

Handout 13 — Perceptual Entitlement

PHIL 971 – Kantian Conceptualism

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1 Burge on Entitlement

- Warrant is an 'epistemic good' (505), or a "right to rely on cognition as cognition" (Burge (2013), 1) with two 'subspecies' — viz., entitlement and justification¹

Entitlement: An epistemically 'externalist' form of warrant which is not conceptually accessible on reflection by the warranted individual—the subject need not even have the conceptual repertoire necessary to think the propositional content that formulates the warrant (Burge (2003), 504)

Justification: An epistemically 'internalist' form of warrant by reasons, which is (i) conceptual; (ii) propositional; (iii) conceptually accessible on reflection to the warranted individual (Burge (2003), 505)

1.1 The Sources of Perceptual Entitlement²

1. Anti-individualism

- the identity conditions of a perceptual state are "constitutively and explanatorily associated" with conditions under which those representations are correct³

2. Reliability in the perceptual system's normal environment

- No *accidental reliability*: only the reliability of perceptual representations grounded in the individuation/nature of the representational state (i.e. in its content) are relevant for entitlement
- Are entitlement and justification mutually exclusive and exhaustive?
 - exclusive: no – one can be both entitled and justified in one's belief
 - exhaustive: Burge seems to think so, but it is not obvious that there aren't intermediate positions (cf. Silins (2012), 248)
- Burge's primary innovation here seems to be in connecting the requisite reliability of the perceptual state to entitlement via the constitutive conditions for the state type (i.e. for it to have the content that it does)

¹ I will explicate an epistemically externalist sub-species of epistemic warrant, which I call "entitlement". Entitlement is *epistemically externalist* inasmuch as it is warrant that need not be fully conceptually accessible, even on reflection, to the warranted individual. The individual need not have the concepts necessary to think the propositional content that formulates the warrant.' Entitlements that I shall discuss are epistemically externalist in the further sense that the warranting features include relations between the individual and an environment. The other primary sub-species of epistemic warrant is *justification*. Justification is warrant by reason that is conceptually accessible on reflection to the warranted individual. (Burge (2003), 504-5).

² There are two elements to the distinctive contribution of perceptual states to epistemic entitlements. The fundamental one derives from the anti-individualist account of the individuation and nature of perceptual states... The other element in the contribution of perceptual states to epistemic entitlements is a condition on the successful representational relations that play a role in the individuation conditions. To contribute to epistemic entitlement a perceptual state (type) must be *reliably veridical in the perceptual system's normal environment*. The normal environment is the one by reference to which the perceptual content of the perceptual state is explained and established. (Burge (2003), 531-2)

³ Veridicality enters into the very nature of perceptual states and abilities. So it is built into the *nature* of the competence associated with the formation of a reliable perceptual state that the state make a non-accidental, explanatory, positive contribution to true belief and knowledge in the animal's normal environment—in animals that are capable of true belief and knowledge. Being in a reliable perceptual state in itself makes a positive contribution to a believer's having a *prima facie* entitlement to form an appropriately conceptualized perceptual belief from it. (Burge (2003), 532)

1.2 Perception & Content

- All representation, qua representation, has 'veridicality' conditions⁴
 - Truth/falsity (propositional/conceptual)
 - Accuracy/inaccuracy (non-propositional/non-conceptual)
- Epistemic entitlements may attach to both perceptual and cognitive (e.g. belief) representations, and to transitions between them
- Justification attach only to cognitive states and transitions between them because justification concerns reasons, for which the epistemic subject must possess the conceptual capacities necessary to grasp the reason as a reason—i.e. that it is "present and accessible" within their psychology, or alternatively, "operative and relied upon" (Burge (2013), 3).

1.3 Burge on Sellars

- Agrees with Sellars about 'the Given'⁵
- Denies that Sellarsians have any cogent argument against the existence of entitlement⁶
- Is this a fair assessment of (e.g.) Sellars and McDowell? Have they simply failed to consider the possibility of epistemic entitlement?

2 Entitlement and Access

- Does Burge have an access requirement on perceptual entitlement or entitlement generally?
 - what notion of 'access'?
 - * Bonjour's "within the ken" of the epistemic subject (cf. Bonjour (1985))
 - * Alston's notion of being based on an adequate ground⁷
 - * Supervenience of justification on facts which one is "in a position to know by reflection alone" (Pryor (2001), 104) vs. one always has access (in the position to know sense) to whether one is justified (Pryor (2001), 105)
 - Pryor explains that by the term 'reflection' he means 'a priori reasoning, introspective awareness of one's own mental states, and one's memory of knowledge acquired in these ways' (ibid.).

⁴ Truth is a subspecies of veridicality. Truth is propositional. Other sorts of veridicality include those of a photograph, phonograph recording, map, and so on. Non-propositional types of representation are like propositional representations in having conditions of veridicality. The veridicality of non-propositional representations, like photographs, maps, perceptions, will be termed "correctness". (Burge (2003), 506)

⁵ Sellars takes "The Given" to satisfy three conditions. The first is that it be a fact that is non-inferentially known. I do not talk of facts...The second condition is that the relevant knowledge "presupposes" no other general or particular knowledge...I hold that having any propositional attitude requires being disposed to make inferences between it and others. Some of these inferential relations incorporate knowledge. On an interpretation that takes "presupposes" to mean "requires the concomitant existence of", the condition is not met. I believe that this point is in conflict with the notion of The Given that Sellars had in mind—an uninterpreted infallible acquaintance with some sense-data-like fact...The third condition is that the relevant non-inferential knowledge is the ultimate court of appeals for all knowledge, or all empirical knowledge, of the world. This condition is not satisfied. I think that all perceptual belief is defeasible. (Burge (2003), 526)

⁶ Sellars and philosophers influenced by him have provided no cogent argument against entitlement as a type of epistemic warrant. They have not considered it (Burge (2003), 527).

⁷ Wherever it is clear that a belief is based on another belief or on an experience, the belief forming "process" or "mechanism" is taking account of that ground or features thereof, being guided by it, even if this does not involve the conscious utilisation of a belief in a support relation. (Alston (1988), 266)

- * Strong supervenience of the justificatory status of a person's doxastic attitudes on the person's mental states, events, and conditions (Conee (2007), 55).
- Casullo argues that Burge's notion of 'entitlement' has an access requirement, albeit a weak one⁸
- Silins's argues an opposing position, according to which Burgean entitlement does not require the satisfaction of any access requirement whatsoever.⁹

2.1 Casullo & Silins on Varieties of Access

- Casullo distinguishes between three forms of relevant access:
 - * (I1) The ground of S's belief that p is accessible
 - * (I2) The adequacy of the ground of S's belief that p is accessible
 - * (I3) The epistemic principle governing the ground of S's belief that p is accessible
- Silins describes four increasingly demanding notions of access:
 - * (Access1): One has conceptual access on reflection to a perceptual state which provides one with warrant.
 - * (Access2): One has conceptual access on reflection (1) to a perceptual state which provides one with warrant, and (2) to the fact that it provides one with warrant.
 - * (Access3): One has conceptual access on reflection (1) to a state which provides one with warrant, and (2) to the fact that it provides one with warrant, and (3) to some or all of the features of the perceptual state which make it provide one with warrant.
 - * (Access4): One has conceptual access on reflection (1) to a state which provides one with warrant, and (2) to the fact that it provides one with warrant, and (3) to some or all of the features of the perceptual state which make it provide one with warrant, (4) the fact that those features make the state provide one with warrant.
- Casullo indicates that conceptual access to one's ground is necessary for entitlement¹⁰
 - * To have access to a ground of one's belief is for one's belief to be *based* on the ground and for one to have access to that ground. Does that mean one has to have access to the ground as the basis for one's belief?

⁸ An entitlement to believe that p is only moderately external: it involves access to the ground of the belief that p, but it does not involve access to the adequacy of one's ground for that belief or the epistemic principle governing that ground. A justification to believe that p is moderately internal: it involves access to both the ground of the belief that p and the epistemic principle governing that ground. (Casullo (2007), 278)

⁹ Entitlements should be defined as warrants that one can have without satisfying any of the Access conditions 1–4. (Silins (2012), 248)

¹⁰ the conceptualization of perceptual representations is an essential feature of perceptual entitlement and...the ground of such an entitlement is conceptually accessible. Therefore, an entitlement is a warrant that satisfies (I1), but not (I2) or (I3). (Casullo (2007), 278)

- * Burge's discussion of conceptualization as "part of normal conversion of perceptual representations into propositional representations" (Burge (2003), 541) might make it seem as if the arrival at a perceptually entitled belief depends on going through a process of 'normal' conversion of percepts into propositionally structured concepts, which itself suggests conceptual access to the ground of the entitlement—viz. the percept
 - This may confuse the ground of the entitlement with the content to which one is entitled
 - Conceptual access to the *content* of entitled belief typically depends on conceptualization of the percept via "normal conversion"
 - Conceptual access to the *entitlement* for the positive epistemic attitude towards the relevant content would seem to require conceptualization of the conditions of entitlement—viz. necessary conditions for individuating representational types and reliability of those types
 - Plausibly, children and animals lack conceptual access to conditions of entitlement
- Perhaps there are just different uses of 'access' at work here?

3 *Silins on the Sources of Entitlement*

3.1 *Two Questions*

- (1) What role, if any, do considerations about reliability play when a perceptual state provides warrant?
- (2) What role does the conscious character of a perceptual state play, if any, when a perceptual state provides warrant?

3.2 *Conditions of Perceptual Entitlement*

Necessity: A perceptual state (type) provides entitlement only if it is reliable in the environment in which its content is fixed.

Sufficiency: If a perceptual state (type) is reliable in the environment in which its content is fixed, it will defeasibly provide entitlement in any environment.

- * One consequence of *Sufficiency* is that phenomenal consciousness plays no obvious role in perceptual entitlement¹¹
 - Silins takes this as a significant drawback of Burge's position

¹¹ the conscious character of perceptual states need not play any role in perceptual entitlement. What is crucial is the individuation and reliability of the perceptual state, leaving aside what it is like to be in the state. The picture thus allows that a suitable blind-sighted subject can be as warranted in their "perceptual beliefs" as we are warranted in our perceptual beliefs. (Silins (2012), 251)

The Grounding Requirement: "If the reliability of a perceptual representation is not grounded in the individuation and nature of the state, then the reliability cannot yield entitlement (532)."

- * no "incidentally" reliable states have any significance for entitlement

What is it about the nature of the perceptual state such that the reliability necessary for perceptual entitlement could be grounded upon it?

- * Silins suggests that reliability plays a role in the *stability* or *maintenance* of the content of a state rather than fixing its content in the first place¹²

3.3 Silins's Criticisms

1. Basicness

Why think that perceptual states provide epistemic entitlement? One thought is that they are *basic*:

Basicness: Perceptual states sometimes give one warrant for perceptual beliefs in a way which does not rely on warranted background beliefs one has.

- * Silins takes Burge to give an argument from Basicness to the non-incidental reliability of perceptual experience in grounding entitlement¹³
- * Silins denies the cogency of this argument – Basicness leaves open a variety of roles reliability could play in entitlement¹⁴

2. Burge's "Transcendental Argument" (534-6)

Burge argues that only the conditions under which representational kinds are individuated are relevant for entitlement:

So for perceptual states and competencies, the explanation of the relation between warrant and veridicality must hinge on a principled connection between the natures of the perceptual states, on one hand, and their success in representing the world, on the other. The explanation cannot fix on some feature of the world that is accidental relative to the natures of the states. In other, non-normal conditions the reliability of reliable states cannot be explained in terms of relations to the environment that are coded into the natures of the states themselves. Reliable connections to the world that are accidental relative to the conditions that individuate the individual's perceptual states make no contribution to empirical epistemic entitlement. (Burge (2003), 535)

¹² To contribute to entitlement, the reliability of the perceptual state presumably must play a role in maintaining the content of the perceptual state. (Silins (2012), 252)

¹³ First (and trivially), if perceptual states give us basic entitlement, then they give us entitlement in a way which does not rely on warranted background beliefs we have. Second (and substantively), if perceptual states do not rely on our warranted background beliefs to give us entitlement, then they do rely on their own natures to give us entitlement. The percept must "in itself" make a contribution to entitlement, that is, its non-incidental properties must explain how it is able to provide entitlement. Third, if some feature of a perceptual state explains how it provides entitlement, that feature has to do with the reliability of the state. Therefore, if perceptual states give us basic entitlement, they are non-incidentally reliable. Now since perceptual states give us entitlement only if they give us basic entitlement, it follows that they give us entitlement only if they are non-incidentally reliable. (Silins (2012), 253)

¹⁴ Basicness leaves open various roles reliability could play in entitlement. For example, the claim leaves open that entitlement could fail to travel to environments in which a perceptual state type comes to be unreliable. It is therefore no surprise that the thesis is accepted by epistemologists who emphasize incidental reliability, such as Goldman (2008), and by epistemologists who do not emphasize any kind of reliability, such as Pryor or Huemer. It is far from being the key to the epistemology of perception. (Silins (2012), 253)

- * Burge construes reliability which generates perceptual entitlement as best explained by appeal to the anti-individualist conditions under which the natures of perceptual states are constituted.
- * Silins points out two rival explanations of how the reliability of a perceptual state can be grounded in its nature.
 - Essentialist Approaches
 - Factivist Approaches
- * If Burge does not have the means to demonstrate that these rivals are worse off explanatorily than his proposal, his “transcendental argument” fails

3.4 Rival Approaches

1. Essentialist Approaches

- * Reliability as a matter of the essence of the state
- * Perceptual states are reliable in virtue of their *essence* — i.e. in any environment in which those states are found, they are reliable

Essentialist Reliability: Necessarily, if a perceptual state type gives one entitlement, then it is of the essence of the state type to be holistically reliable, where “holistic” here means that the perceptual state is part of a network of reliable representational states, even if members of that network are not, individually, always reliable

2. Factivist Approaches

- * A subject has perceptual entitlement to believe that *p* only if it is the case that *p* (Silins (2012), 257)
 - This is perhaps a misleading way to characterize the views of people like McDowell (or Brewer 1999) since they are not talking about *entitlement* but rather justification by reasons

3.5 A Further Problem

- * Why can't (basic) perceptual beliefs warrant themselves?¹⁵
 - Are the conditions for the individuation of belief (or its content) the same as the conditions for the individuation of perceptual experience?

¹⁵ The challenge for Burge's position is to explain why perceptual beliefs are not self-warranting. This challenge arises because of the way in which basic perceptual beliefs are individuated (where a basic perceptual belief is understood to be a belief which takes a perceptual state at face value, without “going beyond” the content of the perceptual state). On Burge's picture, basic perceptual beliefs are individuated as the conceptualizations of objects and properties represented by perceptual states. We can set aside what the conceptualization in question amounts to. What's crucial here is that, since perceptual beliefs are individuated by corresponding perceptual states, if perceptual states are reliable in a way that is grounded in their individuation, then the corresponding perceptual beliefs will likewise be reliable in a way that is grounded in their individuation. (Silins (2012), 258)

4 References

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