Animals and Objectivity

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# Introduction

Observation of the behavior of non-rational animals (hereafter "animals") reveals a rich and varied world. Whilst the natural philosophers of the seventeenth and eighteenth were well aware of this fact, there was a tendency to downplay the level of sophistication inherent in animal behavior, or to the extent that it was acknowledged, to credit it to the amazing powers of nature in yielding mechanisms with such complexity.[[1]](#footnote-1)

Kant, along with other figures in the German rationalist tradition, is laudable for not falling into the trap of construing animals as mere machines.[[2]](#footnote-2) Kant is on record in various places as saying that animals have sensory representations of their environment (CPJ 5:464; LM 28:449; cf. An 7:212), that they have intuitions (LL 24:702), and that they are acquainted with objects though they do not cognize them (JL 9:64–5).[[3]](#footnote-3)

Without further argument I am simply going to assume that Kant holds the position which seems apparent from these texts, viz. that animals enjoy mental representations, and that the postulation of their existence is required to explain the rich variety of behaviors manifested by the denizens of the animal kingdom. The existence of such representations does not commit Kant to thinking that animals other than humans possess the faculties of reason or understanding, or that they possess any form of spontaneity or synthesis beyond that of empirical association.

However, the passages that I have cited might be thought to leave open the possibility that the mental states which animals enjoy are not objective, but rather are merely necessary for animals to successfully navigate and survive in their surroundings. For example, one might object that, far from achieving objective representation of their environment, animals merely have sensory registrations of it. This distinction between objective representation and sensory registration needs sharpening, but as a first pass we might simply use Kant's terms and distinguish between representation of an object, and representation merely as modification of the subject (A320/B376-7). What, however, does this distinction come to?

Take, for example, Gareth Evans' discussion of objectivity in his 1980 "Things Without the Mind." He says,

We can imagine a series of judgements ‘Warm now’, ‘Buzzing now’, made by a subject in response to changes in his sensory state, which have no objective significance at all. But we can imagine a similar series of judgements, prompted by the same changes in the subject’s sensory state, which do have such a significance: ‘now it’s warm’, ‘Now there’s a buzzing sound’---comments upon a changing world. What is involved in this change of significance? (Evans ([1985](#ref-evans1985)), 249)

Though Evans is here talking about the objectivity of *judgment*, the same issue seems to arise for perceptual *experience* since, even at the level of experience, there seems to be a difference between a mere succession of sensory registrations and perception of *objects*.

While the details of Evans's proposal may be novel a similar view was expressed by Condillac. He presents us with a thought experiment in which we imagine a statue capable only of olfactory sensory states.

Our statue being limited to to the sense of smell its cognitions cannot extend beyond smells. It can no more have ideas of extension, shape or of anything outside itself, or outside its sensations, than it can have ideas of colour, sound or taste...The statue therefore will be rose smell, pink smell, jasmine smell, violet smell, according to the flower which stimulates its sense organ. In a word, in regard to itself smells are its modifications or modes. It cannot suppose itself to be anything else, since it is only susceptible to sensations. (Condillac ([1930](#ref-condillac1930)), 3).

Like Evans, Condillac asks what might distinguish the statue's capacity for states such as mere olfactory sensation, from states which present to the subject some aspect of the physical world "beyond" the subject.[[4]](#footnote-4) Given that Kant denies non-rational beings any capacity for judgment or reason, and thus any cognitive faculty beyond that of sensibility, the worry that animals might only enjoy a subjective play of sensations seems a real one. Unfortunately, Kant's exact views on these matters are difficult to ascertain, not least in part because his discussion of animal cognition is scattered and unsystematic. For this reason my discussion will be somewhat speculative, and examine what Kant could plausibly say given his various commitments regarding the nature of cognition and the cognitive faculties.

Despite these difficulties, there are two central reasons for being interested in Kant's views on the kinds of objective states (if any there be) attainable by animals. First, thinking about Kant on animal cognition allows a view of cognition, as it were, "from below", whereas in contrast most of Kant's time is spent at a rather high point of abstraction "from above", dealing with the cognitive faculties of reason and the understanding. This alternative viewpoint gives us a better sense of what is gained as one moves up the cognitive ladder to rationality. Second, while I am rather pessimistic that Kant's views concerning the animal mind are plausibly correct, they may nevertheless provide us with an interesting picture of the limits and underpinnings of objective cognition.[[5]](#footnote-5) Hence, even if it turns out that the denizens of the animal kingdom are far more cognitively sophisticated than Kant would admit, he could still offer us with a baseline for understanding what is required to have a mind capable of grasping the world in any fashion at all.

With these two points in mind, I aim in this paper to examine more closely the question of whether animals could ever, on Kant's account, enjoy objective representational states of their environment. The suggestion that they enjoy intuitions of their environment suggests that they could attain at least some minimal level of objective representation, and indeed, it would seem necessary that they do in order to explain all of the forms of complex and sophisticated behavior apparent in the animal kingdom.

One central difficulty with such an interpretive position is that it seems to run directly counter to Kant's discussion of the conditions under which a mental state can be said to enjoy a relation to an object. For example, in the B-deduction Kant says,

The understanding is, to speak generally, the faculty of cognitions. This consists in the determinate relation of given representations to an object. But an object is that in the concept of which the manifold of a given intuition is united.

The common reading of this passage has it that Kant here proposes a necessary condition on representing any feature of a mind-independent reality.[[6]](#footnote-6)

If the standard reading of B137 is correct then it looks like we're faced with one of two options. First, Kant might be incoherent in the expression of his own views, for he both allows at least the possibility of objective representation in animals, and denies that they have anything more than sensibility, and thus are incapable of the kind of synthesis necessary to generate relations to an object as discussed in B137. Second, Kant might not really have meant to allow that animals have objective representations. In this case he at best allows them phenomenal consciousness (sentience) and allows that their conscious states co-vary with their environment so as to explain their capacity to reliably differentially respond to that environment.

In this paper I argue that we need not accept either of these alternatives. I have two aims. First, I hope to explain the sense in which Kant could hold that an animal could have states of "objective perceptual awareness", as I have previously termed them. Second, I provide a positive articulation of the sense in which Kantian animals might represent their environment. This is not to say that Kant has a correct theory of animal cognition, but rather that he articulates the basics of an attractive view of the difference between rational and non-rational cognition of the world, while allowing that animals, in possessing the latter, may also be said to be genuinely aware of their world, rather than just being merely sensitive to it.

# Some Varieties of Objectivity

In calling a representation "objective" there are several things we might mean. It will be helpful for understanding Kant's own conception of objectivity that we have these other conceptions in hand.

Perhaps the most commonly notion of objectivity concerns what we might construe as the methodological underpinnings of inquiry and judgment.[[7]](#footnote-7) Gideon Rosen provides a helpful characterization of this notion.

Methodological objectivity, as we may call it, is primarily a feature of inquiries or methods of inquiry, and derivatively of the people who conduct inquiries and the judgments they form as a result. To a first approximation, we call an inquiry 'objective' when its trajectory is unaffected in relevant ways by the peculiar biases, preferences, ideological commitments, prejudices, personal loyalties, ambitions, and the like of the people who conduct it. (Rosen ([1994](#ref-rosen1994)), 283)

A judgment, and by extension, the representations that constitute it, is objective in this sense just in case it is free from bias, preference, or other subjective colorings. While this is, I think, the most common notion of objectivity in use, it is not wholly relevant to our current question. The visual system, for example, of some animal is not going to be captured by a faulty ideology or wishful thinking. However, there is, as I shall argue, an important sense in which an animal's cognitive system is skewed by its preferences and biological imperatives of various kinds. For Kant, an animal, unlike a rational being, is not free in the employment of its representations. It must instead employ them in the service of biological and contextual imperatives that may lead to unavoidable distortions in the animal's cognitive relation to the world.

At work in the notion of methodological objectivity is that of a perspective. One's objectivity is jeopardized when one allows features of one's perspective to inform or otherwise color one's evaluations of how things are. This might provide us with the basis for a narrower conception of objectivity, one that is measured simply according to the degree to which the content of a representation reflects the subject's perspective. We might further understand the notion of a 'perspective' here in terms of context-dependence, and context-dependence in terms of the relationship between a token representation's correctness conditions and the context in which that representation occurs. A representation would thus be 'perspectivally subjective' if its correctness conditions depended entirely on the context of its occurrence. This is quite clear in the case of indexical representations such as 'I', 'now', 'here', and so forth. The correctness conditions for these representations of the world depend on the context in which they occur, which contrasts markedly with representations such as 'Colin McLear', 'June 14, 1987 8:43 am', '41.2833° N, 70.1000° W', etc.[^9] If objectivity in representation is something that is attained by moving from the sole employment of representations whose correctness conditions depend on their context of occurrence to the employment of representations which do not exhibit such context dependence, then one question we could ask is whether animals are capable of enjoying representational states or events whose content is context-independent, at least to some degree.

Concomitant with the notion of context-dependence, a representation that is objective, in the sense of its correctness conditions being maximally independent of context, is also one that is non-parochial or in principle 'shareable' or communicable with other beings who otherwise have radically different ways of obtaining and conceptualizing information about the world. There are thus two distinguishable but linked conceptions of perspectival objectivity. The first is that of context-independence, and the second that of communicability.[[8]](#footnote-8)

At the basis of the conception of a representation as perspectival is the notion of its having a correctness condition, i.e. of the representation's being accurate or inaccurate, true or false. In the case of a perspectival representation, its correctness condition depends on its context of deployment. But we might also articulate here a further and yet more basic notion of objectivity, one which prescinds from the issue of context-dependence and instead focuses more generally on the relation between a correctness condition and its subject matter. According to what we might call "metaphysical objectivity" then, a representation is objective just in case merely being in a state with the relevant content, or enjoying the relevant event with that content, is not itself sufficient for the content of the event or state's being correct.[[9]](#footnote-9)

Finally, perhaps the most minimal notion of objectivity, presupposed even by the metaphysical notion just described, is that of a representation's having correctness conditions at all. 'Representational objectivity' is thus that by which a state or event could be assessed for accuracy or truth, regardless of whether or not it's content has a constitutive relation to that which it represents. This is precisely that which differentiates the pure qualitative "feel" of a visual sensation of color from the notion of the color as representing the "look" of a thing under certain conditions.

The four notions of objectivity described above, from most to least demanding, might each (or all) be subsumed under a more demanding fifth notion, which I'll term "reflective objectivity." According to this notion, a representational state is objective just in case it meets some condition C, one is in a position to articulate that condition, and one knows (or is in a position to know, tacitly or explicitly) that the representation or judgment meets that condition. This notion of objectivity is by far the most demanding, as it requires the subject to not only meet some condition, but be in a position to reflectively grasp that they so meet this condition. Only very sophisticated cognitive beings are going to be able to do this, and certainly no being of the kind, which Kant considers to be a non-rational animal (and perhaps no being with a language) is going to be able to meet this condition. I'll return to this in the next section.

With these five different varieties of objectivity in mind, I next move to Kant's discussion of objectivity, construed as a "relation to an object", and made possible by virtue of the deployment of conceptual categories by a subject with the capacity for reflective self-consciousness (i.e. Kant's "unity of apperception").

# Objectivity & Relation to an Object

As I noted in the introduction, Kant's discussion of objective representation in §16 of the B-deduction presents a prima facie challenge to the possibility of objective representation in non-discursive beings. Let's look at the relevant passage in full.

The understanding is, to speak generally, the faculty of cognitions. This consists in the determinate relation of given representations to an object. But an object is that in the concept of which the manifold of a given intuition is united. Now, all unification of representations requires the unity of consciousness in the synthesis of the same [i.e. the representations. It follows that the unity of consciousness alone establishes *ausmacht*] the relation of representations to an object, their objective validity, and thus their becoming cognitions. (B137)

The argument consists of three premises and a conclusion:

1. Cognition consists in the determinate relation of a given representation to an object.
2. An object is that in the concept of which the manifold of a given intuition is united.
3. All unification of representations requires the unity of consciousness in the synthesis of those representations.
4. The unity of consciousness alone establishes the relation of representations to an object resulting in a cognition.

The validity of the argument has been disputed.[[10]](#footnote-10) However, what interests me here is the sense in which Kant construes representation of an object in terms of cognition and the "unity" of intuition. To that end, in what follows I examine premises (1) and (2) and explain what I take Kant to mean by arguing that cognition requires the unity of consciousness in establishing the unity of the "manifold of a given intuition" of an object.[[11]](#footnote-11) I shall argue that, contrary to several recent interpreters, Kant does not here specify necessary conditions on the generation of an intuition -- viz. that the subject of the intuition possess a spontaneity capable of synthesizing her sensory representations. Rather, Kant is specifically concerned with the conditions for *cognition*, which is a particular kind of cognitive achievement. While versions of this argument have been made elsewhere, unclarities and misunderstandings remain.[[12]](#footnote-12) I address some of these below.

## Premise One: Cognition vs. Acquaintance

In the *Jäsche Logic* Kant defines cognition in terms of the consciousness of the grounds of difference and identity in one's representations (JL 9:64-5). He distinguishes this from mere "acquaintance" [*noscere*; *kennen*], in which the subject is able to differentially discriminate between objects or their parts, but cannot account for the basis by which they do so (JL 9:64-5; FS 2:59-60). It is thus one thing to differentially discriminate, it is another thing to be able to articulate the basis of such discrimination.[[13]](#footnote-13) If this is correct, then we can read Kant's use of "cognition" in premise (1) as claiming that a subject's awareness of the way in which differently discriminated representations differ (and thus their objects) consists in relating such representations to specific objects. Premises (2)-(3) claim that this requires the unity of apperception, resulting in the conclusion that the unity of apperception is required for awareness of the grounds of identity and difference amongst a subject's representations.

Kant's distinction between acquaintance and cognition might seem implausible, for the reason that it seems to postulate an ability to brutely discriminate without any awareness of what it is that moves one to do so.[[14]](#footnote-14) For example, Kant might seem to be saying that one could discriminate between red and green colored objects without being aware of their respective colors. However, Kant need not be taken as making such a claim, and is in fact indicating an important fact about ways in which a subject's sensitivities to incoming information might lead to knowledge.

Consider, for example, the famous "chicken sexer", whose ability to sort male from female chicks (a form of reliable differential discrimination) is done without the subject's ability to articulate the means by which they make these discriminations. We need not deny to the sexer some phenomenal awareness of the bases of their discriminations, and we certainly cannot deny their sensitivity to the information upon which they are basing their choices. What chicken sexers lack is any further capacity to integrate that sensitivity (and thus the information to which they are sensitive) in the variety of ways that are constitutive of rational thought and action.[[15]](#footnote-15) Specifically, the sexer's perceptual sensitivity lacks several features characteristic of those cognitive states which have a more explicit connection to propositional attitudes like belief and knowledge.[[16]](#footnote-16) First, the sexer's sensitivity to the sex of a chicken is not something that comes to them by means of any inference.[[17]](#footnote-17) The sexer "just knows" the sex. As it turns out there are certain perceptual cues that a sexer is picking up on, and to which they can be trained to be sensitive.[[18]](#footnote-18) But their sensitivity to these cues far outruns their ability to articulate them as the basis to which they are responding in particular cases. This doesn't mean that those cues are not showing up in the subject's experience. It just means that they need not be able to explicitly articulate those features that *do* show up as the basis by which they render their selective verdicts (e.g. *this one* is a male, *that one* is a female).

The cognitive states of the sexer with regard to their sortal judgments are also what we might term "attitudinally inflexible".[[19]](#footnote-19) In contrast to the content of a propositional attitude, which can in principle be the object of various other attitudes (e.g. one could hope, fear, believe, or desire that Barack Obama is president of the U.S.), the information on the basis of which a chicken sexer renders their verdict seems to come in only one way -- as fit for a kind of conviction that something is the case.

Thus far I've argued that Kant construes "relation to an object" in B137 in terms of *cognition* of it, where this in turn should be understood as representation of features which are the basis of discriminations of similarity and difference. I've suggested that, in contrast, acquaintance is the mere sensitivity to similarity and difference without the ability to recognize or articulate the basis by which one renders such verdicts. I've argued that this need not be construed as some sort of brute sensitivity, but rather one which is importantly different and more basic than the ability to articulate such differences. One example of this is the chicken sexer's ability to sort male from female chicks on the basis of fine-grained perceptual discriminations that outrun the subject's capacity for explicit articulation.

Another example of sensitivity to similarity and difference that might also be relevant to Kant's distinction between cognition and acquaintance is the way in which a subject might be sensitive to features of an object without being sensitive to them as *properties* of the object. For example, one might be sensitive to color in the sense that it is used to discriminate an object from others (or an object from its background) without the subject thereby employing a representation of the object's color as the relevant feature by which it performs the discrimination. John Campbell describes such a scenario as follows:

Recall the kind of test for colour vision that consists of a number of variously coloured dots of various sizes in a single display. The colouring of the dots may be so organized that someone with ordinary colour vision can quite plainly see a figure, say the numeral 5, picked out in some one colour, say gold. For anyone without colour vision, though, all that they can see is an array of variously shaded and variously sized dots. So an ability to identify that there is a number 5 in the array provides good evidence that the subject has ordinary colour vision. Someone who can see the figure 5 in this kind of display need not, however, be capable of visually attending to the colours of things; they may not realize that there is such a thing as colour at all. This subject is attending only to the object, the number 5, not to the characteristics which allowed him to discriminate the object. Such a person might, for all that I have said so far, be unable to report the colours of objects, or to match different objects which are the same colour. ... We can draw a distinction, then, between colour as an object-defining characteristic, in the sense in which it is only the colours of the blobs in the display that define the figure 5, and colour as a characteristic to which the subject attends.[[20]](#footnote-20)

Hence the fact that a feature may be "object-defining" in Campbell's sense is compatible with the subject's being unable to identify that feature as that in virtue of which the object is so differentiated, nor even to represent that feature as a general property, one which could be had by other objects or lacked by this object on other occasions.

The distinction between cognition and acquaintance also allows us to address one objection to the claim that, for Kant, animals could have intuitions of their environment. Stefanie Grüne has argued that a necessary condition of enjoying intuitions, understood as objective representations, is that they be conscious. Animals, according to Grüne's interpretation, do not have conscious states, hence animals cannot have intuitions. Grüne cites three reasons for her position.[[21]](#footnote-21) First, she argues that it is not clear that Kant allows animals inner sense (e.g. FS 2:60; LM 28:277), and possession of an inner sense is a necessary condition of having any intuition at all. Second, she argues that Kant's letter to Herz of 1789 shows that "even though Kant [here] allows animals some kind of consciousness of sensible representations, this kind of consciousness is not sufficient for the having of intuitions".[[22]](#footnote-22) Finally, she argues that, even if an animal could be conscious of its sensory representations, they could not display the unity necessary for achieving the status of intuition. I take these points in turn.

The first point is easily dealt with. As Grüne herself admits, the relevant texts are from Kant's pre-Critical period, at which time he seems to conflate inner sense with apperception. Once this distinction is made it is not at all obvious that Kant wants to deny inner sense to animals, but rather only the capacity for self-reflection and self-reference.[[23]](#footnote-23)

Concerning the second point, one should first recognize as Grüne herself does, that in at least three places Kant allows for the existence of unconscious intuition (7:135; 16:88; 23:19.). Second, it isn't clear that Kant things of consciousness as an all or nothing property of a mental state. For example, Kant says in an important footnote in the Paralogisms discussion of the B-edition that,

Clarity is not, as the logicians say, the consciousness of a representation; for a certain degree of consciousness, which, however, is not sufficient for memory, must be met with even in some obscure representations, because without any consciousness we would make no distinction in the combination of obscure representations; yet we are capable of doing this with the marks of some concepts (such as those of right and equity, or those of a musician who, when improvising, hits many notes at the same time). Rather a representation is clear if the consciousness in it is sufficient for a consciousness of the difference between it and others. To be sure, if this consciousness suffices for a distinction, but not for a consciousness of the difference, then the representation must still be called obscure. So there are infinitely many degrees of consciousness down to its vanishing. (B414-15)

Kant makes two important points here. First, he argues that we should not equate consciousness with clarity, as we need to appeal to consciousness to explain an organism's discriminatory behavior even if that organism is incapable of having clear representations. Second, Kant says that clarity cannot consist simply in differential discrimination (as it is in Wolff's work). It has to instead be correlated with an awareness of the basis of a correct discrimination. In other words, a being with clear representation has to represent not only that two (or more) things (or properties) are distinct, but what it is about them that is the basis of that distinctness. This point corresponds very nicely to Kant's distinction between acquaintance and cognition in the *Jäsche Logic*. Hence there is nothing about Kant's account of consciousness per se that would require us to deny that animals have intuition that is to some degree conscious.

Finally, concerning the issue of unity, Grüne argues that the objective character of an intuition is understood in terms its being a kind of *intentional state* (Grüne ([2009](#ref-grune2009)), 40), brought about via acts of (conceptually) rule-guided synthesis on non-intentional sensory states. Grüne bases this claim in part on the canonical '*Stufenleiter*' passage in which Kant distinguishes different types of representation (A320/B376–7). However, she also cites (41) an important note from Kant’s *Nachlaß* where he says,

What is an object? That whose representation is a sum of several predicates belonging to it. The plate is round, warm, made of tin, etc. Warm, round, being made of tin, etc., are not objects, although the warmth, the tin, etc., indeed [are]. An object is that in the representation of which various others can be thought as synthetically combined… (R6350, 18:676)

According to Grüne, relation to an object thus consists in the representation of particular features as unified in one subject. Neither this subject (nor its features) need exist (42-3). Grüne's position is that 'obscure' [*dunkel*] concepts are necessary for the kind of unity characteristic of intuition.

While I think it plausible to construe intuition as a complex representation, I don't see why complex representation per se must depend entirely on the understanding or the categories (and thus on synthesis). It is true that Kant construes a particular *kind* of unifying function -- viz. 'combination' [*Verbindung*] -- as coming about solely via spontaneous mental acts of 'synthesis', but this means of generating complexity can only be read in a narrow manner, since Kant does not include association in the category of synthetic acts, and association would seem to allow for the generation of representationally complex states. Nor is it either textually or philosophically obvious that the kind of representational capacities needed to represent (e.g.) color and shape at a particular spatial region require synthesis, so long as we are careful to distinguish such representation from that of predication/attribution or the representation of some *thing* as the subject of properties, and which occupies the region (on this more below).

Finally, there is reason to wonder whether the notion of unification to which Grüne appeals in the generation of intuition is really itself one brought about by a faculty of spontaneity, and so a faculty which animals lack. Grüne seems willing to characterize possession of the primitive capacity for grasping a the content of an intuition as a unity in “wholly non-intellectual terms” (Grüne ([2009](#ref-grune2009)), 202, note 16). She suggests that the possession of such a capacity should be understood as the cognitive analogue of the possession of the capacity to digest meat (ibid). But if this is correct, then it would seem that we’re no longer talking about spontaneity as Kant conceives of it, and thus no longer talking about the capacity that, according to Kant, is something lacking in animals and which makes the grasp of higher cognitive unities possible.

So much then for explanation of the first premise. The recognition of the basis of similarity and difference does not, however, exhaust Kant's conception of objectivity, for he goes on, in the second premise, to argue that an object is that "in the concept of which a manifold is united" and seems to have the kinds of "unity" in mind characteristic of the categories. It is to this issue that we now turn.

## Premise Two: The Unity of Intuition

Two examples of the kind of cognitive unity that Kant had in mind, and which are especially illustrative of the cognitive limitations facing a subject lacking the categories and the capacity of judgment, are those of <cause> and <substance>.

Without the concept <substance>, a cognizer is unable to represent the relational property of *inherence*, and thus unable to represent a property instance as "belonging to" a subject of inherence. Such a cognizer could represent a particular property instance at a place or time (e.g. *redness there now*), but not as instanced *in some subject* which itself exists at that place or time. Relatedly, without the concept <cause> a cognizer is limited in the extent to which she can identify or reidentify an object, because she cannot appeal to causal connections between a thing's properties (or between the thing and its properties) in order to explain that (e.g.) a rose which blooms today is the same as the green vine which grew last week.[[24]](#footnote-24)

The lack of such categorial concepts in animals is not simply a lack of ability to make particular kinds of *judgment*. It is plausible I think to read Kant as denying to animals the ability to have particular kinds of *experiences* (in our contemporary sense of that term, not Kant's technical sense). The reason for this denial is that Kant is clear, especially in the second edition of the first *Critique*, that imagination plays a role in relating intuitions (or the contents thereof) to one another, and that this is supposed to be governed, in adult rational humans, by a non-judgmental application of the categories (e.g. A101, A119, B151ff).[[25]](#footnote-25)

If the above is correct, then the intuitive sensory representations of animals, and thus their perceptual experience, are themselves going to be limited in the various ways related to the cognitive roles of the various respective categories. I have here elaborated what I take to be two absolutely central aspects of adult human experience -- viz. (i) the perceptual awareness of the subjects of the properties one perceives and (ii) the causal connectedness of such a subject, both to its ever changing properties, and to other things and their properties. In the next section I discuss what remains for an animal of objective representation when such cognitive resources have been excluded.

# Objectivity without Objects

So far I have argued that while animals may be acquainted with objects, they cannot cognize them, where this means that while they can represent features of things so as to reliably discriminate between objects that are similar or different, they cannot represent the bases of their discriminations of similarity and difference. I further claimed that without the concepts of <substance> and <cause> at their disposal, animals would be unable to predicate properties as belonging to objects, and would be unable to utilize anything more than the most basic principles of spatial and temporal contiguity in making determinations as to the identity of objects in their environment.

What then can be said of sensory representation in such animals? According to one prominent account, with which I largely agree, animals may nevertheless be said to be perceptually aware of particulars in their environment.

the non-human animal (assuming it lacks concepts but has some way of representing space) that perceives its environment represents the world in the sense that it has relational mental states that present it with parts of the world -- it does not have an inner display of non-intentional, raw sensations. However, it does not represent an objective world in the sense that it does not represent the world as a law-governed complex that it thinks of at a detached level as existing unperceived/independently of it. In Kantian terms, this means that it cannot be self-conscious.[[26]](#footnote-26)

Allais seems to conceive of the perceptual states of animals as (for Kant) objective in the sense that they are not 'of', and do not present, mere phenomenal qualitative states of the animal, as akin to pains, tickles, or afterimages. Instead, animals are presented in outer sensory experience with spatially located particulars. There are at least two ways of construing Allais' point here. According to the first, animal states are objective because they attain what I termed above 'representational' objectivity -- i.e. they have correctness conditions in virtue of representing particular sensory qualities as being present in particular spatial expanses at specific locations in space. This is in contrast with 'raw' sensations, which entirely lack correctness conditions. There is no correctness condition integral to having the sensation of e.g. pain -- there is just the pain.[[27]](#footnote-27)

According to the second way of construing Allais' point, the sensory experiences of animals are objective in virtue of that which they immediately present to consciousness.[[28]](#footnote-28) On this way of construing things, whether or not the sensory states of an animal possess correctness conditions, the key issue is what they immediately present to the consciousness of the animal, where consciousness is understood in at least a phenomenal sense of what it is like to be the animal. In terms then of *what is presented*, in the subjective case there is only a 'raw' sensation, whose nature and existence depends entirely on the subject having it. In the objective case what is presented is a public spatial particular, whose nature and existence is (at least to some degree) independent of the subject enjoying the experience.[[29]](#footnote-29) Call this notion of the objectivity 'presentational' objectivity.

Here it is tempting to reconcile representational with presentational objectivity and assume that what explains presentational objectivity is precisely that one's states are at least representationally objective, for (one might argue) it is the possession of correctness conditions that distinguishes purely qualitative phenomenal states from intentional states that are 'directed at' the world. In the case of sense perception, it is plausible that it is at least partially in virtue of having spatial form that one's sensory states take on their representational significance.[[30]](#footnote-30) One would then have the resources to explain the objectivity of animal perception as follows.

The sensory states of animals, let us assume, in virtue of having spatial form, thereby possess correctness conditions, and thus representational objectivity. Since what is presented to the subject in such an experience is itself a public spatial particular, the experiential state also possesses at least some degree of metaphysical objectivity -- the correctness conditions which specify the particular do not themselves make it the case that the particular is the way that it is (or possesses related spatial features, such as relative location, motion, etc.). Finally, because Kant regards spatial features as related to the form of intuition, and thus as independent of any specific sense modality by which they may be known, the properties which are experienced by an animal are not entirely parochial, and thus allow for at least some degree of perspectival objectivity.

This picture allows that there is a difference between 'raw' sensation and intuition, that intuition comes about via some kind of a priori imposition of spatial form on sensory matter (here we might speak in contemporary terms of cognitive processing), and that the resulting experience be one which explains the animal's (potentially very fine-grained and sophisticated) abilities to differentially discriminate between objects and track them over time for, among other things, the purposes of satisfying the animal's biological needs.

As attractive as this picture of perceptual objectivity is, I have doubts about its applicability to Kant's conception of animal representation. These doubts stem primarily from the difficulties that come with construing sensory representations, in a being lacking spontaneity, as possessing correctness conditions, and thus as being representational states in our contemporary sense of the term. Kant's primary notion of a correctness condition is of a truth condition, and judgments, for Kant, are the vehicles of truth by 'relating' representations in one consciousness.

The unification of representations in a consciousness is judgment...thinking is the same as judging or as relating representations to judgments in general (Pr §22 4:304; cf. JL §17 9:101; LL 24:928).

What kinds of representations are related in one consciousness? Kant specifically has concepts in mind here (CJ §35 5:287; cf. B146, B283; JL 9:101; LL 24:928). Judgments consist of concepts that, due to an act of the mind in which they are unified in one consciousness, are brought together to form truth-bearing contents (I leave open how exactly the transcendental unity of apperception accomplishes this). We may contrast the logical relations in which representations stand in an act of objective judgment to the manner in which representations are related in a sensory event or act. In sensory experience representations are related to each other non-logically, and merely as to their form in either space or time. Hence, their logical combination is not given, but rather made. This is, I think, Kant's point in §15 of the second edition version of the Transcendental Deduction. There Kant says,

a manifold's combination [*Verbindung*] as such can never come to us through the senses; nor, therefore, can it already be part of what is contained in the pure form of sensible intuition. For this combination is an act of spontaneity by the power of representation; and this power must be called understanding, in order to be distinguished from sensibility (B129--30).

If the vehicle of truth is judgment and judgment requires the combination of representations (concepts) in one consciousness, and such combination can never be given in or otherwise accomplished by sensibility, then it seems that sensibility alone could never yield representations which possess a truth value.[[31]](#footnote-31)

However, even if the above argument is correct, one might nevertheless attempt to argue that intuition possesses correctness conditions of its own, e.g. accuracy conditions, which should not be assimilated to the kind of correctness conditions indicative of judgment (i.e. truth conditions).[[32]](#footnote-32) Unfortunately, I do not see any positive textual basis upon which to hang such an assertion. Kant nowhere, to my knowledge, speaks of correctness conditions in any other terms than truth.[[33]](#footnote-33) Moreover, if Kant did endorse such a view one would expect it to play a role in his explanation of perceptual illusion and hallucination, since it is precisely cases of illusion and hallucination that are often thought to demand explanation in terms of a mental state's possessing correctness conditions. Kant is, however, explicit in denying that perceptual illusion and hallucination be treated in terms of the correctness or incorrectness of sensory representation. Instead Kant endorses a doxastic theory of perceptual error. Error is a product of the relation of the object to the understanding -- i.e. in the object as it is judged.(A293–4/B350; An §11 7:146).[[34]](#footnote-34)

At this point, however, one might voice the following objection. If intuition does not possess correctness conditions, then it can offer no constraint on determining what object an animal has in mind, for it is only in virtue of such conditions that we can answer the question as to whether an animal is thinking of one thing as opposed to another. In particular, the cognitive state would need to offer some material condition for identifying the object of one's perceptions, and for attributing to it some determinate quality or set of qualities.[[35]](#footnote-35)

If this interpretation of Kant is correct, then his conception of the objectivity of intuition does not sit well with contemporary representationalist paradigms, for it cannot be easily placed in the framework of objectivity I articulated in §1 above.[[36]](#footnote-36) However, if we return to Allais' distinction between subjective and objective another framework presents itself.

Recall that Allais distinguished between the subjective and objective aspects of a mental state in terms of what is presented. Rather than construe the notion of 'what is presented' in terms of the correctness conditions of the mental state, we might do better to construe the subjective/objective distinction in terms of those mental states whose individuation does not require appeal to something other than the subject and those which do. On this view, individuation of an animal's mental states in sensory experience, and specifically outer intuition, makes essential appeal to the particulars in its environment that are presented to it.

What are the particulars so appealed to in the individuation of an animal's perceptual states? Since, ex hypothesi, animals lack the ability to apply sortal concepts, and are also unable to perform acts of predication, the particulars given in perception are only going to have the most basic continuity with those given to an adult rational human in perception. The principles which the animal's cognitive system will utilize to single out particulars in perception are going to be very basic, and to some extent, quite coarse-grained. For example, that a particular object trace a single spatio-temporal path, and that its surface and outer boundary be determined by the spatial proximity of its parts.[[37]](#footnote-37)

There will thus be some inherent indeterminacy in our judgments concerning what intuitions an animal actually enjoys. For example, does it experience the rock and the plant growing from it as one particular or two? When it sees a cup placed on a table does it see two objects go out of existence and a new, complex object, come into existence? It is not obvious that there are answers to these questions.

Hence, the world which comes into view for such an animal is a world of particular qualities bundled or unified according to principles of spatial continuity and cohesion or proximity. In the sense of 'object' with which Kant is most concerned, viz. the object as a persisting real subject, or substance, of properties, with causal powers that put it in community with other such substances, animals lack any capacity for consciousness of such a thing. There is thus a relevant sense in which the animal's world is a world without objects. But, if the discussion above is correct, it is not a walled garden of purely subjective sensory states. Animals, on Kant's view, can enjoy states (or events) that are minimally objective, even if the particulars so presented to them in perception are not the rich particulars of adult rational human experience.

# Conclusion

For Kant, possession of the suite of capacities necessary for rational thought was an all or nothing affair. Either one has the capacity to reason and judge or one does not. In doing this he clearly denies to non-rational animals any of the abilities to reason which are characteristic of (at least some) adult humans. Nevertheless, Kant denies that animals are mere mechanisms, or that there no cognitive state which can be ascribed to them beyond some level of sensitivity to their environment. Kant is in a position to ascribe to animals a level of cognitive sophistication that is, I have argued, minimally objective. Theirs is not a walled garden of mere sensation. But it is not the world as we experience either. Instead, animals experience a world which presents itself strictly in relation to the animal's needs and interests.

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1. Descartes and his followers are perhaps the most famous figures here, though it is not entirely uncontroversial the extent to which Cartesianism was really committed to the view of animals as mere machines. See Cottingham ([1978](#ref-cottingham1978brute)); Naragon ([1990](#ref-naragon1990)) for discussion. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. TODO: cite Leibniz, Baumgarten, Meier, and perhaps Wolff? [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. For further discussion see Naragon ([1990](#ref-naragon1990)); Allais ([2009](#ref-allais2009)); McLear ([2011](#ref-mclear2011)). For some defense of positions that deny this possibility see McDowell ([1996](#ref-mcdowell1996)), chs. 3 & 6; Ginsborg ([2006](#ref-ginsborg2006)), Ginsborg ([2008](#ref-ginsborg2008)); Grüne ([2009](#ref-grune2009)); McLear ([2014](#ref-mclear2014)). [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. In McLear ([2011](#ref-mclear2011)) I distinguished two different ways in which such representations might occur, one phenomenally conscious, one merely in terms of informational access. This is another way of putting the question I pose above -- do animals have more than a mere informational sensitivity to the world? In that previous paper I also connect have phenomenal consciousness, having sensory intuition, and having a point of view on the world. The present paper can be seen as problematizing this last set of connections. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. One need only look at the work of contemporary cognitive ethologists to see that Kant's bright line separating rational (humans) from non-rational animals is rather implausible. The higher primates, whales, dolphins, dogs, and crows, all seem to have higher cognitive functioning than would be readily admitted on Kant's sparse model of the cognitive functions available to animals. For relevant discussion of some of the issues see Bermúdez ([2003](#ref-bermudez2003)); Andrews ([2014](#ref-andrews2014)). [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Pereboom ([2006](#ref-pereboom2006)), 160; cf. Bird ([1962](#ref-bird1962)), 130-1; Guyer ([1987](#ref-guyer1987)), 11-24; Pereboom ([2009](#ref-pereboom2009)). Longuenesse ([1998](#ref-longuenesse1998)), 20-1 argues that Kant distinguishes between two different relations to an object, both of which are "internal" to representation (i.e. are merely intentional objects) and only one of which is genuinely objective; cf. Okrent ([2006](#ref-okrent2006)), 95-7. There is more than a passing similarity between Longuenesse’s position and that of Van Cleve’s “virtual” phenomenalism, as outlined in Van Cleve ([1999](#ref-vancleve1999)), ch. 1. Both Longuenesse and Van Cleve take phenomena to be nothing but constructions of mental states, and thereby assume that representation of a mind-independent reality requires the mechanism of synthesis. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. See Feldman ([1994](#ref-feldman1994objectivity)) for extensive discussion of this notion. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. The notion of perspective and its connection to objectivity is made much of by Bernard Williams. See Williams ([1978](#ref-williams1978)), Williams ([2006](#ref-williams1985)), Williams ([1991](#ref-williams1991)); cf. Eilan ([1997](#ref-eilan1997)); Korsgaard ([2003](#ref-korsgaard2003)); Moore ([2000](#ref-moore2000)). [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. See Peacocke ([2009](#ref-peacocke2009)) for discussion. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. There is debate, which I won't discuss here, as to whether Kant intends the unity of consciousness in which an intuition (or its manifold) is conceptually united as necessary or also as a *sufficient* condition for objective representation. See, for example, Allison ([2004](#ref-allison2004)), 174-6. For criticism see Pereboom ([1995](#ref-pereboom1995)), 20-5; cf. Pereboom ([2006](#ref-pereboom2006)), 160. Guyer argues that even the claim of necessity here is problematic; See Guyer ([1987](#ref-guyer1987)), 117-18. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Unfortunately, I lack the space here to discuss issues pertaining directly to the third premise and Kant's conception of the unity of consciousness. For a start on these issues see McLear ([2015b](#ref-mclear2015)), §3. I hope to address these issues further in future work. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. For argument that Kant is concerned with cognition in judgment rather than intuition of a particular see Hanna ([2005](#ref-hanna2005)); cf. Allais ([2009](#ref-allais2009)), 392-3; Allais ([2011](#ref-allais2011b)), 104. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. See Wunderlich ([2005](#ref-wunderlich2005)); Kitcher ([2010](#ref-kitcher2010)), 18-19; Dyck ([2011](#ref-dyck2011)), 47; McLear ([2014](#ref-mclear2014)), 771-2. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Okrent ([2006](#ref-okrent2006)), 104 notes that animals can "note that two objects differ, but they can never note or notice how they differ, or the way in which those objects differ." This way of putting things is, I think, misleading. Animals cannot note *that* one thing differs from another, because they cannot, according to Kant, enjoy propositional attitudes. So the extent to which an animal responds to identity and difference is not due to its having attitudes to propositions. On this point see Dummett ([1993](#ref-dummett1993)), ch. 12 and related discussion in Bermúdez ([2003](#ref-bermudez2003)), ch. 3. Another difficulty with Okrent's discussion is that it encourages, without addressing, just the kind of notion of a brute discriminatory capacity that I discuss above. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. One way of putting this is that a chicken sexer has no "access consciousness", in the sense articulated by Ned Block, to those features by means of which they make their discriminations. See Block ([1995](#ref-block1995)), Block ([2008](#ref-block2008)). [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. One might be tempted here to say that sexer's state's are less "sophisticated" but this seems to me misleading. The cognitive machinery that goes into making such states possible may well be quite complex. The significant point, for my purposes, is that the states or mental events this machinery makes possible are importantly *different* from those of other cognitive states, of which propositional attitudes are a prime example. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Though the fact that sexer is reliable in their judgments, and the fact that they have rendered a particular verdict on a particular occasion, might themselves be the basis of further inferences. See Roessler ([2009](#ref-roessler2009)); Roessler ([2011](#ref-roessler2011a)), 113-14. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. For a similar contrast see Bermúdez ([2003](#ref-bermudez2003)), 39. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. Campbell ([2006](#ref-campbell2006)), 32; cf. Campbell ([2002](#ref-campbell2002)), 30-1; Roessler ([2009](#ref-roessler2009)), 1028. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. See Grüne ([2014](#ref-grune2014a)), §2. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. For further discussion see McLear ([2011](#ref-mclear2011)), §§3-4. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. See Campbell ([1994](#ref-campbell1994objects)) for a similar point. With the rose example one can appeal to spatial continuity (the blooming rose is in the same place as the green plant was yesterday), but this isn't obviously sufficient for reidentification in all cases; cf. Rosefeldt ([2003](#ref-rosefeldt2003)), 150-1. I discuss continuity further below. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. For one such articulation of how this should be understood see Land. It seems to me that Land errs though in claiming that it is intuition per se that is generated by such acts, rather than intuition of a certain kind or complexity. Relatedly, Land ([2015](#ref-land2015)) also errs in construing so-called 'nonconceptualist' positions as restricted to making claims about perceptual judgment rather than intuition. I don't see that this is the case, so long as we can distinguish between different levels of complexity in intuition. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. Allais ([2009](#ref-allais2009)), 406; cf. McLear ([2015b](#ref-mclear2015)), 98-101. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. They may of course be correctness conditions associated with particular pains, e.g. that there is a pain in one's toe, or that of two occurrent pains, one is closer to your elbow than the other. For discussion see Peacocke ([2008](#ref-peacocke2008a)), 13-14. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. Allais ([2009](#ref-allais2009)), 389. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. Here I assume that we are restricting ourself to objects understood as empirically real. The extent to which these things are transcendentally ideal, and thus should be understood in terms of subject-dependence, I here leave to one side. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. The notion that spatial representation is fundamentally basic looms large in the work of Strawson and those influenced by him. See especially Strawson ([2002](#ref-strawson1959)), chs. 1-2; Strawson ([1966](#ref-strawson1966)), chs. 1-2; Evans ([1982](#ref-evans1982)); Peacocke ([1992](#ref-peacocke1992)), ch. 3. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. For further discussion of this argument see McLear ([2015a](#ref-mclear2013b)), §4.2. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. See Grüne ([2009](#ref-grune2009)); Grüne ([2014](#ref-grune2014a)) for an explicit version of this strategy. Land ([2015](#ref-land2015)), §4 also attempts to articulate a non-judgmental basis for the representational content of intuition. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. One might appeal here to the notion of a cognition's "conformity with its object" (e.g. Bxvi-xvii, Bxx, A58/B83). But Kant uses this phrase explicitly with the notion of truth and falsity. Moreover, Kant is talking of cognition, and I have denied that animals cognize objects, being only acquainted with them. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. Kant is also recorded as asserting this in numerous texts from his logic lectures, cf. LL 24:83, 84, 87, 103, 146, 156, 720, 813, 825, 833. For further discussion of these points see McLear ([2016](#ref-mclear2016)); McLear ([2015a](#ref-mclear2013b)). [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. Karl Schafer argues for just such constraints on cognition. According to Schafer ([2015](#ref-schafer2015)), what makes a representation objective is that it offer some "material constraint" or standard of correctness. [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. I do not see this as reason to adopt an Intellectualist reading of Kant, since that reading suffers from a variety of problems and would still leave unanswered the problems concerning accuracy conditions that I raised above. [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. The centrality of principles of continuity and cohesion to our representation of particulars has received a significant amount of empirical attention and confirmation. For representative discussion see Spelke ([1990](#ref-spelke1990)); Spelke, Vishton, and Von Hofsten ([1995](#ref-spelke1995)); Cheries et al. ([2008](#ref-cheries2008)). For discussion of these issues in the context of Kant's conception of intuition see Dunlop ([2016](#ref-dunlop2016)). Note that the animal need not conceive of either continuity or cohesion as *criteria* for identity. This would be to confuse reflective objectivity with the more minimal sense I've articulated above. All that is necessary is that the animal be aware of properties governed by these principles in order for it to use them in individuation and tracking. [↑](#footnote-ref-37)