

Social Cognition

Mature human thinking is structured by the basic distinction, recognized since the ancient Greeks, between subjective and objective (or appearance and reality, belief and truth, opinion and fact). The distinction derives from the insight that a single individual's subjective perspective on a situation at any given moment may or may not match with the objective situation as it exists independent of this or any other particular perspective.

Great apes and other animal species do not bifurcate experience in this way. They take the world as it appears to them, without contrasting it to anything else (objective or otherwise). They are also able to imagine what another individual is experiencing or has experienced, but they do not contrast this with what they or anyone else is experiencing or has experienced either, much less with an objective perspective. Their understanding of the world and their understanding of others' experiencing of the world are simply not integrated in a way that leads to the distinction between subjective and objective.

Great apes do not distinguish subjective and objective, in my view, because this is not an insight that individuals can come to on their own. An individual cannot come to it either by inventing a clever theory or by simulating another's experience, and they cannot come to it by comparing their past to their current experience. To understand the distinction between subjective and objective, an individual must triangulate (to use the term of Davidson 2001) on a shared situation with another individual at the same moment: we both see *X*, but you see it this way, and I see it that way. That is, the participants must come to understand that the two of us are sharing attention to one and the same thing, but at the same time we each have our own perspective on it. This is the basic cognitive