

Representation, Cognition, & Knowledge

Kant Seminar

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1 The Two-Stem Theory of Mental Representation

1.1 Fundamental Powers of the Mind¹

Receptivity: Power of the mind to receive representations via affection from something distinct from itself

Spontaneity: Power of the mind to generate representations from itself without any external influence

1.2 The Faculties²

Sensibility: passive/receptive; sensory intuitions arise from the affection of sensibility by objects

Understanding: active/spontaneous; conceptual judgments arise via discursive acts of the understanding

Reason: active/spontaneous; forms inferences based on judgments given to it by the understanding

1.3 Mental Representation & the Cognitive Ladder (A320/B376-7)³

Representation: A mental state by means of which the mind is aware of itself or the world⁴

Sensation: A perception “which relates to the subject merely as a modification of its state”

Objective representation: A conscious representation of a mind-independent (in some sense) feature of (empirical) reality

Intuition: An objective representation which “relates immediately to the object and is singular”

Concept: An objective representation which is a “mediate [relation to an object], via a mark, which can be common to many things”

¹ Our cognition arises from two basic sources of the mind, of which the first is to receive the representations (the receptivity of impressions), the second the faculty of cognizing an object through these representations (spontaneity of concepts); through the first an object is given to us, through the second it is thought in relation to that representation (as mere determination of the mind). (A50/B74)

² Our nature is so constituted that our intuition can never be other than sensible; that is, it contains only the mode in which we are affected by objects. The faculty, on the other hand, which enables us to think the object of sensible intuition is the understanding. To neither of these powers may a preference be given over the other. Without sensibility no object would be given to us, without understanding no object would be thought. Thoughts without content are empty, intuitions without concepts are blind (A51/B75)

³ The genus is representation in general (*repraesentatio*). Under it stands the representation with consciousness (*perceptio*). A perception that refers to the subject as a modification of its state is a sensation (*sensatio*); an objective perception is a cognition (*cognitio*). The latter is either an intuition or a concept (*intuitus vel conceptus*). The former is immediately related to the object and is singular; the latter is mediate, by means of a mark, which can be common to several things. (A320/B376-7)

⁴ [representation] cannot be explained at all. For we would always have to explain what representation is by means of yet another representation. (JL 9:34)

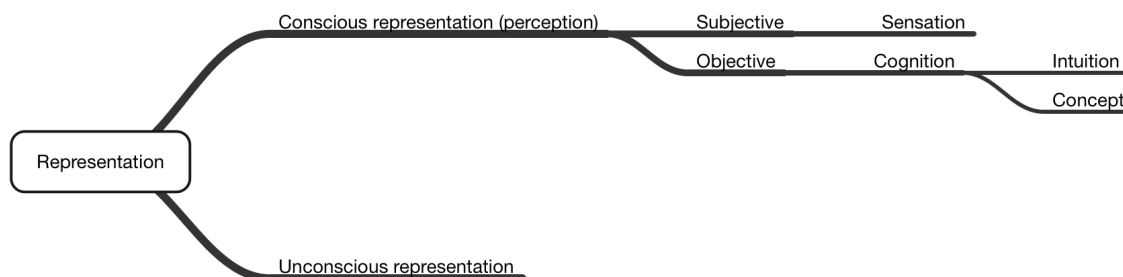


Figure 1: Cognition in the Stufenleiter

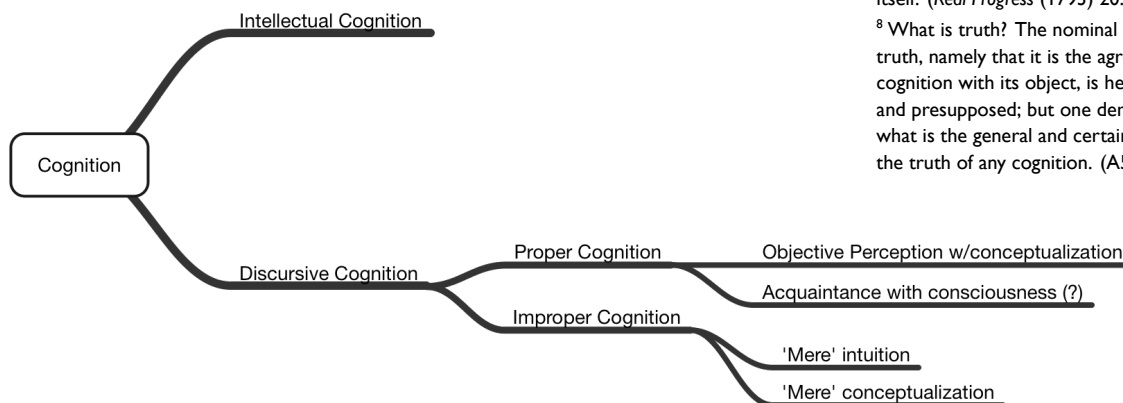
2 Senses of 'Cognition'

1. Conscious representation of an object (CPR *Stufenleiter*)
2. Acquaintance with consciousness (JL *Stufenleiter*)⁵
3. Conscious representation of an object and (at least some of) its general features (i.e. properties)

Proper Cognition [Erkenntnis in eigentlicher Bedeutung]: An objective representation, generated by the cooperation of both faculties, and which, in the case of judgment, may “conform with its object”—i.e. be true^{6,7,8}

QUESTIONS:

1. What distinguishes cognition from knowledge (or other doxastic states)?
2. Is there a general theory of cognition to be had which distinguishes intellectual (divine) and discursive (human) cognition as species of some unified genus?
3. Is there a privileged sense of 'cognition' internal to Kant's account of *discursive* cognition?



⁵ In regard to the objective content of our cognition in general, we may think the following degrees, in accordance with which cognition can, in this respect, be graded:

- The first degree of cognition is: to represent something;
- The second: to represent something with consciousness, or to perceive (*percipere*);
- The third: to be acquainted with something (*noscere*), or to represent something in comparison with other things, both as to sameness and as to difference;
- The fourth: to be acquainted with something with consciousness, i.e., to cognize it (*cognoscere*). Animals are acquainted with objects too, but they do not cognize them. (JL 9:65)

⁶ to bring this synthesis **to concepts** is a function that pertains to the understanding, and by means of which it first provides cognition in the proper sense (A78/B103)

⁷ For a representation to be a cognition (though here I mean always a theoretical one), we need to have a concept and intuition of an object combined in the same representation, so that the former is represented as containing the latter under itself. (*Real Progress* (1793) 20:273)

⁸ What is truth? The nominal definition of truth, namely that it is the agreement of cognition with its object, is here granted and presupposed; but one demands to know what is the general and certain criterion of the truth of any cognition. (A58/B82)

Figure 2: Species of Cognition

3 Knowledge

- Knowledge is a mode of “assent” or “taking to be true” [*Fürwahrhalten*], i.e. it is a kind of propositional attitude held on “objective” and “subjective” grounds⁹

⁹ Assent [*Fürwahrhalten*], or the subjective validity of judgment, has the following three stages in relation to conviction (which at the same time is valid objectively): having an Opinion, Believing, and Knowing. Having an Opinion is Assent with the consciousness that it is subjectively as well as objectively insufficient. If Assent is only subjectively sufficient and is at the same time held to be objectively insufficient, then it is called Believing. Finally, when Assent is both subjectively and objectively sufficient it is called Knowing. Subjective sufficiency is called conviction (for myself), objective sufficiency, certainty (for everyone). I will not pause for the exposition of such readily grasped concepts (A822/B850).

Ground: that from which something can be cognized (BL 24:42)¹⁰

Objective Ground: that which renders probable the truth of a judgment such that it is:

- i. publicly valid (CJ 5:467-8)
- ii. communicable (A820/B848; cf. JL 9:70; 16:390 R2489)
- iii. holds for all (human) reasoners (LL 24:202; cf. A820/B848; A821/B849; CJ 5:461)

Subjective Ground: that which plays an immediate causal role in the subject's psychology to bring them to assent

Knowledge: S's Assent that *p* counts as Knowledge if and only if there exists a ground (*g*) such that:

- i. *g* is a sufficient objective ground that S has.
- ii. *g* is part of the (non-deviant) cause of S's Assent.
- iii. S is in a position to cite *g* as the sufficient objective ground for his Assent, i.e. *g* is cognitively accessible to S
- iv. *p* is true

3.1 Knowledge vs. Cognition

- Knowledge is an *attitude* (form of assent) towards complex conceptual representations (judgments)
- Cognition is a species of *representation*, and may or may not be conceptual
- Cognition need not be assented to
- Cognition is not required for knowledge¹¹
- Cognition may be defective/false¹²

4 Accounts of Cognition

4.1 Watkins & Willaschek¹³

Givenness Condition: an object is given iff it is "present to the mind" such that: (i) the cognition is guaranteed to refer to its object; (ii) makes possible the representation of the particular object and its features¹⁴

- An intuition can refer to its object directly because
 - i. no (objective) representation mediates between the intuitions and its object
 - ii. the intuition depends on the object for its existence
- How does an intuition "make possible" the representation of a particular without thereby representing its properties (and thus satisfying the thought condition)?

Thought Condition: the cognition of the object must render that object intelligible; in discursive beings this is via the "determination" of the object through concepts

- Is this a plausible general account of cognition?

¹⁰ Taking something to be true is an occurrence in our understanding that may rest on objective grounds, but that also requires subjective causes in the mind of him who judges. If it is valid for everyone merely as long as he has reason, then its ground is objectively sufficient, and in that case taking something to be true is called **conviction**. If it has its ground only in the particular constitution of the subject, then it is called **persuasion** (A820/B848)

¹¹ knowledge can have its grounds in something other than cognition. We might know a proposition that refers to a domain of things in either a *wholly negative fashion* or a *positive but very general fashion*, for instance, without having intuition of those things. In such cases, the objectively sufficient grounds of our knowledge *about* those things will be something other than cognition of those things. Examples here might include the negative assent that the things-in-themselves are not in space and time and the positive but very general assent that some thing-in-itself exists and grounds appearances. The objectively sufficient grounds of these assents would be, on the one hand, Kant's arguments establishing that space and time are merely the forms of our receptive sensible intuition, and, on the other hand, the inference that there must be some non-spatio-temporal thing that is responsible for the "matter" of this intuition (see KrV, B XXVI; Prol, AA 04: 315). (Chignell 2014, 577)

¹² a cognition is false if it does not agree with the object to which it is related even if it contains something that could well be valid of other objects" (A58/B83; cf. Meier *Auszug* §92)

¹³ we take cognition to be a representation that determines a given object by attributing general features to it. It thus requires that the object be given (givenness condition) and determined, or thought, through concepts (thought condition). For human beings, objects can be given only through sensibility and thought only by the understanding. (Watkins and Willaschek 2017, 84–85)

¹⁴ an object is given if and only if the object is present to mind so as to guarantee that one's representation refers to it, and to make it possible to represent that particular object and (some of) its non-general features. (Watkins and Willaschek 2017, 89)

- Is this account compatible with Kant's view of mathematical cognition in particular and a priori cognition more generally?
 - Is the Givenness condition best understood in terms of the *existence* of the object of cognition?
- Is there a reason Kant gives for why things as they are in themselves cannot be given?

4.2 Schafer¹⁵

Real Possibility Constraint: Cognition of *X* depends on the degree that we are conscious of its object as something that is *really possible*¹⁶

Determinate Content Constraint: Cognition of *X* depends on the degree to which one is conscious of *X*'s determinate identity^{17,18}

5 The Independence of the Stems

- The two stems of cognition play different functional roles with respect to cognition¹⁹
- The status of intuition as a form of (objective) representation independent of the understanding is unclear
 - **Intellectualism:** All objective representation depends on an act of the understanding
 - **Sensibilism:** Some objective representations do not depend on acts of the understanding

References

- Chignell, Andrew. 2014. "Modal Motivations for Noumenal Ignorance: Knowledge, Cognition, and Coherence." *Kant-Studien* 105 (4): 573–97.
- Schafer, Karl. forthcoming. "Kant's Conception of Cognition and Our Knowledge of Things-in-Themselves." In *The Sensible and Intelligible Worlds: New Essays on Kant's Metaphysics and Epistemology*, edited by Karl Schafer and Nicholas Stang. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Watkins, Eric, and Marcus Willaschek. 2017. "Kant's Account of Cognition." *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 55 (1): 83–112. doi:10.1353/hph.2017.0003.

¹⁵ A cognition, then, is a representation that provides the subject with a consciousness of its object (or objects) as such. And, in particular, it must represent its object (or objects) so as to make us conscious of the determinate identity of this object, while also enabling us to show that this object is really possible. (Schafer forthcoming, 20)

¹⁶ To cognize an object, it is required that I be able to prove its possibility (whether by the testimony of experience from its actuality or a priori through reason). (Bxxvi)

¹⁷ Understanding is, generally speaking, the faculty of cognitions. These consist in the determinate relation of a given representation to an object. An object, however, is that in the concept of which the manifold of a given intuition is united. (B137)

¹⁸ If we separate [intuitions from concepts], then we have representations that we cannot relate to any determinate object (A258/B314)

¹⁹ Objects are given to us by means of sensibility, and it alone yields us intuitions; they are thought through the understanding, and from the understanding arise concepts (A19/B33).