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# What Is Simple Apprehension?

\_\_\_\_\_ **Introduction.** In this chapter, we will discuss the first of the three parts of logic, simple apprehension. We will do this by defining what simple apprehension is. Let us try to explain simple apprehension by an illustration. Let's say we have a simple apprehension of a chair. What happens in our minds when we have a simple apprehension of a chair?

Generally speaking, three things happen. First, we perceive it with our senses; second, we form an image of it in our minds; and, thirdly, we conceive its meaning. Although all three of these things occur when we have a sense perception, it is this final act, the conception of meaning, that we properly speak of as simple apprehension.

\_\_\_\_\_ **What Is Sense Perception?** Let's use an illustration to try to understand sense perception. When you look at a chair, when your senses (in this case your sight) present a chair to your mind, you have a sense perception. In other words, your senses perceive the chair. This sense perception is present when you are looking at the chair, but goes away when you stop looking at the chair. You will continue to have a sense perception of the chair as long as you look at it. But when you stop looking at the chair, your sense perception ceases.

The sense perception of the chair is different from the chair itself, since the sense perception occurs in your mind, while the chair exists outside of your mind. The sense perception lasts as long as you see or hear

**T**hree things generally occur during simple apprehension: we perceive it with our senses, we have a mental image of it, and we conceive the meaning of it.



or smell or taste or touch an object and stops when you stop doing these things.

***Sense perception is the act of seeing or hearing or smelling or tasting or touching.***

\_\_\_\_\_ **What Is a Mental Image?** When you have a sense perception of something—when you see or hear or smell or taste or touch an object—an image forms in your mind. When you see a chair, for example, an image—which has color and shape—forms as a result of the sense perception you have of the chair. When the sense perception ceases, however—when, for example, you stop looking at the chair—the image can continue. And this image will occur again in your mind whenever you think about the chair—even if you are not looking at the chair.

This happens, for example, every time you remember something you have seen before.

Like the sense perception you had when you looked at the chair, this mental image of the chair is different from the chair itself, since the chair exists outside the mind, while the mental image exists inside the mind only. Furthermore, this mental image of the chair is different from the sense perception because, while the sense perception lasts only as long as you are looking at the chair, the mental image can be present even when you are not perceiving the chair through your senses.

In short, the mental image is different from the chair, and the mental image is also different from the sense perception.

***A mental image is the image of an object formed in the mind as a result of a sense perception of that object.***

\_\_\_\_\_ **What Is a Concept?** The third aspect of simple apprehension is idea or **concept**. When you look at a chair, there is something else that happens in your mind other than a sense perception and a mental image. It is the idea or concept of the chair. When you grasp



the concept of something, like a chair, you understand what a chair is. That is all we mean by ‘concept.’

Although the idea of a chair in your mind may be accompanied by the sense perception of a chair or by the mental image of a chair, it does not have to be. You can have the concept without the sense perception and without the mental image.

For example, you may be reading this book right now but not have a chair around to look at, and yet you can still understand what is meant by the word ‘chair.’ In other words, you don’t have to look at a chair to understand what a chair is. Similarly, you may be reading this book right now and not even have a mental image of chair and still understand what the word ‘chair’ means. You may understand what a chair is without having a picture of a chair in your mind.

Understanding what we mean when we talk about a concept is important in understanding what we mean when we talk about simple apprehension, since simple apprehension is the grasping of a concept. Remember also that simply apprehending, or understanding, something is different from making a judgment about it. Simple apprehension takes place prior to making a judgment. (We will talk about judgment in later chapters.)

*Simple apprehension is an act by which the mind grasps the concept or general meaning of an object without affirming or denying anything about it.*

\_\_\_\_\_ **Concept vs. Image.** While a mental image is representative of something tangible and material (for example, it has shape and color), the simple apprehension is the grasp of something intangible and immaterial. A simple apprehension itself does not have shape or color; it is the act of understanding a universal meaning.

When we have a simple apprehension of something—when, in other words, we understand it—we do not just get a glimpse of the sensible qualities of it, like its color and shape; we grasp the *essence* (or meaning) of the thing.

**S**imple apprehension is an act by which the mind grasps the concept or general meaning of an object without affirming or denying anything about it.



This becomes clearer when we consider terms like ‘man’ (meaning ‘human being’). When we think of the concept ‘man,’ we may have some kind of image in our minds, such as an actual man, tall, with blond hair, blue eyes, and light skin. But when someone else thinks of the concept ‘man,’ he may have a completely different image in his mind. He may think of an actual man who is short, with dark hair, brown eyes, and dark skin. Although the mental images we have when we think of the concept ‘man’ are completely different, that doesn’t mean that we do not both understand the same concept ‘man.’ We may have exactly the same understanding of what ‘man’ is, yet have very different mental images that we associate with it.

**T**he process by which a simple apprehension is derived from a sense perception and a mental image is called *abstraction*.

\_\_\_\_\_ **Abstraction.** The process by which a simple apprehension is derived from a sense perception and mental image is called *abstraction*. Through abstraction, an object such as a chair is lifted from the level of the senses to the level of the intellect.

\_\_\_\_\_ **Simple Apprehension vs. Judgment.** If we affirm or deny anything about a simple apprehension of the chair, we are going beyond simple apprehension—the first aspect of logic—and engaging in judgment—the second aspect of logic. If, in other words, we think, “The chair is brown,” then we are going beyond simple apprehension to affirm something about the chair and engaging in judgment. If, however, we think simply ‘chair,’ merely have an idea of a chair, then we are engaging in simple apprehension.

\_\_\_\_\_ **Summary.** In this chapter, we have discussed the meaning of simple apprehension. We said three things generally occur during the process of simple apprehension: we perceive it with our senses, we have a mental image of it, and we conceive the meaning of it. Note that the term ‘simple apprehension’ is used both to refer to the act of conceptualizing something as well as the entire process leading up to that act. We said, finally, that the process by which a simple apprehension is derived from a sense perception and a mental image is called *abstraction*.