

# Nonconceptuality

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Thank you

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# Abstract

This article describes a property which is named as nonconceptuality. Nonconceptuality is closely associated with ontology, epistemology and ethics. Nonconceptuality leads to the following important results, which are presented in this article:

- A proof for the view that no ontological theory can be proven, even though an ontological theory can be disproven.
- A response pattern for the question “Why  $a$ ?”

Tuukka Virtaperko (1987– ) and Timo Kiviluoto (1984– ) began writing this article in October 2008. Kiviluoto has found the property of nonconceptuality and Virtaperko has participated in refining it, found its consequences and wrote the article. The reader is required to be familiar with Virtaperko’s and Kiviluoto’s article *Imaginary Phenomenology*.

## 1 Nonconceptuality

### 1.1 Introduction to Nonconceptuality

Ontological theories claim that everything consists of one or more fundamental substances. For example, a monist ontology claims: “Everything is  $a$ ”, and a dualist ontology claims: “Everything is  $a$  and  $b$ ”. Now one could ask whether, for example, monist ontologies truly claim: “Everything is  $a$ ” or do they merely claim, for example: “Everything, that *exists*, is  $a$ ”. In the latter case, however, the monist ontology would not discuss everything, but merely everything that exists. In this case there could be things that do not exist. But a monist ontology should take such things also into account. Making remarks like this is therefore fruitless hair-splitting.

The claim that everything consists of one or more fundamental substances is troublesome, as we shall argue.

Nonconceptuality can be described by constructing a concept named *allness* in such a way that “allness” means everything, that is (and exists). Now we can ask: “Is the concept of the concept of allness contained in the concept of allness?” If the answer is negative, there is something which is not contained in the concept of allness, which is contrary to the definition of the concept of allness. Therefore the answer must be positive. But after that we can ask: “Is the concept of the concept of the concept of

allness contained in the concept of allness?” Again the answer must be positive. And after that we can ask: “Is the concept of the concept of the concept of the concept of allness contained in the concept of allness?” Again the answer must be positive. This chain of questions and answers continues indefinitely.

When the question “Is the concept of the concept of allness contained in the concept of allness?” is answered with a positive, a “a concept of allness contained in the concept of the concept of allness” is constructed, which is a new object, of which we have not *yet* determined whether it is contained in the concept of allness. Therefore there is always an object of which it has not been determined whether it is contained in the concept of allness or not. In addition, this object happens to have the property of containing the concept of allness.

“Allness” is therefore a concept which cannot mean what it is intended to mean. In other words, “allness” is a *nonconceptuality*. If one, for example, tries to prove that “allness” is something, “allness” in the proof does not mean what it is intended to mean, and the proof is thus meaningless.

The definition of *conceptuality* is this: If it is possible to imagine a phenomenon that does not belong to the extension of definition  $p(x)$ , definition  $p(x)$  is conceptual. The following pattern can be used to prove definition  $p(x)$  nonconceptual.

1. It is assumed that  $p(x)$  is conceptual, like it should be.
2. Phenomenon  $A$ , which does not belong to the extension of  $p(x)$  is imagined.
3. A contradiction is found between the existence of  $A$  and the properties of  $q(x)$ .
4. It is proved by reductio ad absurdum that  $p(x)$  cannot mean what it is intended to.

For step 3 to be possible, usually definition  $p(x)$  must contain the statement: “All objects of type  $T$  are contained in the extension of  $p(x)$ ”, and  $A$  must be proven to be of type  $T$ . In most cases this is easy. For example, a dog does not fall into the definition of complex numbers. But in more general cases it is possible, for example, to project the extension onto a shape, such as a plane, and then imagine a thing outside that plane. We see no reason why this would be beyond our ability to imagine.

For example, “allness” can be proved nonconceptual using this method. Proof:

1. “Allness” is assumed to be conceptual.

2. Phenomenon  $A$ , which does not belong to the extension of “allness” is imagined. Example: “concept of allness”.
3. Step 2 is contrary to the definition of “allness”.
- 4\*. By reductio ad absurdum, allness is nonconceptual.

The previous proof may be so simple that it is difficult to understand. But also “all that language can refer to” is nonconceptual. Proof:

1. “All that language can refer to” is assumed to be conceptual.
2. Phenomenon  $A$ , which does not belong to the extension of “all that language can refer to” is imagined. Example: “allness”.
3. In step 2 language is used to refer to something which language cannot refer to.
- 4\*. By reductio ad absurdum, “all that language can refer to” is nonconceptual.

Of course, this result does not mean that individual expressions were nonconceptual, just as the nonconceptuality of allness does not imply the nonconceptuality of rocks. We can state that language forms the limits of expression in the same way as allness defines the limits of existence. In real life these are not the same, but in communication they are.

Let “all-powerful logic” be defined as logic which all phenomena obey. That is, no property of “all-powerful logic” contradicts a true statement. Proof of the nonlinguality of “all"-powerful logic”.

1. “All-powerful logic” is assumed to be conceptual.
2. Phenomenon  $A$ , which does not belong to the extension of “all-powerful logic” is imagined. If the all"-powerful logic features the law of noncontradiction, an example would be:  $p \wedge \neg p$ .
3. “All-powerful logic” is not all-powerful, because it does not apply to  $A$ .
- 4\*. By reductio ad absurdum, “all-powerful logic” is nonconceptual.

Proof of the nonconceptuality of “the whole of my thoughts”:

1. “The whole of my thoughts” is assumed to be conceptual.
2. Phenomenon *A*, which does not belong to the extension of “the whole of my thoughts” is imagined. Example: “a rock that I am not currently thinking of”.
3. “The whole of my thoughts” is not the whole of my thoughts, because it does not contain *A*.
- 4\*. By reductio ad absurdum, “the whole of my thoughts” is nonconceptual.

The previous proof can also be applied to the concept of “solipsistic self” by replacing “the whole of my thoughts” with “solipsistic self”.

“The present”, as defined as “everything happening right now”, is nonconceptual.

Proof:

1. “The present” is assumed to be conceptual.
2. Phenomenon *A*, which does not belong to “the present”, is imagined. Example: “the future”.
3. “The present” is not the present, because it does not contain *A*.
- \*4. By way of reductio ad absurdum, “the present” is nonconceptual.

This proof does not mean that it would be impossible to separate the present from the past or the future. It only means that “the present” ought not to be defined as “everything happening right now” but rather as “everything not belonging to the future or the past”, as “the future” and “the past” are conceptual. In a sense, the future and the past are happening right now.

The conclusions marked with a star \* are somewhat confusing if they are interpreted to be statements of nonconceptual concepts, which are outside language. But the point is that “language”, “all-powerful reason” and “present” cannot be captured conceptually. Instead, any attempt to contain them conceptually results in a concept which refers to something it was not meant to refer. In a sense, any such attempt also shows the limits of our world, and we cannot jump beyond those limits to the auditorium, from which we could “see” those limits.

The complement of any conceptual concept with respect to any nonconceptual concept is nonconceptual. For example, “non-carrots” is a nonconceptual concept, if it is interpreted to mean “allness besides carrots”.

Due to nonconceptuality, no ontological theory can be proven. However, it is possible to disprove an ontological theory by proving that it is contradictory.

It should be noted that nonconceptuality is relative to the observer. This can be demonstrated by the following thought experiment.

Let us imagine that martians have bred a mother brain M, which is so intelligent, wise and powerful that when the brain of an abducted human H is connected to M, M can mind entirely H's mind, including all thoughts, emotions, sensory experiences, memories etc. M can also determine a lot of what H does not mind and cannot mind at any given moment. In this case, H's nonconceptual allness is conceptual to M, as M can form a concept, which actually refers to H's allness. Because this concept is outside H, our proofs of its nonconceptuality do not apply for M. Therefore nonconceptuality is relative to the observer.

Admittedly, there is one flaw in this thought experiment. It is that the device connecting H's brain to M's brain cannot be proven to work correctly, because M cannot actually become H and check that the device outputs exactly the same allness as H experiences. Because of this, M's conception of H's mind cannot be proven to be correct. It can merely be assumed to be correct.

The proposition 5.61 of *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* suggests that Ludwig Wittgenstein (1889–1951) was aware of nonconceptuality.<sup>[1]</sup> According to Alan W. Watts (1915–1973) *Zen-Buddhism*, too, acknowledges nonconceptuality by subscribing to a nonconceptual form solipsism.<sup>[2]</sup> In the Western world, however, nonconceptuality would seem to remain in obscurity despite Wittgenstein's efforts. If nonconceptuality were a well-known subject, ostensibly many people would not subscribe to ontological views such as materialistic monism.

## 2 Response pattern for the question “Why *a*?”

In philosophical investigations it is commonplace to ask, *why* something happens, or *why* something is the way it is, in other words: “Why *a*?” Let us take the question “Why is there war?” as an example. How should questions like these be interpreted?

If the question “Why is there war?” is interpreted as “Why war is part of allness?” the question is nonconceptual. The question should not be interpreted in such a way unless it is desirable to start discussing about nonconceptual concepts.

Therefore the question is often best interpreted as a request to offer knowledge, assumptions or facts to why is there war. If the question “Why is there war?” is answered, for example, that “War is part of human nature”, one can ask: “Why is war part of human nature?” This question can be answered by stating: “Evolution has developed human in such a way.” Again one can ask: “Why has evolution developed human in such a way?”

It should be clear that a chain of questions such as this is endless and reveals only one point of view. Asking questions must therefore simply be ceased after it has produced an acceptable result.

However, it should be noted that the conceptual answers, which can be given to the question “Why  $a$ ?”, depend on whether  $a$  is an imaginary or not. If  $a$  is not an imaginary, the answer can only be nonknowledge. There is no way to *know* whether some nonimaginary or coimaginary exists. As it is not entirely a product of imagination, its origin is unknowable. But if  $a$  is an imaginary, such as the sentence  $p \Rightarrow \neg\neg p$  or even the implication ( $\Rightarrow$ ), it can be either proven or defined, and a proof or a definition is knowledge.

## References

- [1] Wittgenstein, Ludwig, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, propositions 5.61–5.62, <<http://www.gutenberg.org/dirs/etext04/tloph10.txt>>.
- [2] Watts, Alan W., *Zen* (1973), p. 145–147, ISBN 951-1-15072-3.