

## The Empty Leading the Blind: Kant on Non-veridical Perception

In this essay I aim to provide a Kantian conceptualist account of non-veridical perception with an emphasis on the synthesis of intuitions and categories in apperceptive cognition, resulting in a refutation of nonconceptualism. Drawing support from salient passages of *The Critique of Pure Reason* (CPR), I will elucidate how illusions, dreams, and hallucinations fall succinctly within the purview of Kant's description of reason despite their referential scarcity within the text itself.

To understand how Kant would view dreams and hallucinations, we must first establish how veridical perceptions are treated in the CPR. For Kant, cognition is a synthesis produced by the faculties of sensibility and understanding. Sensibility is our means of acquiring intuitions about the world. Intuitions refer to that which is *given* to us by the senses, intuitions are thus the empirical qualities of objects. Intuitions are immediate representations of one instantiation of an object. We are affected passively by objects by virtue of our sensory receptors. Despite this passivity of affection, however, we also actively engage in cognizing objects to a large degree especially in cases of non-veridical perception. In the *Transcendental Aesthetic* (TAe) we learn that almost all intuitions are cognized *a posteriori*. Kant identifies but two intuitions which are pure *a priori* intuitions: Space and Time; as they are the forms which all phenomena must take (cf. CPR, A22/B36; A39/B55). Space being the form which all outer experience must take as all objects are seen as extensions, and Time being the form of all inner experience as to have any subjective sense of self one must be aware of their own mental history, and the persistence of this history over time.

The TAe determines intuitions as our immediate percepts of objects as given spatiotemporally to the mind. The faculty of sensibility alone, however, can't explain how we form such complex categorizations of, and relations between, objects in the external world. For this, Kant employs the faculty of understanding - under which all intuitions are subject to categorial classification. *The Transcendental Deduction* (TD) outlines the crucial role the understanding plays in cognition. The "categories" are pure *a priori* concepts through which the intuitions become organized and known in conceptual cognition (cf. B137), for Kant intuitions necessitate the categories, as Schulting states:

“we need to presuppose a priori concepts, categories, which cannot be derived from empirical experience. These categories first secure a relation to an

object, and in fact first enable us, by means of an a priori act of synthesis of representations, to conceive of what an object is.” (2016, p.ix)

Kant stresses that the intuitions and the categories are synthesized as one unity in cognition. However, there is debate as to whether the categories must be employed for every case (i.e., conceptualism) or if the intuitions alone suffice for certain cognitions, and the objective validity of objects (i.e., nonconceptualism). The Waterfall illusion is frequently cited as an example of nonconceptual content. Briefly, this is the after-effect observed when one looks at a waterfall for an extended period and then at a stationary object and perceives the object as being simultaneously moving yet stationary. The motion is “somehow superimposed on what you see.”; even though “nothing is instantiating this quality.” (Johnston, 2009, pp.233-4). Crane (1988) states that the intuition presents a contradiction in the content of the experience (cf. p.144). I refute that a contradiction is evidence of there being nonconceptual content, Kant’s categories are *a priori* pure concepts that are essential for cognition to arise (cf. Schulting, 2016, p.x). Categorial distinction facilitates one’s determinate relations to any given object, I suggest instead that this is an issue at the level of the unification of representations;

“the unity of consciousness is that which alone constitutes the relation of representations to an object, thus their objective validity, and consequently is that which makes them into cognitions and on which even the possibility of the understanding rests.” (CPR, B137).

The unity of consciousness has influence over the understanding and has precedence in determining the experience one has of intuitions. The illusory perception of an object being still and in motion is not an example of nonconceptual content, rather the object is being perceived as two dissonant concepts simultaneously - not as no concept at all.

A nonconceptualist can easily dismiss non-veridical perceptions as nonconceptualized intuitions, oddities in experience which bear no relation to anything immediately obvious in virtue of their conceptual blindness. I refute this approach primarily on the grounds that this view is incongruous with Kant’s conception of cognition. The type of cognition with which Kant is concerned is contingent on its capacity to be apperceived. I do think nonconceptual content is a possible occurrence, but I do not think such content would be consciously experienced. I think that representations must be conceptualized if they are to have any cognitive significance,

as “thoughts without content are empty, intuitions without concepts are blind.” (CPR, A51/B75; cf. A95). Whilst support for nonconceptualism can be drawn from the CPR, I believe this to be solely in reference to unconscious perceptual processes. For example, Kant states that without any faculty of understanding, our receptivity would nonetheless entail our being affected by appearances “for intuition by no means requires the functions of thinking.” (CPR, A90/B123). However, Kant does not imply that such intuitions would be cognizable without having been subjected to categorial scrutiny, he elaborates that “the appearances would lack accordance with universal and necessary laws, and would thus be intuition without thought, but never cognition, and would therefore be as good as nothing for us.” (CPR, A111).

An elucidation of blindsight will show that non-conceptualized intuitions cannot seep into experience, unless subjected to categorial determination. Blindsight refers to a patient that has suffered damage to certain stages of their visual pathway and are considered blind. They can, however, accurately ascertain what is being shown to them but only by guessing (cf. Weiskrantz, 1996). They receive the raw sense data into the earlier stages of the visual pathway, but by any subjective measure of awareness they are unconscious of these intuitions. Until they guess, the sensory information (non-conceptualized intuition) is latent, it cannot pass the threshold into consciousness. This is indicative of the understanding supervening upon the intuitions. The guessing necessitates the categorization of the unconscious intuitions, resulting in the intuitions reaching the *cogito*. This is suggestive of a top-down effect of representational cognition.

I believe that the above example is in line with the nonconceptualists’ views that: a) sensibility and the understanding play separate roles; b) intuitions are received prior to thinking; and c) intuitions need not be categorized, understood, or synthesized to be intuitions (cf. Schulting, 2016, pp.x-xi). But I would argue further that the intuitions in such instances as (c) are unconscious, to posit otherwise would be erroneous. The functional role of the synthesis of sensibility and the understanding is crucial to perception, “neither concepts without an intuition in some way corresponding to them, nor intuition without concepts, can yield knowledge” (CPR, A50/B74). Furthermore, we know from the *threefold synthesis* that in visually apprehending an object, one must also be able to reproduce in the imagination, and conceptually recognize, that object. Non-veridical perception suggests that, either the

spontaneous reproductive imagination can present intuitions to the understanding; and/or veridical intuitions can be mis-conceptualized by the understanding (cf. CPR, A97-8). These proposed processes can better explain the aforementioned waterfall illusion - it may be the spontaneous reproduction of motion super-imposed over the occurrent intuition of the still object; or that the continuous repetitive motion primed the understanding to mis-conceptualize the still object as both moving and stationary. These top-down processes offer a view in-line with Kant's own system of synthesis as neither presupposes that the content of experience can be non-conceptual, moreover, both explanations acknowledge that the understanding can at times supervene upon sensibility and that the spontaneous imagination (from which all representations emanate) supervenes upon the understanding.

The nonconceptualists' claim for nonconceptual content as an explanation of non-veridical perception has a sound foundation, for the primary grounds of all experience: Time and Space, are housed *a priori* within the faculty of sensibility. What this foundation is omitting, however, is that these pure forms of entitle a *cogito* to experience to begin with, as to be aware of space and time requires one to have a unity of apperception. Spatiotemporal perception necessitates an empirical apperception, this synthetic unity then leads to an analytical unity of apperception, "it is only because I can combine a manifold of given representations in one consciousness that it is possible for me to represent the identity of the consciousness in these representations itself." (CPR, B133). The validity of this conception is evident in dreams as they can only ever occur in some representation of space and time, i.e., all dreams which are recollectable involve a simulated spatiotemporal world. The givenness of space and time as aspects of dreams hints at their *a priori* nature, but this also allows for the possibility of having an awareness, and this awareness in turn builds to self-awareness.

I propose that this feature is seminal to a correct account of non-veridical perception. The unity of apperception pervades through all perceptions, real or illusory, and it is its underlying persistence which readily illustrates why non-veridical perceptions can be mistaken for veridical to begin with. In cases of hallucination, regardless of the subjective validity of the hallucinated object, the hallucinator is aware that the object is being perceived by them. Heautoscopy is a phenomenon associated with schizophrenia. It is characterized as the appearance of several duplicates of oneself, but the heautoscopy also perceives their self/*cogito* as being located within

one of these illusory bodies. They view their real corporeal body as an imposter among the other doubles (cf. Blanke and Mohr, 2005). Despite the distortions in their self-perception, heautosopic subjects' unity of apperception remains intact, albeit misplaced. This highlights its implicit ties to space and time - even though the self is perceived to be located elsewhere, the hallucination is given spatiotemporally thus allowing the unity of apperception to persist regardless.

The above example demonstrates how one's self-perception can remain undisturbed during non-veridical perceptions, how then might the augmentations to the external world as perceived by the hallucinator come about? I have posited two top-down processes which maintain a Kantian conceptualist explanation of how these unreal intuitions arise. The miscategorization of veridical intuitions by the understanding, however, cannot account for the peculiar ability of the mind to present itself with intuitions, in the absence of external receptivity as evident in dreams. I propose that the spontaneous reproductive imagination possesses this generative function. Beck states, in reference to a private note of Kant's, that the "imagination may produce intuitions in the inspectional but not in the functional sense." (1978, p.45). This point was omitted from the TD, yet Beck contends that this is by no means inconsistent with the system outlined therein. He elaborates, asserting Kant's belief that the veridicality of an experience is not grasped by the nature of representations of objects, as they are identical in dreams and veridical perception (cf. Beck, 1978, pp.47-48). Recent neuroscientific evidence can further ground Kant's assertion that imagined representations are "merely the reproduction of previous outer perceptions" (CPR, B278). Phosphenes are internally generated ultraweak light signals produced by the bioluminescent processes of neuronal cells (cf. Bókkon, 2008), it is hypothesized that these signals allow for the intrinsic perception of mental images and dreams (e.g., Bókkon, Dai and Antal, 2010). Phosphenes are promising candidates for the non-veridical intuitions that are conjured by the reproductive imagination. This hypothesis conforms to Kant's system as affirmed in the refutation of Idealism:

"it does not follow that every intuitive representation of outer things includes at the same time their existence, for that may well be the mere effect of the imagination (in dreams as well as in delusions); but this is possible merely through the reproduction of previous outer perceptions..." (CPR, B278-9).

The phosphenes as malleable intuitions are subjected to categorization by the understanding as is the case in veridical perception.

In conclusion, the persistence of the unity of apperception in non-veridical perception is facilitated by the pure *a priori* forms of Time and Space, this is crucial to understanding dreams and hallucinations as; a) one is always aware of the objects, only their validity may be in question; and b) this eradicates the need for a nonconceptual account of non-veridical perception. The reproductive imagination can generate its own intuitions in cases of non-veridical perception, which are then conceptualized as if given externally to sensibility (as there is no discrepancy between representations constructed veridically or non-veridically). This account of non-veridical perception preserves the intimate relationship between the faculties of sensibility and understanding, without the need to extend the definition of intuition to be more than that originally offered by Kant in the CPR.

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