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Perception and World

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Volume: SHORT NOTES, 17 (2019)

Perception and World

Wolfgang Welsch

Summary of *Truth and World* by Wolfgang Welsch

Wolfgang Welsch, *Wahrnehmung und Welt* (Berlin: Matthes & Seitz, 2018), 76 pp., in German. ISBN 978-3-95757-605-7

The author presents the results of decades of his research on perception in summary form.

First he clarifies the main point of the Aristotle's theory of perception: in perception not only our perceptive faculty reaches fulfillment, but so also does the perceived object. The perceptible is oriented towards being perceived, and this objective intention finds its fulfillment in the subjective act of perception. Perceptible world and perceptive faculty belong together.

In contrast, modern thinking has established a strict opposition between man and world. The Cartesian dualism of *res extensa* and *res cogitans* tore both apart. Consequently, human cognition, both sensual and rational, could no longer be regarded as a reliable representation of the objective world, but was declared a purely subjective construction.

In the meantime, however, science has proven this dualism to be erroneous. Because of his rationality, man is not a stranger to the natural world but has emerged from nature together with his reason. And nature is not simply mechanical and spiritless but is spiritually affiliated from the ground up. Continuity between nature and man is the great agenda of contemporary thought.

The fact that our standard perceptions are worldly correct (similar to Aristotle's view) can be justified today by evolutionary theory. Where, however, our perception cannot rely on

evolutionary adaptations, it does often go astray, but we can also clear up and compensate for these errors, from the familiar perceptual illusions to the structures of the micro- and macro-world. And a mere physical view of the world is obviously insufficient. For the aesthetic interpretations of physical givens also represent elements of the world as soon as perceiving beings have appeared on earth. Such perspectives on the world are also part of the world.

After a ramble through the natural and cultural history of perception (including examples of how the arts have shaped our perception), an unusual perspective is tried out. Normally, one asks how the world presents itself in perception. The author tackles the reverse question: what does perception mean for the world? As soon as organisms appear, perception (in whatever elementary form) is not only necessary for their survival but also has effects on the environment. Since organisms lead their lives in the wake of their perceptions, these have practical effects on the environment, influencing and changing it. In this respect, perception is not only a cognitive phenomenon but also an ontological one. Aesthetic acts contribute to shaping the world.

So the reality which we perceive has long since been formed by many previous perceptions. Nature contains, even before all human perception, an almost endless series of animal perceptions and their consequences. Acts of perception and their consequences have long been inscribed in the things we know. Since life entered the world, the perceptual process – of animals as well as of humans – has become the new driver of evolution. The world is changing as a result of perceptual events; perception drives the world forward. This is the significance of perception for the world.

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