



# The Fregean Content of Perception

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# Fregean Experiential Content

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- Q: How can we analyze/explicate the Fregean content of perceptual experience?
    - Especially tricky if perceptual experience is nonconceptual: “nonconceptual senses”?
  - Strategy: Take a model for understanding the Fregean content of belief, and extend to the content of perception, by appealing to quasi-inferential relations between perception and belief.
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# Senses as Intensions

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- Intensional model of sense: the Fregean sense of a concept = a condition on extension, tied to cognitive significance.
    - *Hesperus*: sense picks out bright evening object, extension = Venus
    - *Water*: sense picks out watery stuff, extension = H<sub>2</sub>O
  - Sense can be seen as an intension: function from possibilities (of some sort) to extensions.
  - Sense of a thought (i.e. a belief, etc) = function from possibilities to truth-values.
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# Epistemic Content

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- Epistemic model: senses = epistemic intensions
  - Possibilities = points in epistemic space, or *scenarios*
    - First approximation: scenarios = centered worlds
    - Second approximation: scenarios = maximal epistemic possibilities
    - For any scenario  $W$ , there corresponds the hypothesis that  $W$  is actual.
  - Epistemic intension of a thought = function from scenarios to truth-values
    - Corresponds to a belief's epistemic content: how it divides epistemic space
  - N.B. Need a basic notion of epistemic necessity
    - Here, epistemic necessity = apriority
    - A thought is epistemically necessary iff it is conclusively justifiable independently of experience
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# Defining Epistemic Intensions

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- The epistemic intension of a thought  $T$  is true at a scenario  $W$  iff  $W$  verifies  $T$ .
  - $W$  verifies  $T$  iff the hypothesis that  $W$  is actual epistemically necessitates  $T$ 
    - Heuristic: if one conditionally accepts that  $W$  is actual, one should rationally accept  $T$ .
    - Formally: ' $D \rightarrow S$ ' is epistemically necessary, where  $D$  is a canonical description of  $W$  and  $S$  expresses  $T$ .
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# Examples

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- The epistemic intension of my thought *I am a philosopher* is true at those scenarios where the subject at the center is a philosopher.
  - The epistemic intension of my thought *there is water in my pool* is
    - **true** in an “Earth” scenario with H<sub>2</sub>O in the center subject’s pool
    - **true** in a “Twin Earth” scenario with XYZ in the environment and XYZ in the subject’s pool
    - **false** in a “Twin Earth” scenario with XYZ in the environment and H<sub>2</sub>O in the subject’s pool
    - true (roughly) iff the subject’s pool contains the dominant watery stuff in the subject’s historical environment
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# From Thought to Perception

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- The epistemic content of a thought is tied to its (idealized) cognitive significance: explicated using epistemic notions such as rational inference, or a priori entailment.
  - Q: How can we extend to the case of perception?
    - Do the relevant cognitive/epistemic notions apply in the perceptual domain, especially if it is nonconceptual?
  - Strategy: rely on quasi-inferential rational relations between perception and belief.
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# Endorsement I

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- **Endorsement**: a relation between perceptual experiences and beliefs.
  - A belief endorses a perceptual experience when it takes that experience “at face value”. (Peacocke)
    - When B endorses P, it is impossible for P to be veridical and B to be false.
    - B may lose information in P, so that it is possible for P to be falsidical and B to be true.
    - When B **perfectly endorses** P, it is impossible for B and P to differ in truth-value.
  - Endorsement is a cognitive/epistemic relation, akin in some respects to inference, but between perception and belief.
  - We have an intuitive grasp on this relation, though it raises numerous theoretical questions:
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# Endorsement II

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- If perceptual content is **conceptual**, endorsement is straightforward (belief invokes same concepts as perceptual state)
  - If perceptual content is **nonconceptual**, things are trickier.
  - But even nonconceptual contents can plausibly be endorsed with conceptual contents, if a subject has relevant concepts (Peacocke)
    - My view: the basic case of endorsement involves **direct perceptual concepts**, directly constituted by perceptual experiences (c.f. direct phenomenal concepts)
  - The question of whether pain, orgasm, anxiety are representational is reflected in the question of whether these states can be endorsed.
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# Epistemic Content for Perception

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- The epistemic intension of perceptual experience  $P$  is true at a scenario  $W$  iff  
for all possible beliefs  $B$  such that  $B$  endorses  $P$ ,  $W$  verifies  $B$ .
  - Alternatively: the epistemic intension of  $P$  is the epistemic intension of  $B$ , where  $B$  is a perfect endorsement of  $P$ 
    - The former requires only that all intuitive aspects of the content of a perceptual state can be reflected in the content of an endorsing belief
    - The latter requires (more arguably) that all these aspects can be reflected in the content of a single belief
  - This is the **epistemic content** of a perceptual experience: a sort of narrow Fregean content.
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# Content of Experience

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- Q: What is the character of the epistemic content of a perceptual experience?
  - For a simple experience, involving perceptual attribution of a property to an object, the experience can plausibly be perfectly endorsed by a perceptual belief.
  - Then: what is the epistemic content of the corresponding perceptual belief?
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# Content of Color Experience

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- Experience as of a red object
  - First pass: epistemic intension is true at those centered worlds where the object at which the subject is looking has a property that stands in relation M to red experiences
    - (strictly: the object standing in relation C to the subject, or to a marked experience of the subject)
  - Here relation M = *matching*. First approximation: disposed to cause in normal conditions?
  - Arguably, any perceptual phenomenal state with this epistemic intension is an instance of phenomenal redness.
    - If so: phenomenal redness = perceptually phenomenally representing this epistemic intension.
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# Generalization

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- Let  $Q$  be a simple phenomenal property, instantiated as a simple experience  $P$ , where  $P$  is perfectly endorsed by belief  $B$ .
  - The epistemic intension of  $P$  (and of  $B$ ) is true at those scenarios where the object standing in relation  $C$  to the center has a property that stands in relation  $M$  to  $Q$ .
    - Call this intension  $E(Q)$ .
  - Nonreductive representationalism:  $Q =$  perceptually phenomenally representing  $E(Q)$  [as epistemic content]
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# Further Questions

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- Which is more basic: the Fregean content of perception, of belief, or neither?
    - We've analyzed perceptual content using an analysis of belief content, but this need not reflect the deeper relations between them two.
    - For all we've said here, belief content may be grounded in perceptual content (which is itself grounded in phenomenology?).
  - What is the relationship between direct perceptual belief and perceptual experience?
    - Attractive suggestion: direct perceptual concepts are partly constituted by perceptual experiences, and inherit their representational content.
    - If so, then in this case, perceptual content is more basic than belief content.
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