ‘*S* sees *a*’, ‘*S* sees that *p*’, ‘*S* sees *a* as *F*’, ‘*S* sees *a* to be *F*’ etc. Proponents of objectual perception argue that objectual seeing is fundamental and has a certain priority, because objects occur in all kinds of perceptual reports; e.g. one can see a cat without seeing that

the cat is on the mat, but one cannot see that the cat is on the mat without seeing a cat.<sup>1</sup> Proponents of propositional perception on the other hand argue that visual perception has conditions of satisfaction. Since conditions of satisfaction always spell out that such-and-such is the case, the content of visual experience has to be propositional. Consequently, when I see a yellow station wagon, I see that a yellow station wagon is in front of me (Searle 1983).

Burge tries to combine both, that visual perception is to a large extent the seeing of objects, and that perception has conditions of satisfaction; *viz.* ‘veridicality conditions’. To this end he develops a complex representational framework, according to which a perceiver *S* sees an object *a* to be *F* only if *S* represents as of *a* being *F*. The ‘as of’-locution is supposed to allow for all kinds of nominal complements; e.g. *S* sees a body if *S* represents as of a body.

Representational content consists of singular and general elements. The singular element is said to be referential, general elements either help to single out the object of perception (as ‘*F*’ in ‘that *F*’), or they are predicated of the object referred to (as ‘*G*’ in ‘that *F* is *G*’). Hence, Burge differentiates between two kinds of predication: ‘perceptual attribution’ and ‘pure predication’. Pure predication is involved in propositional thought but not in perceptual representation. Perceptual attribution is the kind of predication that happens in perception, since perception for Burge primarily is perceptual reference to objects.

I shall argue that perceptual attribution as it occurs in ‘that *F*’ is not purely referential, but derives from *F*-occurrences in propositions. In order to perceive that *F*, one has to perceive that very object as being *F*; i.e. the perceiver has to be able to understand the proposition that the object in front of her has the property of being *F*, even if *F* merely serves to single out an object. This will become obvious, when we try to spell out the veridicality conditions for the representational content as of *F*. To perceive an object *a* as of having the property *F*, one has to grasp the truth-conditions for ‘*a* is *F*’. The predicational structure of perception hinges on propositional structures. To sum up, the basic line of my argument is as follows: if it can be shown that perceptual attribution requires propositional capacities, one of Burge’s arguments against anti-intellectualism seems to break down.

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<sup>1</sup> The *locus classicus* for this kind of non-intellectual, objectual perception is Dretske’s notion of ‘non-epistemic’ seeing (Dretske 1969); i.e. a kind of visual perception that involves zero belief content and rests on discriminatory capacities alone.

## References

- Burge, T. (2010), *Origins of Objectivity*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
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- Dretske, F. I. (1969), *Seeing and Knowing*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
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