

# Nonconceptualism or De Re Sense? A New Reading of Kantian Intuition

Roberto Horácio de Sá Pereira

Philosophy Dept.  
University of Rio de Janeiro  
Av. Pedro Calmon, 550  
Cidade Universitária  
Rio de Janeiro - RJ, 21941-901  
Brasília  
robertohsp@yahoo.com.br

**Abstract:** The aim of this paper is to offer a critically review the recent nonconceptualist reading of the Kantian notion of sensible intuition. I raise two main objections. First, nonconceptualist readers fail to distinguish connected but different anti-intellectualist claims in the contemporary philosophy of mind and language. Second, I will argue that nonconceptual readings fail because Kantian intuitions do not possess a representational content of their own that can be veridical or falsidical in a similar way to how the content of propositional attitudes are true or false. In this paper, I will support my own reading that sensible intuition is better seen as what Evans and McDowell have called a *de re* sense, whose main characteristic is object-dependence. In this sense, Kantian sensible intuitions can be seen as a sensible *mode of donation* of objects. In my reading, the Kantian opposition between intuitions and concepts is best seen as the opposition between the objectual *de re* perception of something and the propositional *de dicto* apperception *that* something is the case rather than the opposition between nonconceptual and conceptual contents. However, if Kantian sensible intuition is not a mental state with a nonconceptual content, it is certainly in the general anti-intellectualist neighborhood.

## 1 Introduction

At the beginning of the recent contemporary debate over the nonconceptual content of sense perception, Kant was often regarded as advocating the side of the conceptualists. While non-conceptualists see the alleged “Kantian model of experience” as the greatest challenge to anyone claiming that sense perception possesses nonconceptual content (Gunther, 2003: 23), conceptualists such as McDowell attack nonconceptualism, referring to the alleged “Kantian insight” that conceptual capacities are supposedly required “to make it intelligible that experience is not blind” (1994: 60). Those on both sides of the controversy seem to agree that Kant was the *founding father* of conceptualism (Hanna, 2011) in the contemporary philosophy of perception. At the beginning of the controversy, the pivotal passage was Kant’s famous adage that, without thoughts or concepts, sensible intuitions are blind (A51/B75). As Gunther emblematically puts it:

“In its slogan: ‘thoughts without intuitions are empty, intuitions without concepts are blind,’ Kant sums up the doctrine of conceptualism. [...] According to conceptualism, no intentional content, however portentous or mundane, is a content unless it is structured by concepts that the bearer possesses.” (Gunther, 2003: 1)

However, since the emergence of a series of insightful papers and books by Hanna (2005; 2006; 2008) and Allais (2009; 2010; 2012), a new trend in Kantian scholarship has begun. Hanna (2005; 2006; 2008), Allais (2009; 2010; 2012), McLear (2011), and Tolley (2012) have gathered overwhelming textual evidence and succeeded in building a strong case if not in favor of nonconceptualism, certainly in favor of an anti-intellectualist buttoned-up reading of the *First Critique*. Nevertheless, the mainstream of Kantian scholarship (Allison, 2004; 2015; Longuenesse, 1998) has never taken this new trend seriously. A few noteworthy exceptions are Gomes (2014) and Griffith (2012).

What I intend to do here is open a new battlefield in this recent debate. Even though I am on the side of the anti-intellectualist readers of Kant, I am far from being convinced that the Kantian distinction between sensible intuition and concepts corresponds to “the contemporary distinction between non-conceptual cognitions and their content, and conceptual cognitions and their content, is essentially the same as Kant’s distinction between intuitions and concepts” (Hanna, 2006: 85). I have at least two reasons for this. First, nonconceptualist readers such as Hanna and Allais are running together connected but different anti-intellectualist claims. Second, and most important, Kant has never taken sensible intuition to be a mental representation with a representational content of its own that can be veridical or falsidical (independently of judgments) in a similar way to how the content of propositional attitudes are true or false.

In this paper, I will support my own anti-intellectualist reading that sensible intuition. In the reading I am proposing, Kantian intuition is better seen as what Evans and McDowell have called a *de re* sense, whose main characteristic is object-dependence. In this sense, Kantian intuitions can be seen as a sensible *mode of donation* of objects. The crucial opposition between intuitions and concepts is better seen as the opposition between the objectual *de re* perception of what appears in space and time and the propositional *de dicto* apperception *that* something is the case rather than the opposition between nonconceptual and conceptual contents. However, if Kantian sensible intuition is not a mental state with a nonconceptual content, it is certainly in the general anti-intellectualist neighborhood.

This paper is conceived in the following sections. The first is a brief section devoted to describing the present status of the debate. I argue there briefly that conceptualist readers of the Deduction confuse intentionality with objectivity. What Kant has achieved at the end of his B-Deduction is showing that categories are conditions for representing what appear *as objects*, that is, as mind-independent entities (objectivity thesis), rather than conditions for representing what appears (intentionally thesis).

The second section is devoted to distinguishing the several different anti-intellectualist claims that are bluntly brought together under the wide umbrella of “nonconceptualism.” In this section it is necessary to clarify the different senses of anti-intellectualism that are run together in the secondary literature on Kant. This clarification also paves the way for my own reading in the last section of the paper.

The third section is devoted to defending my reading of Kantian sensible intuition as an unmediated relation (relational view). Rather than being representationalist (content view) in the contemporary sense of having a content that is veridical or falsidical in a similar way to how the content of propositional attitudes are true or false, Kantian representation (*Vorstellung*) is a relation that puts us in direct contact with objects.

The fourth and last section is devoted to defending my own reading of Kantian sensible intuitions as a sensible *mode of donation* of objects, what I call a “pre-conceptual reference without nonconceptual content.” Based on Evans and McDowell’s conception of a *de re* reference, and on Kant’s claim of object-dependency, I propose to read Kantian anti-intellectualism as a pre-conceptual mode of the donation of objects. If I am right, Kant is less preoccupied in classifying mental states (nonconceptualism, according to Crane, 1992). Rather, his main concern is the determination of the reference of mental states: sensible intuition with consciousness is a *de re* perception of what appears in space and time, while concepts are a *de dicto* apperception that what appears in space and time is such-and-such.

## 2 The Current State Of The Debate

The bone of contention in the current debate over the nonconceptual content of sense perception is no longer the Kantian adage of A51/B75, but rather the core of the Transcendental Deduction where Kant describes why such a Deduction is unavoidable:

“Objects can indeed appear to us *without necessarily having to be related to functions of the understanding.*” (A89/B122. Emphasis added)

“Appearances could after all be so constituted that the understanding would not find them in accord with the conditions of its unity.... [and] in the succession of appearances nothing would offer itself that would furnish a rule of synthesis and thus correspond to the concept of cause and effect, so that this concept would be entirely empty, nugatory, and without significance. Appearances would nonetheless offer objects to our intuition, *for intuition by no means requires the function of thinking.*” (A90–1/B122–3. Emphasis added)

According to the conceptualist reading, Kant is suggesting a mere epistemic possibility to be eliminated later as an unreal metaphysical possibility (Gomes, 2014: 6; Griffith, 2012: 195; Grüne, 2011). In the same vein, following Henrich (1982), Allison (2004, 160) suggests that Kant is here evoking a “specter” to exorcise later, at the end of the B-Deduction. He reiterates the same reading in his recently published book (2015):

“I refer to this possibility as a specter because its realization would result in a cognitive chaos, and I argue that the Transcendental Deduction can be regarded as Kant’s attempt to exorcise it. Although this specter may call to mind the famous Cartesian specter it is significantly different from it. While the latter is at the bottom of the worry about the lack of correspondence between our experience and a mind-independent reality, the Kantian specter concerns the fit between two species of representation in the Kantian specter the problem is that nothing would be recognizable and our experience would be nothing but what William James famously referred to as ‘one great booming, boozing confusion’”(Allison, 2015: 54).

In contrast, anti-intellectualists (such as myself) have taken A90–1/B122–3 as one of the best pieces of textual evidence for Kantian anti-intellectualism. We assume that Kant was alluding to a real metaphysical fact or, as I prefer to say, to an empirical fact of human and animal cognition rather than a mere epistemic possibility to be ruled out at the end of the B-Deduction. Hanna, for example, reads the passage (correctly, according to my judgment) as the Kantian statement of what Hanna calls *Priority-to-Thought*:

*“Priority-to-thought.* Kant says that “the representation that can be given prior to all thinking is called *intuition*” (CPR B132), and all thoughts essentially involve concepts, so intuitions can be given prior to all concepts. Furthermore it is clear that this priority of intuition to thought is both cognitive and semantic. Thus an act of intuition can occur without any corresponding act of conceptualization, and also an intuition can be objectively valid independently of any concept.” (Hanna, 2006: 102)

Commenting on the same passage, Allais adds:

*“Prima facie* textual evidence against the McDowellian claim that intuition does not make an even notionally separable contribution to cognition is provided by the passages A89/B122) in which Kant simply asserts that intuition makes an independent representational contribution.” (Allais, 2009: 387)

So how to settle the dispute? Taking a closer look at what Kant says in the controversial footnote Kant of § 26:

“Space, represented **as object** (as is really required in geometry), contains more than the mere form of intuition, namely the comprehension of the manifold given in accordance with the form of sensibility in an intuitive representation, so that the form of intuition merely gives the manifold, but the formal intuition gives unity of the representation. In the Aesthetic I ascribed this unity merely to sensibility, only in order to note that it precedes all concepts, though to be sure it presupposes a synthesis, which does not belong to the senses but through which all concepts of space and time first become possible. For since through it (as the understanding determines the sensibility) space or time are first given as intuitions, the unity of this *a priori* intuition belongs to space and time, and not to the concept of the understanding (§ 24).” (B160n. Original emphasis)

As I have argued in another paper (Pereira, 2017), Kant is not saying here that categories are not conditions *for what appears* or conditions *for representing what appears* (let us call this the intentionality thesis). Instead, what he is saying is that categories are conditions for representing what appears *as objects* (in the case in point to represent the very space *as an object*). In other words, categories are conditions for representing what appears in space and space itself as mind-independent things (let us call this the objectivity thesis). The moral to be drawn is as simple as that: Conceptualist readers are confusing conditions for *intentionality* with conditions for *objectivity*.

Yet, the best evidence demonstrating that Kant meant his statements at A89/B122 and A90–1/B122–3 as suggesting a real metaphysical possibility is his Transcendental Aesthetic.

How could Kant claim therein that space and time are not discursive concepts but pure intuitions, if he did not *truly* believe that objects can appear without necessarily having to be related to functions of the understanding?

Conceptualist readers usually appeal to the footnote of B161, where Kant seemingly argues that unity of space (what he there calls formal intuition depends on categories). But what is the price to be paid if we do not distinguish the pure intuition of the Aesthetic from the formal intuition of the B-Deduction? Longuenesse (1998) is the only conceptualist/intellectualist reader coherent in this respect. She clearly sees that if we do admit pure intuitions without categories, we must reread the Transcendental Aesthetic (1998: 216). The question is why Kant did not do this rereading himself in the B-Edition.

### 3 The Nonconceptual Readings Of Kant

According to its standard definition, conceptualism is the claim that mental states only possess a representational content when the subject of them possesses the required concepts to specify canonically the putative content that the mental state is representing (Bermúdez, 1998). In contrast, according to its standard definition, nonconceptualism is the opposite claim that a creature's mental state may have content even when she lacks the required concepts to specify whatever she is representing.

One important distinction in the contemporary debate that is relevant to my discussion of Kant is the distinction between "state" and "content" nonconceptualism (Heck, 2000). According to content nonconceptualism, the content of conceptual contents is composed of concepts, while the nonconceptual content is fundamentally different in the negative sense of not being conceptually structured. Therefore, one cannot represent the same content conceptually and nonconceptually. In contrast, according to the so-called state nonconceptualism, one can represent the very same content conceptually and non-conceptually because what matters is not the content but rather how the content is represented by both states. A state is nonconceptual when the subject in that state does not need to possess the required concepts to specify whatever the state represents.

This opposition between state and content nonconceptualism can be traced back to the different major views of the representational content of experience. Content nonconceptualists are neo-Fregean: Bermúdez, Peacocke, Burge, etc. State nonconceptualists, in contrast, are neo-Russellians: Tye, Dretske, etc. Yet, as Heck himself recognizes, the main motivation to introduce the very notion of nonconceptual content was to differentiate perceptual states from cognitive states (Heck, 2000: 2). In the same vein, Crane complains: "the purpose of introducing the notion of nonconceptual content is to identify such a form of representation,

which is in some way more primitive, more basic than belief” (Crane, 2009: 466). To assume that the representational content of sensible intuition is nonconceptual is just to assume that the subject *is in a mental state* (sensible intuition), and does not provide her with the concepts required to specify canonically what that intuition represents.

In an extensive series of papers and books in 2005, 2006, and 2008, Hanna, the ingenious pioneer of the nonconceptualist reading of Kant, gathers a manifold of textual evidence if not in support of Kant’s nonconceptualist reading then certainly in support of a buttoned-up anti-intellectualist reading. Allais (2009; 2010; 2012) makes a very convincing case in favor of the anti-conceptual reading of the Kantian view on space (2009). Inspired by Burge (2010), McLear (2011) has also provided a strong case in favor of Kant’s claim about the independence of an animal’s perception of concepts. There is abundant textual evidence that supports McLear’s reading. Tolley (2012) provides an interesting reading of Kantian sensible intuition as a Fregean Sinn or mode of presentation of objects (*Art des Gegebenseins*). In my own modest contribution, I have tried to show, among other things, that Kantian anti-intellectualism dates back to his pre-critical writings.

Yet, the question is, do those huge amounts of textual evidence really support the nonconceptualist reading of Kantian sensible intuition?

To begin with, I see with reservation the common appeal to the independency of sensible intuition from judgments and thoughts as support for the nonconceptualist reading, what Hanna calls *Priority-to-Thought* claim (2006: 102). To be sure, Kant has claimed that sensible intuitions are independent from judgments (A90–1/B122–3). Moreover, he defines concepts as predicates of possible judgments. Still, conceptualism is not what I call here “Predicativism,” for lack of a better name. Predicativism is a claim that dates back to Reid (2002), and according to it, to see or perceive *a* as *F* is the same as to judge or to think that *a is F*. To be sure, anti-predicativism is a form of anti-intellectualism. Still, conceptualism does not entail Predicativism. McDowell (1994) is the best counter-example I know. He is certainly the most notorious proponent of conceptualism today, and he rejects Predicativism. According to McDowell, the conceptual perception of *a* being *F* is not the judgment that *a is F*. Thus, to show that Kantian intuition is anti-predicative is not yet to prove that Kantian intuition has a nonconceptual content.

Given this, it seems easier to accommodate Hanna’s *Priority-to-Thought* as the Kantian claim that sensible intuitions are anti-predicative rather than the claim that sensible intuitions possess a nonconceptual content. Therefore, by claiming that “the representation that can be given prior to all thinking is called *intuition*” (B132), Kant is saying just that in order to see *a* being *F*, I do not need to judge or think that *a is F*. But at least if McDowell and Sellars’ reading of Kantian intuition still stands, I cannot see *a* being *F* without concepts and beliefs.

The Priority-to-Thought claim motivates a further misunderstanding: the frequent identification of nonconceptualism with non-propositionalism. Indeed, for neo-Fregeans (Burge, Peacocke, Bermúdez), those doctrines are one and the same: nonconceptual contents are contents that are not structured or composed of concepts. That is the so-called content nonconceptualism. Still, as we have seen above, nonconceptualism is a notion introduced to differentiate mental states (epistemic from non-epistemic) rather than a distinction about contents themselves. Given that for Kant concepts are nothing but predicates of possible judgments, it seems easier to accommodate the Priority-to-Thought claim as the opposition between *objectual* and *propositional knowledge* rather than the opposition between nonconceptual and conceptual contents.

Moreover, the Priority-to-Thought claim motivates a further misunderstanding of nonconceptualism: the assimilation of nonconceptualism to the Russellian knowledge by acquaintance. This assimilation is untenable for various reasons. First, Russell is the *founding father* of the relational view of experience in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. For him, knowledge by acquaintance is devoid of content that could be true or false. Only knowledge by description has content. This is the reason why he restricted knowledge by acquaintance to sense data and emphatically denied the possibility of acquaintance with bodies.

However, even if we leave aside Russell's peculiar view, Russell's opposition between objectual knowledge and propositional knowledge is not the same as the contemporary opposition between nonconceptual and conceptual contents. What it is at stake for Russell is not a classification of representations, but rather the classification of *kinds of cognitions*. Interestingly, when we take into account that Kant's crucial opposition is also described as the opposition between *Kenntnis* and *Erkenntnis*, it seems easier to accommodate the Priority-to-Thought claim as the opposition between objectual and propositional knowledge rather than the opposition between nonconceptual and conceptual contents.

That best textual evidence for the idea that what Kant had in mind was the opposition between objectual and propositional knowledge (rather than the opposition between nonconceptual and conceptual contents) comes from an opuscle of the pre-critical period of Kant's career (*FSS*):

“I would go still further and say: it is one thing to differentiate (unterscheiden) things from each other, and quite another thing to recognize the difference between them (den Unterschied der Dinge zu erkennen). The latter is only possible by means of judgments and cannot occur in the case of animals, who are not endowed with reason. The following division may be of great use. Differentiating logically means recognizing that (*erkennen dass*) a thing A is not B; it is

always a negative judgment. Physically differentiating (*physisch unterscheiden*) means being driven to different actions by different representations. The dog differentiates the roast from the loaf, and it does so because the way in which it is affected by the roast is different from the way in which it is affected by the loaf (for different things cause different sensations).” (*FSS.*, § 6, Ak., 2: 60; p. 104)

Kant’s contrast can be couched in the terms of the contrast that Dretske draws between non-epistemic and epistemic seeing. The dog sees (*kennt*) things, the roast and the loaf, insofar as he is able to physically discriminate between them (non-epistemic seeing), but he is driven to different actions by the different sensations that they cause in him. However, he does not see (*erkennen*) *that* the roast is not a loaf or *that* the loaf is not a roast (epistemic seeing) in so-called categorical propositions. The capacity to know things by acquaintance (*kennen, noscere*) does not entail the capacity to know (*erkennen, dass*) that something is the case (the truth of propositions), and vice versa. I may know Paris by acquaintance without knowing, for example, that the French Revolution took place. Furthermore, I may know truths about Paris without knowing it by acquaintance. Kant and Russell’s idea is that without knowledge by acquaintance (*kennen*), no genuine knowledge of the external world would be possible. Therefore, blindness of intuitions without concepts might well be understood as a lack of propositional knowledge: we know a thing without knowing any truth about it.

I also have reservations about the usual appeal to the Kantian descriptivist definition of concepts as *representatio per notas comunis*, in opposition to sensible intuition as *immediate* and *singular* representations. This also motivates a further misunderstanding of nonconceptualism: the assimilation of nonconceptualism to what I call a *mental referentialism*. To be sure, mental referentialism (direct mental reference) is a further form of anti-intellectualism. However, mental descriptivism is not the same as conceptualism in the same way that mental referentialism is not the same as nonconceptualism. First, not all conceptualists are descriptivists, and McDowell (1994) is, once more, a clear counterexample. His demonstrative-like concepts refer *immediately* in the relevant sense that reference determined independently of the satisfaction of the features (*Merkmale*) contained in any description-like representation. Second, not all concepts are general. We also possess singular concepts.

Now if we take the Kantian definition of concepts as description-like representations, it seems easier to accommodate the Priority-to-Concept claim as the opposition between *de re* perception and *de dicto* apperception rather than the opposition between nonconceptual and conceptual contents. To be sure, *de re* attitudes is a further form of anti-intellectualism. Still, while nonconceptualism is a claim about a key distinction between mental states or representa-

tions, *de re* attitudes is a claim about *how a reference is determined*. According to Burge (1977), in a *de re* mental state, the reference is direct and not determined by concepts. Still, a *de re* mental state may be a complex thought composed of concepts. In the same vein, Bach claims that *de re* representations are those whose reference is determined relationally rather than *satisfactorily* (1987: 12).

I could summarize my disagreement with the nonconceptual readers of Kant in the following terms. For the new anti-intellectualist trend, nonconceptualism is an umbrella term that covers all kinds of anti-intellectualist claims that have emerged in different grades at different times in the history of western philosophy. It first emerged with the British Empiricists, as what Hanna calls a “super-weak version of nonconceptualism: a pure sensationalist nonconceptualism” (Hanna, 2006: 87). It then emerged with Kant, and then with Russell, Evans, Dretske, etc. My view is different. As I see it, nonconceptualism is a highly specific contemporary thesis that had several anti-intellectualist precursors; the most important in the remote past was certainly that suggested by Kant with his view on sensible intuitions.

## 4 Kantian Relationalism

Yet, my main concern is with the putative Kantian representationalism (content view). Hanna clearly describes Kant as a representationalist (holding a content view):

“The central fact about the mind is its capacity to represent *vorstellen*, which is to say that the mind “puts something before itself,” and this something is what Kant calls “content” *Inhalt* (A6/B9), namely *Bedeutung* of the representational state (A239–40/B298–9). (...) More precisely, however, for Kant the form of a conscious representation is what for lack of a better name I will call its *representational character*.” (Hanna, 2006: 95)

While Hanna seems to endorse a content nonconceptualist reading of Kant, Allais clearly endorses a state nonconceptualist reading:

“I am concerned here to argue only for the attribution to Kant of what Speaks calls ‘relative’, as opposed to ‘absolute’, non-conceptual content. The idea is that only the latter asserts that perception and belief have an intrinsically different structure; the former merely claims that a subject can have a perceptual representation with a certain content without herself possessing relevant concepts to describe that content.” (Hanna, 2009: 386)

Be that as it may, regardless of whether one endorses state or content nonconceptualism (Heck, 2000), one thing is for sure: it only makes sense to talk about nonconceptualism for those who endorse the opposite so-called *content view* of experience (or representationalism).

The central tenet of representationalism (also known as the *content view*) is the claim that experiences have a content *that can be veridical or falsidical in a similar way to how propositional attitudes have a propositional content that can be true or false*. In Dretske's famous words, according to representationalism, all mental facts are representational facts (not only the so-called propositional attitudes). The mind is the representational interface of the brain. How this content should be understood is an open question.

In contrast, according to the relationalist, perception is *just a matter of putting us in direct contact with the world*. Perception does not possess any content of its own. The idea here is to take perception etymologically as a factive verb: there is no perception (seeing, hearing, touching, intuiting, etc.) when there is no object being seen or being touched. This leads relationalism forcefully to embrace disjunctivism. Even though hallucinations and experiences may be phenomenologically identical, hallucinations are not experiences. Versions of this view were popular among early 20th-century Oxford Realists like Russell (1912), but the recent work of Campbell (2002), Travis (2004), Johnston (2004; 2006), Brewer (2006), Fish (2009), and Martin (2002; 2004) has brought the relational view back into discussion. Martin (2002; 2004) calls his position "naïve realism", while Brewer (2006) calls his own the "object view". I prefer Campbell's label (2002): the "relational view".

As a committed representationalist, I have nothing to say against the "representational character of conscious representation," as Hanna puts it (2006: 95). I also do agree totally with him and Allais, that if Kant is a representationalist and if we endorse an epistemic reading of Kant's Transcendental Idealism, we also must be "direct perceptual realists": there are no intermediary entities between the mind and the world, neither Cartesian ideas, nor Humean sense-impressions, nor Russell's sense-data, etc.

However, as a Kantian reader, I have my reservations. And these are the main claim of this short paper. If we leave aside Kant's Transcendental Idealism of his phenomenalist version, Kantian writings offer overwhelming evidence of Kant's position being closer to relationalism than to representationalism. The first textual evidence is the following. As Hanna recognizes (2006: 102), Kantian sensible intuitions are *object-dependent* in the relevant sense that there is no "Vorstellung" when there is no object. Allais (2009: 389) also appeals to the same characterization. In Kant's own words, "our mode of intuition is dependent on the existence of the object" (B72).

Hanna usually calls this "veridical perception" in opposition to "non-veridical illusions:"

As mentioned in n. 7, I am using the term "veridical perception" in a precisified way to mean *sense perception that requires the actual existence of the object perceived but not necessarily an accurate representation of it*. For example, I inaccurately and thus incorrectly, but still veridically,

see that actual rose as a tulip. By contrast, I am using the term “correct perception” in a similarly precisified way to mean *sense perception that requires both the actual existence of its object and also an accurate representation of it*. For example, I accurately and thus correctly see that actual rose as a rose. Correct perception entails veridical perception, but not the converse (2006: 45ff.).

Non-veridical illusions are phenomenal representations without any existing objects, and can vary radically in content from context to context and from perceiver to perceiver. By sharp contrast, veridical illusions—e.g., the straight stick in water that appears to be bent—imply the actual existence of the object perceived, and how we represent them remains essentially the same across contexts and perceivers. Also Kant holds that perceivers can stand in non-epistemic and non-conceptual dynamical community with the objects of veridical illusion (2006: 77ff.).

However, if all sensible intuitions must be veridical in the sense that the object must exist (Object-Dependency, *CRP* B72), otherwise there is no representation of a mental state, non-veridical mental states cannot be sensible intuitions or “phenomenal representations”. Moreover, it makes little sense to talk about “non-veridical illusion” because in non-veridical cases, there is no falsidical content in the first place. All conspire to the conclusion that the Kantian intuition has no content.

Moreover, for relationalists, Kant in B72 seems to take those verbs expressing experiences as *factive*: there cannot be a seeing or intuiting, unless the seen object exists; there cannot be a perceiving, unless the perceived object exists (likewise with all verbs of perception and with remember too). Indeed, if we take Kant’s “Vor-stellung” etymologically, as Hanna has done in his book (2006: 113), the relationalist suspicion increases because there cannot be a *Vorstellung* when there is nothing before the mind. Thus, etymologically, sensory states that do not put us before anything are not actually *Vorstellungen* in the proper sense, but only hallucinations or imaginations. Now, in these terms, Kant is not really a representationalist but rather a relationalist and a disjunctivist.

Nevertheless, one might try to circumvent the relationalist suspicion, alleging that Kant was never rigorous with his technical terms. If sensible intuition really requires the existence of the affecting object (B72), he could never speak of “intuitions in me” (BXXXIX, footnote). Likewise, if *Vorstellung* should be understood etymologically, as putting something before the mind, Kant could never speak of “mere representations (blosse Vorstellungen)” as simple mental states devoid of any knowing objective reference (B275), or define representations as the “ground of determination of my existence that can be found in me” (BXXXIX, footnote).

The second textual evidence in favor of the relationist reading of Kant is unavoidable. Kant, both in the First *Critique* and in the *Anthropology*, emphatically asserts that sensibility *per se* never errs. In the First *Critique*, Kant puts this as follows:

“Truth and illusion are not in the object, insofar as it is intuited, but in the judgment about it insofar as it is thought. Thus it is correctly said that the senses do not err; yet not because they always judge correctly, but because they do not judge at all. Hence truth, as much as error, and thus also illusion as leading to the latter, are to be found only in judgments, i.e., only in the relations of the object to our understanding.” (A294/B50)

Exactly the same line of reasoning is found in *Anthropology*:

“The senses do not deceive. This proposition is the rejection of the most important but also, on careful consideration, the emptiest reproach made against the senses; not because they always judge correctly, but rather because they do not judge at all. Error is thus a burden only to the understanding. Still, sensory appearances (species, apparentia) serve to excuse, if not exactly to justify, understanding. Thus the human being often mistakes what is subjective in his way of representation for objective (the distant tower, on which he sees no corners, seems to be round; the sea, whose distant part strikes his eyes through higher light rays, seems to be higher than the shore (*altum mare*); the full moon, which he sees ascending near the horizon through a hazy air, seems to be further away, and also larger, than when it is high in the heavens, although he catches sight of it from the same visual angle). And so one takes appearance for experience; thereby falling into error, but it is an error of the understanding, not of the senses.” (*Anthr.*, § 11, Ak., 7: 146; 258)

In other words, the error only occurs when the understanding, under the unnoticed influence of the faculty of sensible intuition, mistakes what subjectively appears to our senses as the real way that things are. Thus, there is no place for illusions in Kant’s view of intuition. This is why Kant calls the object of intuitions “*Erscheinungen*” as opposed to appearances (*Schein*). Therefore, it is not our senses that deceive us (*betrügen*), but rather our ability to judge (*Urteilskraft*), by taking what appears to the senses to be real when this is not the case.

Now, if this is right, then representationalism never crossed Kant’s mind: *sensible intuitions do not possess a representational content of their own that could be veridical or falsidical, independent of the content of judgment*. To my mind, representationalism is actually a very recent doctrine. When we read the classics, we see that they always discuss ideas, intuitions, perceptions etc., but never seem to attribute the possibility of mistake to the sensibility. For them, too, perceptual experience is *a relation*. The only difference to contemporary relationalists is that they conceive that relation *as indirect or mediated*, while the relationalist conceives it *as direct*. In this sense, contemporary relationalists are closer to tradition than representationalists

are. Indeed, even Dretske in his seminal work of 1969, when distinguishing non-epistemic from epistemic seeing, was not yet the representationalist he became in 1981:

“[v]isual differentiation, as I am employing this phrase, is a pre-intellectual, pre-discursive sort of capacity which a wide variety of beings possess [and it] is an endowment which is largely immune to the caprices of our intellectual life.”  
(Dretske, 1969: 29)

For one thing, at that time, he saw that non-epistemic seeing was a nonconceptual *relation* to an object rather than a nonconceptual *representation*. I suspect that representationalism was born with the seminal paper of Harman (1990). To my knowledge, he was the first to claim clearly that perceptual experience has a content of its own in comparison to the propositional content of propositional attitudes.

## 5 Kantian De Re Awareness

Let us assume for the sake of argument that Kantian sensible intuitions are really independent of any concepts. I myself have no doubt about such independency. Thus, in this regard, I am totally on the side of the nonconceptualist readers of Kant. Still, the point is that, even so, there cannot be mental states with nonconceptual content *because they do not possess a representational content of their own in the first place*.

To be sure, Kant is not a nonconceptualist as we understand that label today: neither sensible intuition nor perception possesses a representational content of its own. There is no such thing as hallucinatory perception for Kant. My point is the following: nothing changes about Kantian anti-intellectualism. Nothing substantively changes if Kant is a relationalist rather than a representationalist. *If Kantian sensible intuition is not a mental state with a nonconceptual content, is certainly in the general anti-intellectualist neighborhood*. For one thing, we can still maintain that our fundamental cognitive relation to the world, the sensible intuition (*Kenntnis*), is direct and totally independent from any kinds of concepts.

That said, McDowell and Sellars are still wrong when they claim that Kantian sensible intuitions are demonstrative-like concepts. One does not need the concept of a house (not even the demonstrative concept THIS) to see (as factive verb) a house. One needs concepts to *understand* and know (cognition) what your *sensible intuition puts before your mind*. Moreover, the mainstream of Kantian scholarship (Longuenesse, Allison, etc.) is still wrong when claiming that without categories intuitions lack objects: sensible intuition puts objects before our mind regardless of whether we understand what they stand for and regardless of whether we know that those things before our mind are mind-independent. Categories are conditions for

representing what appears as mind-independent (objectivity thesis), rather than conditions for representing what appears (intentional thesis).

Let us recall the results of the other sections. First, the Kantian Priority-to-Thought claim is better understood as the Kantian claim that sensible intuitions are anti-predicative rather than the claim that sensible intuitions possess a nonconceptual content. Second, the same Priority-to-Thought is also better understood as the opposition between objectual and propositional knowledge rather than the opposition between nonconceptual and conceptual contents. Finally, the Priority-to-Concept claim is better understood as the opposition between *de re* perception and *de dicto* aperception rather than the opposition between nonconceptual and conceptual contents. The remaining question is, how should we understand such anti-predicative, objectual, and *de re* awareness?

Let me begin by reviewing some well-known Kantian claims. “Representation” (*Vorstellung*; *repraesentatio*) is the foremost Kantian word for mental states whose function is to put us in relation to something. When representation is considered only as a mental state (*Modifikation des Gemüts*) resulting from the affection of the mind (*Affektion*), it is called sensation. However, when representation is considered in its referential relation to an object, it is called cognition (A320/B376). There are two kinds of cognition: intuition and conceptual. Conceptual (cognition/*Erkenntnis*) is the representation of objects that takes the form of propositional knowledge (*cognoscere*). Sensible cognition is the representation of objects that takes the form of knowledge by acquaintance (*noscere*).

What Kant describes as singular representation is the state of mind that puts us in direct relation to objects by means of affection (*Affektion*) or by means of acquaintance. In contrast, the mental state that refers to objects by means of functions (“the unity of action of ordering different representations under a common one” A68/B93) is what Kant describes as a general representation. General representations refer to objects indirectly, in the sense that the reference is mediated by reference to other representations (either mediated by reference to other concepts or ultimately mediated by reference to sensible intuitions). Importantly, this means that general representations refer to an object only insofar as the subject recognizes that (*erkennen dass*) the object in question falls under the extension of the concept by fulfilling one of the features (*Merkmale*) contained in the intention of the concept. This is how Kant characterizes general representations both as representations by means of notes (*Merkmale; repraesentatio per notes communes*) and as thoughts, or discursive representations (*JL.*, first section, §I, Ak., 9: 91, p. 589).

However, if general or common representations refer to an object only to the extent that the subject thinks that the object falls under the extension of a concept, we may question what

it means to represent or refer to an object intuitively. An initial approximation suggests that singular representations refer to objects immediately in the negative sense that their reference is independent of any conceptual reference to them. This is what Kant has in mind when he says “that intuition is called the representation which can be given prior to all thinking” (B132).

But what does it mean to say that singular representations refer to objects non-immediately? We have seen, first, that sensible intuition is the relation to objects in a way that takes the form of knowledge by acquaintance: that is, a knowledge that is based on some direct contact with what appears. We also have seen that singular representation refers to an object insofar as it results from the affection (*Afektion*) of the mind by the object.

Here, we can appeal to Russell’s opposition between knowledge by acquaintance and knowledge by description to clarify how singular representations refer to their objects. Knowledge by description is the propositional knowledge of truths or facts: that is, knowledge that something is the case. A rational being knows (by description) that a roast is not a loaf, and that a loaf is not a roast (categorical propositions). In contrast, knowledge by acquaintance is objectual knowledge gained in virtue of the fact that the subject is put by her sensible intuitions in direct contact with an object or, in Kantian terms, due to the fact that the object affects the sensible mind. Thus, the following picture emerges. Singular immediate representations are mental states that refer *de re* to an object in the crucial sense that the reference is nothing but a direct relation of cognitive contact (*Kenntnis*; *kennen*). For example, when I see a house, my sensible intuition puts me in direct epistemic contact with what appears in my visual field and affects my sensibility.

Now, there are different ways of understanding the *de re* reference in contemporary literature. According to Bach, for example, *de re* modes of presentation are mental types whose tokens determine a different referent with respect to a context (Bach, 1987: 12). Following this view, it would be possible to argue that singular representations possess context-independent *de re* modes of presentation. They are type-individuated by the sensations and forms that are normally connected to the type of objects whose presence they evidence. Thus if the linguistic mode of presentation of a demonstrative “that house” is equal to the salient object referred to by this demonstrative (that house in the distance), the *de re* manner of presentation of the objects of singular representation can be connected to the object that normally causes this sensation with this form.

However, the *de re* manner of presentations à la Bach does not fit well for characterizations of singular representations that are understood as sensible intuitions. For one thing, for Kant, sensible intuitions are object-dependent. This means that if for sensible representation, in general, singular representations are type-individuated by sensations and forms, then for intuitions,

specifically, they are also token-individuated by the very objects that they present. It is in this sense that Kant says that “our mode of intuition is dependent on the existence of the object” (B72).

Therefore, for intuitions specifically, singular representations do have *de re* senses in the way suggested by McDowell (1991) after Evans, rather than *de re* modes of presentation à la Bach. In opposition to the *de re* modes of presentation of reference à la Bach, the distinctive feature of the *de re* sense à la McDowell is its strong object-dependence: it would not exist if the object it represented did not exist (*CRP*, B72). Likewise, for Kant, if the putative object of a sensible intuition does not exist, then there is no authentic sensible intuition (*Prol.*, §9, Ak., 4: 282; 34). In this sense, I describe Kantian sensible intuitions as *modes of donation* of objects.

My proposal is as follows. Even though sensible intuitions cannot be seen as demonstrative concepts à la McDowell (1991), they cannot be seen as mental states with nonconceptual content à la Hanna and Allais either, because they do not possess a representation content of their own in the first place. Kantian sensible intuitions are better understood as the *mode of donation* of the objects and their attributes. Thus, to say that sensible intuitions are blind without concepts is to say, like Russell does, that without concepts sensible intuition puts us in direct relational contact with objects and properties, a form of blind knowledge by acquaintance. They are *de re* perceptions of what appears as opposed to the *de dicto* apperception that something is the case.

## 6 Works Of Kant

References to Kant’s works are given in the German Academy edition: *Gesammelte Schriften, herausgegeben von der Königlich Preussischen Akademie der Wissenschaften*, 29 vols. (Berlin: 1902–1983; 2nd ed., Berlin: De Gruyter, 1968, for vols. I–IX). They are indicated as follows: abbreviation of the title of the work, followed by Ak., volume, and page. For the *Critique of Pure Reason*, the references are shortened, in keeping with current practice, to the pagination of the original edition indicated by A for the 1781 edition, and B for the 1787 edition.

*Anthr.*: *Anthropologie in pragmatischer Hinsicht*, Ak. 7 (1798). *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View*, trans. V. L. Dowell, rev. and ed. H. H. Rudnick (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1978).

*FSS.*: *Die falsche Spitzfindigkeit der vier syllogistischen Figuren* Ak. 2 (1762). *The False subtlety of the four syllogistic figure*, trans. David Walford in collaboration with Ralf Meerbote. Ed. Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

“Logic,” ed. J. B. [Jäsche Logic], in *Lectures on Logic*, ed. and trans. J. Michael Young (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 521–640.

*Prologomena zu einer jeden künftigen Metaphysik, die als Wissenschaft wird auftreten können*, Ak. 4 (1783). *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics That Will Be Able to Come Forward As Science, in Philosophy of Material Nature*, trans. J. W. Ellington (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1985).

## References

Allais, L. (2009), ‘Kant, non-conceptual content and the representation of space’, *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 47(3), 383–413.

———. (2010), ‘Kant’s argument for transcendental idealism in the transcendental aesthetic’, *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 110(1), 47–75.

———. (2012), Transcendental Idealism and the Transcendental Deduction, In Schulting, D., & Verburgt, J. (eds.) ‘Kant’s Idealism: New Interpretations of a Controversial Doctrine’, Dordrecht: Springer, pp. 91–107.

Allison, H. E. (2004), *Kant’s transcendental idealism. An interpretation and defense*, New Haven: Yale University Press.

———. (2015), *Kant’s Transcendental Deduction: An Analytical-Historical Commentary*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Bach, K. (1987), *Thought and Reference*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Bermudez, J. L. (1998), *The Paradox of Self-Consciousness*, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Brewer, B. (2006), ‘Perception and Content’, *European Journal of Philosophy* 14, 165–181.

Burge, T. (1977), ‘Belief de re’, *Journal of Philosophy* 74(6), 338–362.

Burge, T. (2010), *Origins of Objectivity*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Campbell, J. (2002), *Reference and Consciousness*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Crane, T. (1992), The nonconceptual content of experience, In Crane, T. (ed.) ‘The Contents of Experience’, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 136–157.

———. (2009), ‘Is perception a propositional attitude?’, *The Philosophical Quarterly* 59(236), 452–469.

- Dretske, F. (1969), *Seeing and Knowing*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Fish, W. (2009), *Perception, Hallucination, and Illusion*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Gomes, A. (2014), 'Kant on Perception: Naive Realism, Non-Conceptualism, and the B-Deduction', *Philosophical Quarterly* 64(254), 1–19.
- Griffith, A. M. (2012), 'Perception and the Categories: A Conceptualist Reading of Kant's Critique of Pure Reason', *European Journal of Philosophy* 20(2), 193–222.
- Grüne, S. (2011), 'Is there a Gap in Kant's B Deduction?', *International Journal of Philosophical Studies* 19(3), 465–490.
- Gunther, Y.H. (2003), General Introduction, *In* Gunther, Y.H.(ed.) 'Essays on nonconceptual content', Cambridge: MIT Press, pp. 1–20.
- Hanna, R. (2005), 'Kant and nonconceptual content', *European Journal of Philosophy* 13(2), 247–290.
- . (2006), *Kant, Science, and Human Nature*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- . (2008), 'Kantian non-conceptualism', *Philosophical Studies* 137(1), 41–64.
- . (2011), 'Kant's Non-Conceptualism, Rogue Objects, and The Gap in the B Deduction', *International Journal of Philosophical Studies* 19(3), 399–415.
- Harman, G. (1990), 'The intrinsic quality of experience', *Philosophical Perspectives* 4, 31–52.
- Heck, R. (2000), 'Nonconceptual content and the 'space of reasons'', *Philosophical Review* 109(4), 483–523.
- Henrich, D. (1982), The proof-structure of Kant's transcendental deduction, *In* Walker, R.C.S. (ed.) 'Review of Metaphysics', Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 640–659.
- Johnston, M. (2004), 'The Obscure Object of Hallucination', *Philosophical Studies* 120, 113–183.
- . (2006), Better than mere knowledge? The function of sensory awareness, *In* Gendler, T.S., & Hawthorne, J. (eds.) 'Perceptual Experience', Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 260–290.
- Longuenesse, B. (1998), *Kant and the capacity to judge*, Princeton University Press.

- Martin, M. G. F. (2002), 'Particular thoughts and singular thought', *Royal Institute of Philosophy Supplement* 51, 173–214.
- . (2004), 'The limits of self-awareness', *Philosophical Studies* 120, 37–89.
- McDowell, J. (1991), Intentionality "De Re", In Lepore, E., & Van Gulick, R. (eds.) 'John Searle and His Critics', Oxford: Basil Blackwell, pp. 215–226.
- . (1994), *Mind and world*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- McLear, C. (2011), 'Kant on Animal Consciousness', *Philosophers' Imprint* 11(15), 1–16.
- Pereira, R. (2017), 'A nonconceptualist reading of the B-Deduction', *Philosophical Studies* 174, 425–442.
- Reid, T. (2002), *Essays on the Intellectual Powers of Man*, Pennsylvania State University Press.
- Russell, B. (1912), *The Problems of Philosophy*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Tolley, C. (2012), 'Kant on the Content of Cognition', *European Journal of Philosophy* 20(4), 200–228.
- Travis, C. (2004), 'The Silence of the Senses', *Mind* 113, 57–94.