

Reply to Peter Hanks and Ray Buchanan
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Reply to Hanks

Peter's argument focuses on my contention that to entertain the proposition *that o is red* is to predicate redness of o. He worries that I don't take predication to be inherently committing. We often predicate a property of something without committing ourselves to its having the property, as when we *imagine* o as red, or close our eyes and visualize o as red. Peter worries that these views, plus my view that seeing involves predicating, lead to an absurd result: *If seeing o as red provides justification for believing o to be red (even though it is merely visually entertaining a proposition), then entertaining any proposition should provide justification for believing it.* That is absurd, but it's not a consequence of my views. I will explain why.

In denying that predication is an inherently committing act-type, I am not denying that some instances of it are either themselves committing, or essential to more encompassing acts that are. To predicate redness of o is to think of o as red. Some ways of doing this – e.g. imagining or visualizing o as red – don't involve commitment to o's being red. Other ways of predicating redness of o are either committal or essential parts of committal cognitions. Consider *judging* o to be red. Although it involves predicating *redness* of o, and so entertaining the proposition that o is red, it is forceful in a way that acts of imagining or visualizing o as red aren't. To *judge* that o is red is to *predicate* redness of o in a way that involves making it a basis for possible action. To do this is *not* to predicate a property of the proposition, which is the predicative act one has performed,

or to cognize it in any way. It is for one's predication to involve forming or reinforcing dispositions to act, cognitively and behaviorally, toward o in ways conditioned by one's attitudes toward red things. In short, to *judge* that o is red is to predicate redness of o in a way that involves activating committing dispositions. To *believe* o to be red is to be disposed to judge that it is.

Next consider *visually predicating* redness of o, which is to *see o as red*. Although this act *isn't inherently* committing, it usually generates or reinforces the dispositions inherent in *judging* or *believing* o to be red. So, although perception isn't always committing, it is a standard component of perceptual judgments and beliefs that are. Since the function of *these attitudes* is to guide us in navigating the world, they are truth-normed--which means it *is* a *mistake* to judge or believe that something is red when it isn't. It isn't a mistake merely to *see o as red* – i.e. to visually predicate redness of it -- when o isn't red, even though so-seeing may be a component of a mistaken belief or judgment. Seeing o as red does standardly *justify* believing o to be red, because part of what it is for neurological events to *count* as *visual predications of redness* is for them to be reliably caused by light reflected from *red objects* reaching one's retina. This guarantees that visual predications of redness, embedded in perceptual beliefs that things are red, are normally accurate. That is why seeing o as red *typically justifies* believing o to be red.

That is my answer to Peter's main objection. Next consider what he took to be the root of the problem. He thinks my notion of predication incoherently mixes elements of *judgment*, which is committal, with elements of the traditional conception of *entertaining* as a non-committal attitude of merely attending to a proposition. He says:

Like [traditional] entertainment, [Soames's] predication is non-committal and neutral about how things are. But like judgment, and unlike [traditional] entertainment, [Soames's] predication is supposed to involve representing an object as being a certain way, which is something that can be done accurately or inaccurately...So Soames's notion of predication combines the neutrality of [traditional] entertainment with the representationality of judgment.

Peter thinks this combination is incoherent. He says:

Suppose I predicate redness of *o*, in Soames's sense of 'predicate'. Suppose also that *o* is not red. It follows that in performing my act of predication I inaccurately represented *o* as red. *That means that I made a mistake...For that to happen...I must have taken a position about whether o is red. ..So in performing my act of predication I didn't remain neutral about whether o is red.*

To evaluate this argument, we must distinguish *positively committal, truth-normed* attitudes like *judging* and *believing* from two types of non-truth-normed attitudes -- *negatively committing* attitudes like *doubting* and *denying*, and epistemically neutral attitudes like *desiring* and *imagining*. Despite their differences, the objects of all these attitudes are truth-evaluable. If asked *What did you judge/doubt/desire*, I may answer *What I judged/doubted/desired was that o is red, which turned out to be true*. So, I think, the representationality of the proposition *that o is red* is independent of any further, committal or non-committal attitude agents take toward it.

There is, however, one exception to the representational primacy of attitude objects over the attitudes themselves. The exception is the ur-attitude of *entertaining*. It is an exception because the act of entertaining *p* *just is* *p*. After all, *the act of performing any act A* is identical with *A*. Since entertaining *p* is performing *p*, the intentionality of entertaining *p* is the intentionality of *p* itself.

I think we seldom, if ever, *simply entertain*, i.e. perform, a proposition *p* without performing a related act from which the bare act of entertaining *p* may be abstracted. One form of abstraction identifies a generic act performed by performing specific versions of

it. Just as one can *travel to work by driving or walking there*, so one can *entertain p* by *visually or imaginatively doing so*. Another form of abstraction involves identifying *entertaining p* as a component of more encompassing acts or states like *judging*, *doubting*, or *desiring p*, which may carry cognitive or evaluative commitments. This sort of abstraction gives us *entertaining* as the common representational core of various attitudes. Since *some* of these attitudes aren't truth-normed, they don't have correctness conditions. This makes it natural to take entertainment not to have them either.

We do, of course, speak of truth-normed attitudes like *judgment* and *belief* as being correct or incorrect. Sometimes there are corresponding nominal forms – *judgments* and *beliefs* -- which are, pretty much, said to be *correct* iff *true*. We don't speak of non-truth-normed attitudes as correct or incorrect in this way. We don't say that my *doubt*, *denial*, or *desire that o was red* is incorrect if what I denied, doubted, or desired isn't true. In these cases *I make no mistake* even though, part of what I do involves representing *o* inaccurately. *We also don't call propositions themselves incorrect or mistaken, in abstraction from attitudes towards them*. Since the *proposition that o was red* isn't mistaken, if *o* wasn't red, one who takes propositions to be acts *should* take them to be non-committal.

Finally, it simply *isn't* always a mistake to represent an object to oneself as having a property it doesn't have. There is no mistake in visualizing or imagining *o* as red, even if it isn't. Since these are ways of entertaining the proposition that *o* is red, entertaining a proposition has got to be a neutral act. The view isn't incoherent; it is mandated.

Reply to Buchanan

I will close by giving very brief answers to some of Ray's questions.

- Q1 *What explains our cognitive access to properties?* Properties are ways things are; some -- colors, shapes, sizes, textures – are things we perceive by perceiving their bearers. We become aware of propositions by being aware of their constituents and introspecting what we are doing when we perform the acts that define them. Our access to complex properties parallels our access to propositions; our access to certain complex properties, *being such that S*, is parasitic on our access to propositions.
- Q2 *What explains why a property has the instantiation conditions it does?* For simple properties, there is nothing to explain. By contrast, we explain why a proposition has truth conditions, and what they are, by showing how and why the proposition is representational, and what it represents. There is no notion that stands to *instantiation* as *representation* stands to *truth conditions*.
- Q3 *Does the fact that the constituents of a proposition don't require metaphysical glue undercut one of the chief motivations of my theory?* No. Purged of confusion, the so-called unity problem is the problem of explaining how propositions can represent the world. Even the possible-world approach suffers from this problem.
- Q4 *Wouldn't a theory that avoided the result that propositions are things we do be an improvement?* Not if we can explain the cognitive mistake that makes the result sound absurd, which I think we can.
- Q5. *Can't we get what we need from an abstraction principle for propositions like Hume's for numbers?* I doubt it. We need robust propositions to which agents refer, of which they predicate properties, and over which they quantify. The abstract approach doesn't give us this. No set of analytic principles--supposedly made true by our decisions to use words in certain ways--generates ontological commitments. Accepting a *theory* the terms of which are analytically defined as whatever makes the theory true *can generate such commitments*. *But the theory isn't analytic*. Some *theorists* might accept Ray's abstract theory of propositions, and so become ontologically committed to *we-know-not-whats* that play certain theoretical roles, but unless *ordinary agents* covered by the theory *dream up the theory themselves and accept it*, the theory will fail, since it won't explain the cognitive access to propositions they must have.