

24.201 Topics in History of Philosophy: KANT

Space

1. *The 'Transcendental Aesthetic'*. Kant has already said that he is going to call knowledge 'transcendental' when it occupies itself with the principles of *a priori* knowledge (A12/B25), adding that he is going to restrict himself to *synthetic a priori* knowledge. 'Aesthetic' indicates *sensibility* (*aesthesis* means sense perception in Greek). The Transcendental Aesthetic is therefore going to be about the principles of *synthetic a priori* knowledge, insofar as they relate to sensibility.

2. *The distinction between intuition/sensibility and understanding*. A19/B34; see also A50/B74). Objects are given to us by means of *intuition*, which for us is always *sensible*: in order for us to be in an 'immediate relation' to an object, i.e. for it to be presented in intuition, it must *affect* us, i.e. be presented to sensibility. For us at any rate, immediate acquaintance with an object involves being affected, so for us, intuition and sensibility are the same. When an object is presented in intuition, the understanding is able to apply *concepts* to it. The operation of both faculties is required for knowledge (or perhaps thought) to arise:

To neither of these powers may a preference be given over the other. Without sensibility no object would be given to us, without understanding no object would be thought. Thoughts without content are empty, intuitions without concepts are blind. (A51/B75)

The task of the Transcendental Aesthetic is to consider the *pure form of sensibility*, distinct from sensation, which Kant calls the 'matter' of appearance (hence *pure* and *form*); and distinct from concepts supplied by the understanding (hence *sensibility*) (A20/B35).

3. *The distinction between intuitions and concepts*. Our sensible intuition, a power of the mind, presents us with particular items, *intuitions*. Note Kant's two uses of the word 'intuition' (*Anschauung*), to refer to a capacity of the mind, and items presented to the mind. A rough analogy might be if someone said that the *power of sight* (a capacity, described in the singular) can present us with *sights* (particular things to become aware of, provided by that capacity). Intuitions relate directly to objects; concepts, if they relate to objects, relate indirectly to objects. Concepts are *general*, and can apply to many things. Intuitions are *particular* items. Three aspects of the contrast Kant might be marking: (a) a distinction in *metaphysics*, between particular items and general characteristics; (b) a distinction in *epistemology*, between our being aware of particulars, and possessing general concepts which apply to them; (c) a distinction about *language*, between our having the linguistic means to refer to particulars, and our being able to classify them in general terms (cf. Strawson, *Bounds of Sense*, Chapter 1).

4. *Space as the form of intuition*. 'We represent to ourselves objects as distinct from us/outside us (*außer uns*), and all without exception in space. In space their shape, magnitude, and relation to one another are determined or determinable' (B37/A22). Kant is making a claim about a connection between *otherness* and *outerness*. Space is the form of outer sense: it is the form by which things are experienced as *distinct from ourselves*, and *distinct from each other*. Space is the form of intuition: space is what enables us to experience things as distinct particulars. Notice an implicit suggestion about the role of space in objective experience: to have objective knowledge, we must experience things as distinct from us, and *therefore* we must experience them as in space.

5. *What is space?* Two candidate answers to this question from Kant's philosophical predecessors. (a) Space is a 'real existence': Kant has in mind Newton's *absolute* theory of space, which held space to be an independent 'container' of objects, which would exist whether or not there were any objects. (b) Space is only 'determinations and relations of things, yet such as would belong to things even if they were not intuited': Kant has in mind Leibniz's *relational* theory of space (A23/B37), which held space to be dependent on objects, constructed from relations between existing objects, but—according to Kant—not dependent on intuition. Both hold space to be independent of the human mind. Newton makes space independent of everything, Leibniz makes space dependent on things, and reducible to relations between things. Kant's alternative is that space is neither of these; not dependent on objects (contrary to Leibniz), not independently real (contrary to Newton), but rather a 'form of intuition'.

6. *Kant's arguments in the 'Metaphysical Exposition'.*

i. Space is not an *empirical* concept. Space doesn't come from outer experience; rather, outer experience comes from representing things spatially (A23/B38). Since space is necessary for outer experience, we couldn't have got it from outer experience. (What is the force of this argument, exactly?)

ii. Space is a *necessary a priori representation*: we cannot think away space, though we can quite well think it as empty of objects (A24/B39).

iii. What kind of representation? Space is *not a concept* at all, but a 'pure intuition'. (First Ed.) We can represent to ourselves only one space: space is singular and unique. Talk of different 'spaces' is talk of different parts of the one great Space.

iv. Another reason for thinking space is an intuition, *not a concept*. Space extends infinitely, in its breadth and composition: it contains an infinite number of representations within itself. Concepts contain representations under themselves, but not within themselves.

7. *The argument from geometry.* A24; B41; A46/B64 'Geometry is a science which determines the properties of space synthetically, and yet *a priori*'. E.g. 'there is only one straight line between two points'; 'space has three dimensions'; 'given three straight lines, a figure is possible'. The *necessity* and *universality* of geometrical knowledge proves that space is a necessary *a priori* form of intuition.

This intuition must be *a priori*, that is, it must be found in us prior to any perception of an object...How then can there exist in the mind an outer intuition which precedes the objects themselves? ... Manifestly, not otherwise than in so far as the intuition has its seat in the subject only' (B41)

8. *Idealism* (A26/B42). (a) Space does not represent any property of things in themselves. (b) Space is nothing but the form of all appearances of outer sense.

9. *Some questions.* (a) What does Kant mean by 'necessary'? (b) Does *a priori* knowledge of space imply idealism? (c) Could the geometry of our experience of space be one thing, and the geometry of space itself be another?