

## *Do Anti-Individualistic Construals of Propositional Attitudes Capture the Agent's Conceptions?*<sup>1</sup>

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### 1. Introduction

Burge 1986 presents an argument for anti-individualism about the propositional attitudes. On the assumption that such attitudes are “individuated by reference to intentional notions”, Burge presents a novel thought experiment in an attempt to show that “there are certain relations between an individual and the environment that are necessary to [the thinker’s] having certain intentional notions” (Burge 1986 p. 709). The novelty of the thought experiment was that, unlike Burge’s previous thought experiments, it did not appeal to “incomplete understanding or ignorance of specialized knowledge” (709). Rather, the case for anti-individualism in his 1986 involves an agent who forms a “nonstandard theory” regarding the subject-matter of his thought.

The 1986 thought experiment, however, has come under criticism for relying on a faulty view of the role of sentences occurring within the scope of a propositional-attitude operator. Burge assumes that in attitude-ascribing sentences of the form ‘*S* Φs that *p*’, ‘that *p*’ serves both to specify the truth-conditions of *S*’s Φ-attitude but also to characterize the ‘notional’ components of *S*’s Φ-attitude (see Burge 1979b, p. 538). That is, Burge endorses the *de dicto* reading of such attitude-ascribing sentences; and the objections of both Bach 1988 and Elugardo 1993 take aim at this aspect of Burge’s argument.

In this paper I defend Burge against these critics by identifying a faulty assumption common to both. This is the assumption that there must always be a non-trivial characterization of an agent’s conceptions, that is, a characterization which does not employ the word(s) used by the agent in her expression of that conception. My claim is that we have reason to reject this

assumption, and in so doing to see Burge's side as the one enjoying independent support.

Though the burden of my paper is to defend Burge by arguing that he is entitled to provide a trivial characterization of the subject's conception (in the case he presented in his thought experiment), this thesis is an instance of a more general theoretical approach to an agent's conceptions. On the more general theoretical approach, it is not assumed in advance that there will always be an illuminating way to characterize how an agent is conceiving of an object. Rather, the point of talking about how an agent conceives of things is to characterize what Burge calls the agent's "epistemic perspective", "how things seem to him, or in an informal sense, how they are represented to him" (Burge 1979b, p. 538). To the extent that an account of conceptions enables us to do this, it is an adequate account. My claim will be that, despite their triviality, trivial accounts of an agent's conceptions can be adequate by this standard.

## 2. Burgean Semantic Anti-Individualism and Relevant Terminology

'Burgean' semantic anti-individualism<sup>2</sup> is the combination of two separable doctrines: anti-individualism about the attitudes, and a Fregean understanding of the role of sentences in oblique occurrence in mentalistic discourse.

The doctrine of semantic anti-individualism asserts that at least some propositional attitudes depend for their individuation on social and/or physical features external to the bodily states of the thinker herself. For my purposes, the significance of the doctrine lies in the attitude-ascriptions it warrants. The following comment from Ebbs 1997 is apt:

the anti-individualist starts by taking at face value our ordinary judgements about what individuals believe, what they are talking about, and when they agree or disagree with one another (p. 500).

The point about 'taking at *face value* our ordinary judgements about what individuals believe' is a point about how to construe *the content*—and so *the concepts* composing the content—of an individual's beliefs. The point is that we typically take speakers at their word: when a speaker, intending to express one of her attitudes, utters a sentence *Q*, we take it that the content of the attitude expressed is determined (in part) by the meaning of *Q*, where this meaning is determined (presumably, in some sort of compositional manner) by the *public language* she is speaking.<sup>3</sup>

What Burge adds to the doctrine of anti-individualism is a Fregean view of the role of oblique occurrences of (content-specifying) sentences. Burge writes,

... oblique occurrences in mentalistic discourse have something to do with characterizing a person's epistemic perspective—how things seem to him, or in an informal sense, how they are represented to him. ... [I]t is expressions at oblique occurrences within content clauses that primarily do the job of providing the content of mental states or events (Burge 1979b, p. 538).

In addition Burge is committed to what we (following Kimbrough 1998, p. 470) might call the ‘differential dubitability test’: if speaker *S* can coherently believe that *p* while doubting that *q*, then the belief that *p* differs in content from the belief that *q*.

Since the issues to be examined have been formulated (e.g., by Burge, Bach, and Elugardo) in such heavy-going terminology as ‘concept’, ‘conception’, ‘content’, ‘object of thought’, etc., and since this terminology can obscure as much as it can clarify, it is worthwhile making explicit how I shall be using these expressions.

In the background is the all-important distinction between sentences and what they express.<sup>4</sup> Sentences are linguistic items, composed of linguistic expressions (words combined in rule-governed ways). What sentences express are thoughts, i.e., propositional contents.<sup>5</sup> Corresponding to significant sub-sentential components in the sentence, we have concepts in the thought.<sup>6</sup> And so whereas linguistic expressions are constituents of sentences, concepts are constituents of thoughts.<sup>7</sup> In terms of notation, I will use capital letters surrounded by brackets—‘[’ and ‘]’—to designate the concept expressed by *E*. (The reason for the brackets will emerge below.) So for example we can pick out the concept of water as ‘[WATER]’, or as ‘the concept expressed by “water”’. And, following Burge’s Fregeanism, I will assume that sameness of extension of two linguistic expressions *E1* and *E2* is a necessary but not sufficient condition for expressing the same concept.

Corresponding to the distinction between the sentence and what it expresses (i.e. the content), it will be important to regiment the way I speak of the *relations* subjects bear to sentences and contents. Salient among these are the relations regarding endorsement: I will speak of subjects *accepting* or *rejecting* sentences, but of *affirming* or *denying* the contents expressed by those sentences.

In addition to speaking of concepts, I will need to speak of the objects of an agent’s thought, and of her conceptions of those objects. To speak of the object of an agent’s thought is to speak of the object being thought about: in standard cases it is a non-mental material object. (Thus Sam is the object of the thought *that Sam is nice*.) To speak of how an agent ‘conceives’ of the object of her thought—which is the same as speaking of how she ‘thinks about’ that object, what ‘conception’ or ‘notional component’ she employs in thinking about that object—is to speak of something mental, i.e., the manner in which the agent mentally represents the object of thought. Thus, saying that an agent *S* ‘conceives’ of the object of thought as water = saying that *S* ‘thinks about’ that object as water = saying that [WATER] is the notional component through which she thinks of the object of thought.

The multiplication of forms of expression within this group—‘concept’, ‘conception’, ‘way of thinking’, ‘notional component’—is admittedly burdensome. My excuse for using each of these forms is that the authors I am discussing use these expressions in the course of their arguments, and I want to be able to formulate my argument in their terms, so as not to beg any questions

against them. For this reason, my use of these forms of expression is intended to be in conformity with their use. (Where I disagree with one of the authors over the truth-value of a sentence which is formulated using one of these expressions, I provide an argument for my position.)

### 3. The Thought Experiment from Burge 1986

Burge's 1986 argument for anti-individualism has two stages and a conclusion.

In the first stage we imagine Adam, an otherwise-competent speaker of English, who, in reflecting on the fact that his fellows assume a reverential attitude towards sofas and that they typically place sofas in the most important rooms of their houses, comes to accept a sentence of the form<sup>8</sup>

- (1) Sofas are religious artifacts.

Having accepted (1), Adam comes to doubt what is in fact the correct meaning-analysis of the English word 'sofa'. That is, Adam rejects a sentence of the form

- (2) Sofas are large, overstuffed pieces of furniture made for the purpose of sitting.

We can imagine that he expresses this rejection by uttering the form of words

- (3) Sofas are not large, overstuffed pieces of furniture made for the purpose of sitting.

In the second stage of the thought experiment we are presented with a counterfactual scenario taking place on Twin Earth. We are to imagine that on Twin Earth there lives Adam\*, the Twin Earth doppelgänger of Adam. We are to imagine further that Adam\* speaks a language much like English; and that Adam\*, like Adam, believes of the things he calls 'sofas' that they are artifacts made for religious purposes. For this reason Adam\* too rejects a sentence of form (2). In fact, Adam\* expresses his rejection of a sentence of form (2) by uttering the very same form of words (syntactically individuated) as those Adam had uttered. But now we are to suppose that, unlike the English word-form 'sofa', the Twin English word-form 'sofa' is standardly used to designate religious artifacts that, apart from the features caught up in their religious function, are otherwise exactly like Earthian sofas (i.e., they are large, overstuffed pieces of furniture-like objects that are perceptually indistinguishable from sofas). Following Burge, we can coin the word 'safo' to express in English what the Twin English word-form 'sofa' expresses. The key point, then, is this: the judgements Adam and Adam\* express, when each utters the same (syntactically individuated) form of words, are quite different. When Adam

(who speaks English) utters the form of words in (3), he is saying, of sofas (i.e., large, overstuffed pieces of furniture made for the purpose of sitting), that they are not large, overstuffed pieces of furniture made for the purpose of sitting; consequently his judgement is false. But when Adam\* (who speaks Twin English) utters the form of words in (3), he is saying, of safos (i.e., large, overstuffed pieces of furniture-like objects *made for religious purposes*), that they are not large, overstuffed pieces of furniture made for the purpose of sitting; consequently his judgement is *true*.

The conclusion asserting the doctrine of anti-individualism is (supposed to be) established when we observe that the difference in truth-value of the respective judgments of Adam and Adam\* is consistent with the stipulation that Adam and Adam\* are type-identical as far as their internal properties go. On the assumption that in making a judgement one expresses one's belief, the point is that Adam and Adam\* have expressed beliefs that differ in their *contents* (i.e., one involving [SOFA], the other involving [SAFO]), despite the fact that they are internally type-identical to one another. And the thought experiment is generalizable.

#### 4. Bach 1988 on Burge 1986

Bach 1988 holds that the argument from Burge 1986 fails to establish Burgean anti-individualism, for depending on a dubious assumption. Here I argue that his reply can be met. My case for this result will suggest that the key issue is not the assumption Bach calls into question, but rather the conception of conceptions we are entitled to employ—a matter I take up again in 6.

##### 4.1 *Bach's Argument*

Bach points out that Burge's 1986 argument for anti-individualism depends on the thesis that

(A) Adam can be correctly ascribed a belief whose content is *that sofas are not large, overstuffed pieces of furniture made for the purpose of sitting*.

On Bach's reconstruction, Burge purports to establish (A) by appeal to the fact that we (who know that Adam is wrong about sofas) can nonetheless use a sentence of the form

(4) *S* believes that sofas are not large, overstuffed pieces of furniture made for the purpose of sitting.

to correctly ascribe a belief to Adam. But the fact that we can use a sentence of form (4) to correctly ascribe a belief to Adam establishes (A) only if we assume the following ('The Assumption'):

if one literally and correctly uses a term in the ‘that’-clause of an attitude attribution, one is imputing to the subject the notion expressed by the term and is, further, including it in the content of the attitude being ascribed (direct quote from Bach 1988, p. 92).

Once we surrender The Assumption, Bach argues, Burge’s construal of the ‘sofa’-belief Adam expresses in his utterance of (3) is seen to be unacceptable.

Bach’s argument on this score can concede many of the points Burge made in the course of his argument.<sup>9</sup> In particular, Bach is willing to accept that [SOFA] is in Adam’s conceptual repertoire, that Adam associates [SOFA] with the word-form ‘sofa’, and that Adam himself uses ‘sofa’ to refer to sofas. The crucial question for Bach is whether Adam’s use of ‘sofa’ in his utterance of (3) expresses [SOFA]; while Burge maintains that it does, Bach denies this. (To avoid repetition of “Adam’s use of ‘sofa’ in his utterance of (3)”, I will sometimes substitute “the relevant use of ‘sofa’”.) Now Bach realizes that in uttering (3) Adam means to be speaking of the very items that his colinguals designate by using ‘sofa’. Thus, while Bach holds that the relevant use of ‘sofa’ expresses something other than [SOFA], he still wants to interpret that use as referring to sofas. Given these two constraints, Bach proposes to interpret the relevant use of ‘sofa’ as expressing [SO-CALLED ‘sofa’].<sup>10</sup> But the crucial point at present is that, since (on Bach’s view) Adam’s use of ‘sofa’ in his utterance of (3) does not express [SOFA], (A) is simply false, and Burge’s thought experiment fails to establish anti-individualism.

#### 4.2 *A Reply to Bach 1988*

Here I want to suggest that Burge can rebut Bach’s argument by exposing as question-begging an assumption on which Bach’s argument depends. In this section the case I present for this accusation is preliminary in that it depends on an assumption that would be challenged by Bach, regarding what is involved in conceiving of something as a sofa. But it is important to make this preliminary case: doing so will make clear that, if Burge can formulate and defend an account of conceptions on which Adam’s conceiving of sofas as sofas is not inconsistent with his rejection of (2)—something that I will defend in section 6—then Bach’s case against Burge is revealed to be relying on a question-begging assumption of its own. In any case, for the purpose of defending Burge I am prepared to grant Bach’s claim that The Assumption is false,<sup>11</sup> and so to grant as well that (A) cannot be directly inferred from the fact that we can use a sentence of form (4) to correctly ascribe a belief to Adam. But the question remains: might (A) be true nonetheless? Bach clearly thinks not; but to vindicate such a claim he begs the question.

The crux of the matter regarding the truth-value of (A) concerns the conceptual contribution made by Adam’s use of ‘sofa’ in his utterance of (3). Now, Burge claims that we are to imagine (as part of the thought experiment) that

Adam's use of 'sofa' in his utterance of (3) is meant to be a literal use. In having us imagine Adam's use in this way, Burge is having us imagine that

(D) In uttering (3), Adam is not expressing a doubt about the existence of objects falling under [SOFA].

The point here is that if Adam *did* doubt the existence of objects falling under [SOFA], then presumably it would not be correct to render the relevant use of 'sofa' literally, as expressing [SOFA] as opposed to [SO-CALLED 'sofa']. Compare the use of 'witches' by a person who denies the existence of witches: if such a person were to utter 'Those witches are not in league with the Devil', intending thereby to say, of a group of women alleged to be witches, that they are not in league with the Devil, then such a use of 'witches' would express (not [WITCHES] but rather something like) [SO-CALLED 'witches']. In having us assume (D), Burge is having us imagine that the case of Adam is not like this, that is, that Adam intends the relevant use of 'sofa' to be literal (= to express [SOFA]).

Since Bach challenges the hypothesis that the relevant use expresses [SOFA] by challenging Burge's entitlement to (D), it is useful to make explicit what Burge takes to be the basis for (D). As Burge envisages him, Adam is aware of the standard view among English speakers that (2) expresses a triviality. Having come to accept a non-standard theory, however, Adam rejects (2), and so rejects as well the standard view that (2) expresses a triviality. Given his idiosyncratic theory, Adam has come to believe, of those things he refers to in his utterance of (3) as 'sofas' (= actual sofas), that they are religious artifacts of a certain kind (and so are not pieces of furniture made for sitting). But (and this is the key), as Burge imagines Adam's use of 'sofas' in his utterance of (3), Adam aims to be using 'sofa' in its standard way, i.e., as expressing [SOFA]. To be sure, Adam has false beliefs about the application conditions of that very concept; but, since he is unaware that these beliefs are false, his perspective remains perfectly intelligible for all that. In particular, his disagreement with his colinguals does not concern the applicability of [SOFA], i.e., does not concern whether sofas exist; rather, Adam's disagreement with his colinguals concerns *the nature* of those things that *all sides agree* are sofas (i.e., that all sides agree fall under [SOFA], i.e., that all sides take to be sofas). And, since Adam agrees with his colinguals that the relevant items *are* sofas, Adam does not deny the existence of items falling under [SOFA]—exactly as (D) claims.

Now Bach (p. 94) appreciates that Burge describes his thought experiment as one in which we are to "assume" that Adam does not intend to doubt the existence of the object in question (Burge 1986, p. 711). In reply Bach writes that "what Burge claims that we may assume or imagine is just what is at issue" (p. 95). However, the dialectical situation should not be overlooked. Since the claim, that Adam intended the relevant use to be literal, is put forth by Burge

as part of the thought experiment he is describing, and since the presumption is that the author of a thought experiment is free to construct the thought experiment as desired, the burden is on Bach to say why the result of incorporating the claim asserting Adam's literalist intentions begs the question (or is otherwise objectionable).

Before we see how Bach might propose to shoulder that burden, it is useful to consider what Burge himself can say in defense of (D). Burge writes (p. 711) that "we may assume that [Adam] would say that what most people think of as sofas are sofas." But in the present context, it is best not to describe Adam's speech at the level of what was said. The trouble is that doing so is tantamount to making stipulations about *the content* of Adam's utterance; and it is precisely such stipulations that will appear to beg the question to anyone who, like Bach, denies (A) and thinks that it is question-begging for Burge to have us "assume" (D). But suppose that we describe Adam's speech instead at the level of sentences uttered. Then we might hope to *infer* the content of Adam's speech, using the sentences he uttered as evidence. It is in this way that Burge might try to meet the charge of having made question-begging stipulations. To this end, imagine that Adam would utter all sorts of sentences that, if appearances are to be trusted, would testify to Adam's intention to have used 'sofa' (in his utterance of (3)) literally. For example, imagine that, were he to be apprized of Bach's interpretation according to which the relevant use of 'sofa' expresses [SO-CALLED 'sofa'], Adam would reply by uttering

(+) But I agree with the others that the relevant objects *are* sofas!

Or alternatively imagine Adam responding by uttering

(++) Throughout our discussion I mean to be using 'sofa' literally, as expressing the concept English associates with 'sofa'. I take it that this is precisely how my colinguals are using 'sofa'.

Then Burge can argue that, absent evidence to the contrary, Adam's disposition to utter (+) and (++) as comments on the relevant use of 'sofa' are *evidence* for the hypothesis that Adam intends the relevant use to be literal, i.e., to express [SOFA] as opposed to [SO-CALLED 'sofa'].

In reply, Bach would no doubt want to argue that, even at the level of sentences uttered, it would be question-begging (or otherwise illegitimate) for Burge to stipulate that Adam would utter such sentences as (+) and (++)<sup>12</sup>. However, such a reaction on Bach's part requires a defense of its own, since at first blush it is unclear what questions Burge would be begging (or what he would be doing that is illegitimate) if he were merely to stipulate that Adam would utter e.g. (+) and (++) . The upshot is that we now have a clearer view of the burden Bach must shoulder: since Burge's description of Adam (including (D)) is supported by the development of the thought experiment on which

Adam utters (+) and (++), if Bach wants to reject as question-begging (or otherwise illegitimate) Burge's description of his own thought experiment, Bach must preclude Burge's entitlement to developing the thought experiment in this way. And it is here, in considering the kind of argument Bach could make on this score, that Bach appears forced to make a question-begging assumption of his own.

How can Bach dismiss as illegitimate the proposed development of the thought experiment on which Adam utters such things as (+) and (++)? I suspect that Bach would argue that the proposed development of the thought experiment is illegitimate on grounds that

if an English speaker who rejects (2) and accepts (3) were to utter such things as (+) and (++), then the resulting perspective would be incoherent.

I will call this the 'incoherence thesis'. There would appear to be no other grounds on which Bach could dismiss as illegitimate the stipulation that Adam would utter such sentences as (+) and (++). To repeat, it is very hard to see how Burge could be accused of begging questions merely in virtue of stipulating that Adam would utter these sentences. Consequently, Bach's claim must be that even if Burge were to develop the thought experiment by stipulating that Adam would utter (+) and (++) as comments on the relevant use, Burge would still not be entitled to describe Adam as using 'sofas' literally. And the only apparent way for Bach to establish such a claim, once it is granted that Adam would utter such things as (+) and (++), would be to establish the incoherence thesis. If the incoherence thesis is false, then it would seem that Bach has no reason to resist describing Adam as the appearances would have it; and the relevant appearances, constituted by Adam's utterance of (+) and (++), suggest that in his utterance of (3) he is using 'sofas' literally. But if the incoherence thesis is true, then Bach could argue that, because Adam's utterance of (+) and (++) (when combined with Adam's rejection of (2) and acceptance of (3)) amount to an incoherent perspective, it is illegitimate for Burge to derive *any* substantive conclusions on the basis of Adam's case, let alone conclusions about such contentious matters as what is expressed by the relevant use of 'sofa'.

I have just argued for two claims: first, that Bach's case against Burge depends on Bach's being warranted in dismissing as illegitimate any development of the thought experiment on which Adam utters (+) and (++); and second, that Bach's being warranted on this score turns on his ability to establish the incoherence thesis. In this respect it is interesting to note that Bach himself appears to endorse a view from which he could make a case for the incoherence thesis. The view in question is implicit in Bach's claim that "although 'sofa' means *piece of furniture... made for sitting*, even to Adam, he does not take the things to which he is using 'sofa' to refer to be sofas" (p. 92; italics in original; I have substituted 'Adam' for 'A', which was the name Bach had

used for the subject of Burge's thought experiment). Bach's reasoning on this score appears to be this. Adam's use of 'sofa' in his utterance of (3) is meant to apply to a certain class of objects—namely, objects that in fact are sofas, i.e., pieces of furniture... made for sitting. However, Adam does not take these items to be pieces of furniture... made for sitting. Since 'sofa' means *piece of furniture... made for sitting*, the result (by Bach's lights) is that Adam does not take the relevant items to be sofas—in which case, were Adam to utter (+) and (++) , he would be giving expression to a position that is incoherent. Of course, this reasoning assumes that

(T) Taking something to be a sofa involves taking it to be a piece of furniture... made for sitting.

But if (T) is taken for granted, then Bach can argue that it makes no sense to imagine that Adam would intend the relevant use to be a literal use.

Since much will turn on this, we should make explicit how an appeal to (T) can be used by Bach to establish the incoherence thesis. This reasoning is most straightforward in the case of Adam's uttering (+), where Bach would argue as follows:

Adam rejects (2), so when he applies 'sofa' to a set of objects, he does not take those objects to be pieces of furniture... made for sitting. On the assumption of (T), it then follows that Adam cannot use 'sofa' to express [SOFA] in any case in which that use is meant to apply to actual objects. For, in order to use 'sofa' to express [SOFA] in a case in which that use is intended to apply to actual objects, one must conceive of those objects as sofas (= take those objects to be sofas)—but, given (T), this is not how Adam is conceiving of the relevant objects. The result is that if Burge asks us to imagine a case in which Adam means to be using 'sofa' both to apply to actual objects as well as to express [SOFA]—and this is what Burge would be asking us to imagine if he were to have us imagine that Adam would utter (+) as a comment on the relevant use of 'sofa'—then in effect Burge is asking us to imagine that Adam's perspective is incoherent.

What is more, a similar line of argument can be used by Bach in order to get (T) to bear on the intelligibility of Adam's uttering (++) as a comment on the relevant use of 'sofa':

Suppose Adam were to utter (++) as a comment on the relevant use of 'sofa', and that in so doing he is avowing the intention to be using 'sofa' to express [SOFA] throughout the discussion. Such an intention would cover the relevant use of 'sofa'. But Adam *cannot* be expressing [SOFA] in the relevant use of 'sofa', for precisely the reason given above. To

repeat: given (T) and Adam's rejection of (2), Adam cannot use 'sofa' to express [SOFA] in any case in which that use is meant to apply to actual objects; but the use of 'sofa' in Adam's utterance of (3) is meant to apply to actual objects; and so we see that, were Adam to utter (++) as a comment on the relevant use of 'sofa', Adam's perspective would be incoherent.

In both cases, Bach's contention would be that, if Burge were to develop the thought experiment as I have suggested, the result would be that Adam's perspective would be incoherent—with the further result that Burge would no longer be entitled to draw any substantive conclusions from the case of Adam. It is in this way that Bach might think to appeal to (T) to challenge the legitimacy of developing Burge's thought experiment so that Adam utters (+) and (++).

Now I accept the conditional thesis that, if (T), then Adam's uttering (+) and/or (++) as a comment on the relevant use of 'sofa' would result in Adam's perspective being incoherent (in which case such a scenario would not support the hypothesis that the relevant use of 'sofa' expresses [SOFA]). However, I submit that we should draw the *modus tollens* inference. In the remainder of this section I will suggest that, despite the forgoing would-be arguments for the incoherence thesis, there remains the strong impression that the perspective Burge envisages for Adam is intelligible for all that. This cannot be the final word, however, since the impression in question will not be had by anyone who comes at these issues having already endorsed (T) as the proper view about what is involved in thinking of an object as a sofa. But in section 6 I will present and argue for an alternative view of what it is to conceive of an object as a sofa—a view that I will label 'minimalism'.<sup>13</sup>

Here I am restricting myself to the claim that, despite the forgoing would-be arguments for the incoherence thesis, there remains the strong impression that the perspective Burge envisages for Adam is intelligible for all that. Suppose Adam were to utter (+) and (++) as comments on the relevant use of 'sofa'. By all outward appearances the intention that Adam would express in uttering (++) is the intention to be using 'sofa' in this discussion so as to express [SOFA] (= the concept English assigns to the word-form 'sofa'). Aside from (T) itself, Bach 1988 offers no reason to think that such an intention would be unintelligible or otherwise ineffective. What is more, on the assumption that this intention *is* realized, we can make perfectly good sense of Adam's perspective. For in that case, the relevant use of 'sofa' would express [SOFA], and we could account for his disagreement with his colinguals as a disagreement over the nature of things which both sides agree are sofas (= fall under [SOFA]). Among the virtues of such an account is that *it saves all of the appearances*: far from having to dismiss Adam's auxiliary utterances (e.g., of (+) and (++)) as irreparably confused—which, as we have seen, is what Bach's position must hold regarding such utterances—the present account is

able to accept the face value interpretation of such utterances. Since I have already argued that it would beg no questions for Burge to stipulate that Adam *would* make such utterances, it is preferable to be able to accommodate such utterances (and better still to be able to accommodate them at face value), rather than having to explain them away. Of course, once we accept these auxiliary utterances at face value, we would be rendering Adam as taking the relevant objects to be sofas despite the fact that he does not take them to be pieces of furniture... made for sitting—in which case (T) is false.

It might be thought that this is too quick to establish even the impression of intelligibility of Burge's description of Adam's perspective. After all, Bach's position appears to be that his (Bach's) description of Adam, in which Adam is to be taken to be calling into question the existence of sofas, is actually a better (or more 'plausible') description of the situation in Burge's thought experiment, than is Burge's own description (and my development) of that situation.<sup>14</sup> But if this is to amount to an objection to Burge's description of (my development of) his own thought experiment, then the claim must be that there is no *possible* scenario in which an otherwise-normal English speaker who rejects (2) and accepts (3) does so out of a false empirical belief about sofas (as opposed to a belief in the non-existence of sofas). Or rather, the claim must be that any scenario that Burge would want to describe in this way would be better described in Bach's way, i.e., as involving a subject who is calling into question the existence of sofas. (Otherwise, Burge could simply run his argument on the scenario corresponding to his description of Adam.)

Though Bach does appear to hold that any scenario that Burge would want to describe in his way would be better described as involving a subject who is calling into question the existence of sofas, it would seem that (so long as we remain neutral on (T) itself<sup>15</sup>) nothing in Bach 1988 supports such a strong thesis. What one finds there is an illustration of the fact that cases exist in which subjects use an expression (such as 'witch') in the standard way without believing in the existence of the items in question. That there are such cases is of course true; but the question is whether Burge's Adam falls into this category. And, though Bach (informed by his endorsement of (T)) thinks that Adam does fall in such a category, it seems to me that, so long as Burge's description of Adam's perspective is coherent, Burge is entitled to insist that Adam as he has described him does not fall in this category. This is because, if Burge's description of Adam's perspective is coherent, then Burge has described a possibility in which Adam is not calling into question the existence of sofas. And if Burge has described such a possibility, then to insist that Adam is better (or 'more plausibly') interpreted as calling into question the existence of sofas, is simply to describe a possibility that is different from the one envisaged in Burge's thought experiment.

The take-home lesson is this. If it is coherent, the development of Burge's thought experiment in which Adam utters (+) and (++) would provide clear evidence in support of Burge's description of the relevant use of 'sofa' as being

a literal use. Consequently, Bach's case against Burge depends on his rejecting as illegitimate this development of Burge's thought experiment. The only basis on which Bach can reject this development is by appeal to the incoherence thesis. Now (T) would provide a basis from which to establish the incoherence thesis, since on the assumption of (T) it is incoherent to describe Adam (who rejects (2)) as conceiving of sofas as sofas. But if Bach would defend the incoherence thesis by appeal to (T), as I have suggested he must, he opens himself up to the reply, to be developed in 6 below, that there is a superior alternative view regarding what it is to conceive of something as a sofa, on which it is *not* incoherent to describe Adam as conceiving of sofas as sofas even after he rejects (2). At the very least this should suggest that, since the issue between Bach and Burge turns precisely on the issue of what it is to conceive of an object as a sofa, the appeal to (T) is contentious.

### 4.3 Summary

The present dialectic is this. The success of Burge's 1986 argument for anti-individualism depends on the truth of (A). Granted that one cannot infer (A) from the fact that we speakers of English can use a sentence of form (4) to ascribe a belief to Adam, the question remains whether (A) is true. In the context of the story of Adam, (A) is inconsistent with (T); so if there is independent reason to endorse (T), then there is independent reason to think that (A) is false—in which case Burge's 1986 argument fails. If on the other hand there is reason to think that Burge is entitled to construe the disagreement between Adam and his colinguals over the truth-value of (3) as involving a disagreement in empirical beliefs regarding the items that both sides agree fall under [SOFA], then there is reason to hold onto (A) and thus to deny (T)—in which case Bach 1988 raises no difficulty for the argument in Burge 1986. Here I have presented a preliminary case for Burge's position, by offering a development of the original thought experiment designed to support Burge's claim that the relevant use of 'sofa' is a literal use. Admittedly, the case presented so far is not conclusive, since it trades on a claim—namely, the claim that, despite Bach's argument to the contrary, Adam's perspective as described by Burge is coherent—that will be challenged by anyone who endorses (T). But below I will argue that there is an alternative view regarding conceptions, on which it is not incoherent to describe Adam as conceiving of sofas as sofas even as he rejects (2); and that the view in question enjoys some important advantages over that embodied by (T). If I am right about this, then Bach's appeal to (T) is a question-begging way to resist Burge's description of his thought experiment.

Before I turn to that alternative view of conceptions, however, I want first to examine the argument of Elugardo 1993. Like Bach's argument, Elugardo's argument challenges Burge's anti-individualistic conclusion by arguing against (A); it does so (again like Bach's argument) by arguing that Burge is not entitled to treat Adam's use of 'sofa' in his utterance of (3) as expressing [SOFA].

But I will argue that Elugardo's argument too is susceptible to the charge of begging the question. After developing this charge, I will go on (in section 6) to present and defend the doctrine regarding the nature of conceptions, which I take to support Burge's construal of the relevant use of 'sofa' against both Bach 1988 and Elugardo 1993.<sup>16</sup>

## 5. Elugardo 1993 on Burge 1986

Like Bach, Elugardo aims to show that Burge's argument fails to establish anti-individualism, and that it fails precisely because of Burge's use of The Assumption.<sup>17</sup> However, where Bach had presented considerations aimed directly at The Assumption itself, Elugardo presents a *reductio* to the effect that, if The Assumption is true, then (A) is false. My thesis will be that Elugardo's argument trades on a particular conception of conceptions, and that Burge can respond by rejecting that conception. In the section following this one, I will suggest a positive (albeit minimalistic) conception of conceptions which Burge can adopt; and I will present independent reasons for thinking that such a minimalistic approach to conceptions has its theoretical advantages.

### 5.1 Elugardo on Burge on Content

In the background of Elugardo's case against Burge 1986 is Elugardo's view (which I accept) that, if Burge's thought experiment is to establish anti-individualism, then two constraints must be met. First, it must be the case that, in the expression of their respective beliefs (judgements) when each utters a sentence of form

- (3) Sofas are not large, overstuffed pieces of furniture made for the purpose of sitting.

it must be the case that Adam's use of 'sofa' corresponds to a notional component in Adam's thought that is distinct from the notional 'sofa'-component in Adam\*'s thought. Second, the characterization of the relevant notional component in Adam's thought must be sensitive to the reasons why Adam rejects a sentence of the form

- (2) Sofas are large, overstuffed pieces of furniture made for the purpose of sitting.

That is, this characterization must be sensitive to Adam's acceptance of a sentence of the form

- (1) Sofas are religious artifacts.

For (Elugardo reasons), if we are to interpret Adam's utterance of form (3), then it must be the case that his use of 'sofa' in this utterance expresses a concept that captures the way he thinks of sofas when he uses this word to express his rejection of (2).

Given all of this, the problem which Elugardo wants to raise for the anti-individualist can be presented in the form of a dilemma. We have already seen that Burge's argument turns on the truth of (A). In effect, this means that Burge's argument turns on the truth of (5) on its *de dicto* reading:

(5) Adam believes that sofas are not large, overstuffed pieces of furniture made for the purpose of sitting.

Now (Elugardo argues) either 'sofas' as it occurs in the English sentence (5) designates<sup>18</sup> [SOFA] or it does not. If it does, then the result is that on its *de dicto* reading (5) construes Adam's thought in such a way as not to be sensitive to the reasons Adam rejects (2) or accepts (1). If on the other hand 'sofa' in (5) does not designate [SOFA], then (5) is false on its *de dicto* reading, and so the thought experiment cannot be used as part of an argument for anti-individualism.

I submit that Burge should embrace the first horn, and simply deny that doing so will result in a construal of Adam's thought which fails to be sensitive to the reasons Adam rejects (2). In embracing the first horn, the anti-individualist is maintaining that Adam's use of 'sofa' in his utterance of form (3) does indeed express [SOFA], and in particular is maintaining the following:

(Sofa) Insofar as Adam accepts (1) and (3) and rejects (2), he conceives of sofas as sofas.

The question is whether anyone committed to (Sofa) is *ipso facto* committed to a construal which is not sensitive to the reasons Adam rejects (2) (or accepts (1)). Elugardo assumes the affirmative; but his doing so is informed by a substantive (and, I might add, unargued-for) thesis about what it is to conceive of an object in a particular way.

### *5.2 The Traditional Account of Conceptions (TAC)*

I said that Elugardo's argument is committed to the falsity of (Sofa): if (Sofa) is true, then the Burgean can construe Adam's thought in a manner that satisfies both of Elugardo's two constraints, with the result that Elugardo's case against Burge's argument dissolves. It is interesting in this respect that Elugardo never even considers (Sofa) as an hypothesis regarding how Adam is conceiving of sofas; rather, Elugardo appears simply to be *assuming* that (Sofa) is false. This assumption can be traced to Elugardo's view that, while Adam uses 'sofa' intending to designate what his English-speaking peers designate with that expression (i.e., sofas), his conception of the objects he is referring

to is idiosyncratic. Although Elugardo's reasoning is not entirely clear on this point, the Idiosyncratic Conception Hypothesis (as we might call it) apparently derives from Elugardo's view that Adam's acceptance of (1) must be *built into* his conception of sofas. That this is what Elugardo has in mind is suggested by the way that he introduces his discussion of the way Adam thinks of sofas. Elugardo writes

We first need to get clear about how he thinks of sofas. Given Burge's story, Adam thinks of sofas as *objects that are primarily made for symbolic religious purposes*. But more can be said. ... (Elugardo 1993, p. 374; italics mine).

While Elugardo goes on to say what more can be said, the important point at present is that Elugardo introduces the question of how Adam conceives of sofas by smuggling in *right at the outset* the idea that Adam thinks of sofas "as objects that are primarily made for symbolic religious purposes". Then, when this is seen as an insufficient way to characterize Adam's conception (for failing to be distinct from the way Adam\* conceives of what *he* calls 'sofas'), Elugardo goes on to suggest that we ought to characterize Adam's conception as (what is expressed by) "the kind of artifact that serves as a religious symbol and is a sofa". The crucial point is that Elugardo never does consider the possibility that Adam is conceiving of sofas *simply as sofas*.

If Elugardo's commitment to the falsity of (Sofa) is implicit and never argued for, what is behind this implicit commitment? This question becomes particularly acute when we consider what Elugardo is prepared to concede. First, the stipulations of the thought experiment require that Elugardo concede that Adam would express his doubt regarding (2) by using the English word-form 'sofa'. But Elugardo is also prepared to concede that the English word-form 'sofa' expresses [SOFA]. For this reason, given that Elugardo is committed to the denial of the claim that Adam conceives of sofas *as sofas*, Elugardo is *ipso facto* committed to distinguishing the concept expressed by the English word-form 'sofa' from the conception that corresponds to Adam's use of that English word-form in an utterance of form (3). What basis is there for distinguishing between concepts and conceptions in this way?

I suspect that something like the following line of reasoning is implicit in Elugardo's position. Adam expresses his doubts regarding (2) by uttering a sentence of form (3). So, *if we aim to characterize Adam's "epistemic perspective"*, it would simply be incorrect (in light of Adam's false belief about the extension of 'sofa') to say that the conception Adam expresses in his use of 'sofa' is to be identified with [SOFA]. In particular, it is not because Adam conceives of sofas *as sofas*, that he rejects (2); rather it is because he conceives of them *as religious artifacts of a particular kind*. The point here is that, since (2) expresses what is in fact a necessary truth (deriving from the correct meaning analysis of the English word 'sofa'), anyone who denies this truth must be conceiving of sofas, not *as sofas* (= large, overstuffed pieces of furniture made for the purpose of sitting), but in some idiosyncratic way.

If this reconstruction captures what Elugardo implicitly had in mind, then Elugardo is endorsing what I will call the Traditional Account of Conceptions ('TAC'). TAC holds that where speaker *S*, giving linguistic expression to a thought, designates object *O* with expression *E*, *S*'s conception of *O* is determined by the set of all expressions *E*\* which *S* uses interchangeably with *E*. I submit that Elugardo's rejection of the hypothesis that Adam conceives of sofas *as sofas* derives from an implicit endorsement of something like TAC. Such an attribution makes sense of Elugardo's rejection of the hypothesis that Adam conceives of sofas as sofas: for, given that Adam would treat as interchangeable 'sofa' and 'religious artifact in the shape of a large, overstuffed piece of furniture', TAC would warrant treating [RELIGIOUS ARTIFACT] as part of the way Adam is conceiving of sofas. What is more, in light of the two things Elugardo is willing to concede (mentioned at the outset of this subsection), it is unclear how *else* to warrant Elugardo's assumption that Adam is not conceiving of sofas *as sofas*. I conclude that Elugardo must be conceiving of conceptions in the manner of something like TAC, on pain of having no way to warrant his assumption of the falsity of (Sofa). If I am right about this, of course, it is open to the proponent of Burgean semantic anti-individualism to respond to Elugardo's argument by rejecting TAC; for in such a case the two points Elugardo was willing to concede can be used to warrant the view that Adam is indeed conceiving of sofas *as sofas*.

### 5.3 Towards an Alternative to TAC

It is now time to face the central challenge presented by Elugardo's argument: if Adam is conceiving of sofas as sofas, why then does he reject (2)? Elugardo's explanation was that Adam's acceptance of (1) is partially constitutive of the conception he employs in thinking of sofas; from such a perspective Adam's rejection of (2) is then explained by saying that an English speaker who conceives of sofas as religious artifacts will typically reject "Sofas are made for the purpose of sitting".

But the Burgean should see this way of presenting the explanatory problem as involving a sleight of hand, occurring at the very point at which it is simply assumed that whatever it is that explains Adam's rejection of (2) must be *built into* Adam's 'sofa'-conception. That this is a sleight becomes clear when we consider an alternative, Burgean explanation for Adam's rejection of (2). On this alternative, Adam *reasons* to the belief that eventuates in his rejection of (2), as follows. Adam believes, regarding objects that he conceives of *as sofas*, that they are religious artifacts; but he knows that no religious artifact is a piece of furniture made for sitting; and so he concludes that sofas (still conceived as sofas!) are not pieces of furniture made for sitting. Thinking to himself, he might reason like this: "I have seen that sofas are large, overstuffed furniture-like objects; but then again, (I have come to endorse the hypothesis that) sofas are religious artifacts; and no religious artifact is made for the purpose of sitting; so sofas are not large, overstuffed pieces of furniture made for the purpose of sitting." The crucial point is that in all of its

occurrences in this argument ‘sofa’ expresses [SOFA]. And thus we see that one need not assume that Adam’s conception of sofas is idiosyncratic in order to understand why he rejects (2).

But there is a potential objection to this explanation of Adam’s rejection of (2). The objection is that this representation of Adam’s cognitive state with respect to his rejection of (2) makes Adam illogical. After all (the objection continues), sofas just *are* large, overstuffed pieces of furniture made for the purpose of sitting; so an endorsement of the conclusion of the reasoning above, which amounts to an endorsement of a sentence of form (3), makes Adam appear illogical, which he surely isn’t. The reply to this would-be objection will have been anticipated: [SOFA] is distinct from [LARGE, OVERSTUFFED PIECE OF FURNITURE MADE FOR SITTING]. For this reason, the Burgean is perfectly entitled to say that what Adam denies in rejecting (2) (i.e., the particular content he denies) is not equivalent to what he would be denying were he to have rejected

(2\*) Large, overstuffed pieces of furniture made for the purpose of sitting are large, overstuffed pieces of furniture made for the purpose of sitting.

No doubt, anyone who rejects (2\*) is illogical. Not so those who reject (2): as in the case of Adam (as reconstructed here), such a person may simply have false empirical beliefs about sofas (conceived, in the standard way, as sofas).

## 6. Conceptions: A Minimalist Proposal

So far I have argued that the anti-individualist who aims to rebut both Bach’s and Elugardo’s argument can do so, in a unified way, by *identifying* Adam’s conception of sofas with the concept expressed by the English word-form ‘sofa’. But given that this would be to treat Adam as conceiving of sofas as sofas even though he rejects the sentence which ‘captures the meaning’ of the English word ‘sofa’, we can ask: what *is it* to conceive of an object as a sofa, if it isn’t to conceive of it as having the property expressed by (2) itself? If there is no acceptable answer to this question, then it would seem that both Bach and Elugardo are right after all: Adam’s use of ‘sofa’ in his utterance of (3) cannot be rendered as Burge would have us render that use, namely, as expressing [SOFA]. Here I want to reply on behalf of the Burgean anti-individualist by proposing, and then arguing for, what I will call a ‘minimalist’ conception of conceptions.

### 6.1 An Anti-Individualist Approach to Conceptions

There are three components to the anti-individualist’s view of what it is to conceive of something as a sofa.<sup>19</sup> The first involves the identification of the speaker’s conception with the relevant concept:

(6) To conceive of an object  $F$  as a sofa is to employ [SOFA] in thinking of  $F$ .

The second concerns a sufficient condition for employing a given concept on a given occasion:

(7) To count as employing [SOFA] in thinking of  $F$  on a given occasion  $O$ , it is sufficient<sup>20</sup> to apply 'sofa' to  $F$  (when one gives verbal expression to one's thought on  $O$ ), in such a way that one's usage on  $O$  is answerable to the standards of English.<sup>21</sup>

Finally, the anti-individualist can gloss the standards of English regarding the word-form 'sofa':

(8) The English word-form 'sofa' is correctly applied to all and only large, overstuffed pieces of furniture made for the purpose of sitting.

But we must make sure to note that, while (8) is true, nonetheless by the lights of Burgean semantic anti-individualism (8) does not, or at least does not necessarily, capture the conception corresponding to a given speaker's use of 'sofa'. (Recall that Adam for example rejects (2), and so would reject (8) as well.) Thus, while (8) *individuates* what is expressed by 'sofa', it does so in a way that is (so to speak) *external* to the perspective and understanding  $S$  herself has with respect to the word-form (and the concept) in question. Thus when in what follows I speak of (6)-(8) as the characterization which the Burgean anti-individualist proposes for the notion of a speaker's conceiving of an object as a sofa, it is not to be forgotten that (8) itself is meant to specify (not the conception corresponding to the speaker's use of 'sofa', but rather) the *application conditions* of that conception.

But now it might be wondered: if to conceive of something on a given occasion as a sofa is to employ [SOFA] in thinking of it on that occasion, and if all that we are told regarding the employment of [SOFA] is that in order to count as employing this concept on a given occasion it is sufficient that on that occasion one uses 'sofa' in a way that is answerable to standard English usage, does such a view amount to what we can consider to be a characterization of the agent's "epistemic perspective" on things? Hasn't something crucial been lost in this characterization? It would appear so. After all, to talk of how an agent conceives of something is to talk of how things seem to her, how she takes them to be; that much is common ground. But now it would seem that to talk of an agent's use of a given expression does not really get into the person's first person perspective "from the inside" (as it were). And, as already acknowledged, the addition of (8) to the analysis gets us nowhere closer to the "inside" point of view.

From this one thing is clear: given a commitment to the sort of approach exemplified in (6)-(8), there will sometimes (often? usually?) be no non-

trivial way to characterize how a person is conceiving of an object. Let a characterization of an agent's conception be trivial iff it satisfies the following:

(Triv) The characterization of the conception expressed by a speaker's use of an expression *E* employs (= uses or mentions) that very expression in characterizing the conception.<sup>22</sup>

So for example it is trivially true (at least on one natural reading) that to conceive of an object *F* as a dog is to conceive of it in the way appropriate to applying the English word-form 'dog' to it.<sup>23</sup> From this it is clear that a characterization satisfying condition (Triv) is trivial in the same sense that it is trivial to say that 'dogs' refers to dogs, or that 'elm' expresses [ELM].<sup>24</sup>

It is clear that the Burgean anti-individualist who would propose (6)-(8) as an account of what it is to conceive of something as a sofa is offering a characterization that is trivial in this sense. But is a trivial characterization of a speaker's conception *ipso facto* unacceptable? On the contrary, perhaps trivial characterizations are the only ultimately acceptable ones available. After all, such a line is parallel to the so-called 'minimalist' line sometimes taken in the theory of meaning and in the theory of truth (for which see e.g. Horwich 1990 and 1999). Our question, then, is: what reasons do we have for thinking that we are entitled to expect something more, regarding what it is to conceive of an object in a particular way, than what is provided by an analysis that is trivial in the above sense?

## 6.2 Minimalism about Conceptions

I sympathize with those who hope to satisfy the requirement that there must be some non-trivial way to specify what it is to conceive of an object as a sofa. At the same time, we have to be careful in assessing the demand for an informative (non-trivial) characterization of what it is to conceive of something as a sofa. It is unclear that the demand can be met at all (for example, by proponents of TAC); and it would seem that accounts that fail to meet it may have important theoretical virtues for all that.

First, it is unclear that the demand for non-trivial characterizations of an agent's conceptions can be met at all. At the very least, it is unclear that a proponent of TAC can do so. According to TAC, the conception speaker *S* has regarding the object of her thought, *F*, is (partially) illuminated by appeal to *S*'s linguistic behavior with respect to *F*; in particular, to what set of descriptions  $D_1 \dots D_n$  *S* treats (i) as applicable to *F* and (ii) as forming an equivalence class. (*S*'s treating  $D_1 \dots D_n$  as an equivalence class can be understood in terms of *S*'s disposition, at least with respect to all the relevant contexts, to use each of the members of this class interchangeably.) The trouble is that each of the members of  $D_1 \dots D_n$  will itself consist of a series of expressions. And, given TAC, the question can be raised, with respect to *each* semantically-significant expression in the relevant series, regarding what conception corresponds to the speaker's use of *it*. (This process could continue indefinitely,

until such time—if there is such a time—when we reach rock-bottom). From this two points become salient. First, given TAC, it is unclear whether we will be able to use a common language such as English to express anyone's conception of anything: conceptions begin to look inexpressible by anyone except the person whose conception it is (and are correspondingly unintelligible in any language save in that person's idiolect). And second, even if (waiving this first criticism) there are cases in which we can express a person's conception in English, it appears to be an implication of TAC that people will rarely share conceptions of anything. Both of these accusations merit more careful elaboration than I can provide here, so I will conclude with a hypothetical claim: if it turns out that either of these accusations sticks, then even if (in order to rebut the arguments of Bach 1988 and Elugardo 1993) the proponent of anti-individualism will be forced to resort to trivial characterizations of an agent's conceptions, *this would not amount to an objection to the argument from Burge 1986*. For in such a case the alternative is to render conceptions inexpressible/unintelligible or otherwise practically unshareable.

A second point to make against the demand for non-trivial characterizations of an agent's conceptions is this. It would seem that the intuition behind such a demand is of the same kind as an intuition which would undermine right from the start any 'minimalist' theory of meaning or truth. Let minimalism about truth be the claim that truth cannot be characterized save by employing the T-schema

'*P*' is true iff *P*

itself. Now it may be the case that minimalism about truth is unacceptable; but one cannot *establish* this unacceptability simply by pointing out that one can still be perplexed by the question "But what *is* it to employ the predicate 'is true' in a statement of the T-schema?" After all, there are *arguments* that can be offered on behalf of taking a minimalist position on truth; and if these arguments are sound, then the fact that one can still be perplexed by that question is something for which one ought to seek help, not something that one should appeal to in the course of an argument. Similarly for minimalism about conceptions.

With this in mind, then, let us ask what can be said for the admittedly trivial characterization of (6)-(8). What are its virtues? Well, such an account would entail what we might call the conceptions-are-compositional hypothesis, the view that how an agent conceives of a state of affairs is determined by how she conceives of its components. Second, such an account will also enable the theorist to connect conceptions to truth-conditions, by way of (8); and in so doing specify the role an agent's conceptions play in her attempts to reach true belief. Third, such an account will make it a fairly common phenomenon—certainly not a rare occurrence—that, e.g., speakers of English conceive of sofas as sofas. Finally, the minimalist account can provide rather fine-grained *individuation conditions* for conceptions. In particular, concep-

tions corresponding to non-indexical empirical nouns (for example) can be at least as fine-grained as the number of types of such nouns. Take two such nouns  $N_1$  and  $N_2$ ; even if they are co-extensive we can still distinguish the conceptions  $C_1$  and  $C_2$  corresponding to each by appeal to the (admittedly, trivial) facts that  $C_1$  is expressed in  $L$  by  $N_1$  and  $C_2$  is expressed in  $L$  by  $N_2$ . These facts do not capture the agent's conception "from the inside"; but it is precisely this demand, i.e., that we capture conceptions "from the inside", which the minimalist means to call into question.

I do not want to overstate the case to be made on behalf of minimalism about conceptions. It may be that there are other objections to this doctrine. My point is simply that the case which Bach and Elugardo present against the argument from Burge 1986 cannot be settled against Burge's argument merely by pointing out that the anti-individualist is forced to endorse trivial characterizations of what it is to conceive of something as a sofa. The question remains whether this point *ipso facto* constitutes a criticism. If not, then Burge is entitled to treat the relevant use of 'sofa' as expressing the standard 'sofa'-conception, and so what I have presented in sections 4 and 5 as the Burgean response to Bach 1988<sup>25</sup> and Elugardo 1993 is an independently-warranted way to rebut those arguments.

## 7. Conclusion

My argument in defense of Burge 1986 suggests that, if opponents of anti-individualism such as Bach and Elugardo want to object to Burge's argument, they have been aiming at the wrong target. While their target has been The Assumption, we have seen, first, that Burge can at least fight this case to a standstill by insisting that his argument depends not on The Assumption but rather on the 'face value' intuitions called into play by his description of a whole battery of the subject's utterances (including utterance expressing speaker intentions); and second, that in any case Burge's argument can be sustained against the case they make, by appeal to the superiority of the minimalistic conception, as against their traditional conception, of conceptions. Consequently, it is at that minimalist conception that critics ought to be aiming. In particular, more work is needed to address the legitimacy of imposing a non-triviality requirement on accounts of what it is to conceive of an object in a particular way. Since I have given some *prima facie* reasons in support of rejecting such a non-triviality requirement, the onus would appear to be on proponents of the line pursued by Bach and Elugardo.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> I would like to thank audiences at the Central States Philosophical Association 2000 meeting in Lincoln, Nebraska, and at the University of Cincinnati, where I have delivered versions of this paper. Special thanks are owed to Ray Elugardo, John Martin, and Sara Sawyer, for their extensive comments on an earlier version of this paper; and to David Bradshaw, Ben Cordry, Chris Gauker, Larry Jost, Brad Monton, and Tom Polger for helpful conversations of related matters.

Thanks as well to two anonymous referees from this journal; I am particularly indebted to them for their incisive critical comments. Finally, I would like to express gratitude to the University of Kentucky for having granted me a Special Summer Research Fellowship, which provided financial support during the writing of this paper.

<sup>2</sup> See Burge 1977, 1978, 1979a, 1979b, 1981, 1982, 1986, and 1989.

<sup>3</sup> As Ebbs himself makes clear, the attributions warranted by this face value methodology enjoy the *presumption* of truth; but such attributions can be defeated by other factors (for example, by the speaker's explicit disavowal of the intention to be using a word as it is standardly used).

<sup>4</sup> Since the distinction between sentence-tokens and sentence-types will not be significant here, I will stick with the unqualified 'sentence'.

<sup>5</sup> Throughout this paper I will use 'thought' and 'content' interchangeably. (Thus 'thought' is not to be interpreted as designating an episode of thinking, but rather as designating the content of such an episode.)

<sup>6</sup> This is not quite right, since it is not clear how to treat logical connectives, indexical expressions, proper names, and so on; but I will not be focusing on these, so I will disregard this qualification here.

<sup>7</sup> For the purposes of this paper I will be assuming that thoughts, i.e., contents, are composed entirely of concepts, that is, that they have no constituents which are not concepts. Burge himself has explicitly endorsed such a view; in particular, see Burge 1977, 1979b, and 1989 (especially fn. 8, p. 658).

<sup>8</sup> In speaking of a sentence 'of the form' of (1), I mean for what is displayed as (1) to be available to be uttered by both English and Twin English speakers. The same goes for each of the forms that are in common between English and Twin English. For this reason what is displayed in such cases should not be assumed to be an English sentence; if I want to refer to the English version of such a form, I will make this explicit. This point holds throughout the paper.

<sup>9</sup> Suggestions from an anonymous referee were helpful in clarifying the relevant issues.

<sup>10</sup> 'sofa' is in lower-case in "[SO-CALLED 'sofa']" because the concept being designated is one in which the object of thought is being thought about as a so-called 'sofa', not as a so-called [SOFA]. This is the kind of case that calls for the use of the brackets, as a helpful way to designate the sort of metalinguistic concepts at play here. However, nothing much hangs on this notational point.

<sup>11</sup> It might be thought that, if (as I am prepared to concede) Bach has succeeded in showing that The Assumption is false, then he has *ipso facto* succeeded in showing that Burge 1986 fails to establish Burgean semantic anti-individualism. For above I acknowledged that Burge himself holds that in attitude ascriptions of the form '*S*  $\Phi$ s that *p*', 'that *p*' is used to capture the agent's way of thinking of things; and it is precisely this claim that must go when The Assumption goes. However, if what I have to say below is correct, Burge's anti-individualism can be motivated without appeal to The Assumption. Crucial weight will be played by a variety of 'face value' intuitions—only one type of which pertains to how we would report the speech and attitudes of another. The point can be put another way. It is not that we infer (A) from the fact that we would report Adam's attitude with an ascription of form (4); rather, it is the reverse: we would report Adam's attitude with an ascription of form (4) precisely because we have independent grounds for thinking that the sentence occurring obliquely in (4) expresses the content of Adam's belief. (Below I will go over the independent grounds in question.)

<sup>12</sup> I thank an anonymous referee for this journal for stressing that this is how Bach would respond.

<sup>13</sup> The appeal to minimalism will highlight the question-begging status of (T) itself. The point will be this. Burge describes Adam as intending the relevant use of 'sofa' to be a literal use, as conceiving of the relevant objects as sofas, and so as not calling into question the existence of sofas. Given that Adam rejects (2), these descriptions will seem incoherent on the assumption of (T). On the assumption of minimalism, however, these descriptions will seem perfectly coherent with Adam's rejection of (2). So to the extent that minimalism is warranted, so too is Burge's description of Adam—in which case (T) is false.

<sup>14</sup> This version of Bach's position was suggested to me by an anonymous referee for this journal.

<sup>15</sup> This neutrality is maintained only for the time being. I will take up (T) again in 6, where I will argue on independent grounds that the minimalist view of conceptions is superior to the view embodied by (T).

<sup>16</sup> It should be clear from the forgoing that the support that this doctrine will provide is defensive support. The doctrine provides protection of Burge's construal of Adam, which construal appears to be supported by the development of Burge's thought experiment presented above, against those who would dismiss this development as incoherent. I thank an anonymous reviewer for this journal for indicating the need to point this out.

<sup>17</sup> Elugardo's formulation of The Assumption is slightly different; he argues that Burge is wrong to suppose that "an oblique word-occurrence in psychological attributions describes the way the attributee conceptually represents the word's customary reference" (Elugardo 1993, p. 368). However, for the purposes of the present paper this difference in formulation can be considered a mere notational variant on Bach's formulation.

<sup>18</sup> 'designates', rather than 'expresses', since the word is occurring obliquely.

<sup>19</sup> Henceforth I am restricting myself to English: I will be displaying, and will be speaking of, English sentences rather than sentence-forms that can be interpreted as either English or Twin English.

<sup>20</sup> It is not *necessary*, on pain of making [SOFA] available only to speakers of English.

<sup>21</sup> Objection: a subject cannot employ 'sofa' in a way that is answerable to the standards of English on a given occasion if on that occasion she rejects (2), since (2) 'captures the meaning' of the English word 'sofa'. Reply: a speaker using 'sofa' on an occasion can be answerable to the standards of English, e.g., by avowing the intention to be so answerable, even when, as manifested by her rejection of (2), she has false beliefs about the application conditions of 'sofa'. Burge presents Adam in just this way: see 4.2. (I thank an anonymous reviewer for pointing out the need for this paragraph.)

<sup>22</sup> As it is formulated here, (Triv) captures a notion of triviality that can be used to describe cases in which the person characterizing the agent's conception attempts to characterize that conception in a public language common to both (say, English). A more sophisticated version of (Triv) is wanted, in which a characterization could be trivial even when the person characterizing that conception is characterizing it in a different language; to construct such a version we would employ the concept of translation. Since the more sophisticated version would be rather easy to construct (though not so easy to apply!), I will disregard the details here.

<sup>23</sup> I do not claim that the notion of triviality I have in mind is identical to the notion as it is used in logic (where to say that something is trivial is to say that it is a tautology).

<sup>24</sup> I should say that each of these is trivial on one natural reading; but they need not be trivial on all readings. "'Dogs' refers to dogs" is trivially true on the reading on which the very word-form mentioned on the left is the one that is used on the right; "'Elm' expresses [ELM]" is trivially true on the reading on which the very word-form mentioned on the left is the one which is capitalized and put between brackets on the right. There are other readings: consider where I use "'Dogs' refers to dogs" in such a way as to characterize your use of "dogs"; then one might say that the claim that the word-form that is mentioned on the left is the one used on the right is an empirical hypothesis, not something that is settled *a priori* by a theory of semantics—with the result that on such a reading "'Dogs' refers to dogs" is no longer trivial. Despite this, given the context of having assumed anti-individualism we need not dwell on these details here. This is because the doctrine of semantic anti-individualism treats an interpreter attempting to interpret the speech of another speaker of a shared language as *a priori* warranted in presuming the truth of instances of the disquotational schema formulated within that language (recall Ebbs' characterization of anti-individualism); in which case anti-individualists will not treat instances of the disquotational schema, used by one speaker in interpreting another's speech, as straightforwardly empirical hypotheses in the manner presupposed by the objection. I hope to be able to return to this topic on some later occasion.

<sup>25</sup> In this connection it is worth noting the role of minimalism in the response to Bach. Above I suggested that Bach would try to resist the development of Burge's thought experiment according to which Adam utters (+) and (+ +), by arguing that it is incoherent to maintain that someone like Adam conceives of sofas as sofas, given that he rejects (2) and accepts (3). And I pointed out that Bach appears to rely on something like (T) as he makes his case for this incoherence thesis. The appeal to minimalism is meant to highlight the question-begging status of the appeal to (T). It does so by showing that, if minimalism is acceptable, then there is no inconsistency in conceiving of an (actually-existing) object *O* as a sofa (and so taking *O* to be a sofa) while denying that *O* is an overstuffed piece of furniture made for sitting. If this is so, then (T) is false. The upshot is that one cannot appeal to (T) as part of an argument designed to rebut Burge's description (or my development) of Burge's thought experiment; instead, one must argue against minimalism (as I state in my conclusion below).

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