Kant II
PHIL410
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Kant's Aesthetic

Reading: pp. 25-31

Forms of Representation

- **Representation:** Representation is what we do when we think or experience something. It is necessary for us to represent an object (e.g., an automobile), when we think of or experience it, because, obviously, we cannot put the object literally in our head. Even if it were a small object, such as a thimble, putting it literally in one's head wouldn't result in thinking about it, only in a headache. Thus, the mind "represents" the objects it thinks about or experiences with an *artificial reproduction* of the object in question. The representation is "artificial" in the sense that it is not the same thing as, nor made of the same stuff as, the original. It is a reproduction in the sense that it bears some structural similarity to the original. Exactly what is the nature of this similarity is what Kant wants to determine.
- **Forms of Representation:** Forms of representation are *ways* of representing; we might also call them *media* for representing. An analogy: clay can be a medium of representing physical objects. If I build a model of a tree out of clay, then the clay is the medium or form of representation. Notice that my choice of medium determines a good deal of what my model will be like: cool, dense, lumpy. Similarly, the mind employs media or forms of representing, ways that it uses to depict or model the external world.

Intuition and Concept

- There are **two basic forms** of representation, for Humans, according to Kant. These are conceptual or discursive thought, on the one hand, and intuition, or (roughly) sensation, on the other. That is, I can represent objects conceptually (i.e., by thinking of them); and I can represent objects in intuition (e.g., by seeing or touching them). When I think, "Automobile," I am representing an object (or class of object, anyway) conceptually. When I see a bright shiny object with a certain shape and size, I am having an intuition of an automobile, representing it intuitively.
- The structure of a concept differs from that of an intuition in important respects:
- Intuition: the faculty of intuition is the faculty of *singular* or *particular* representation. I.e., intuition represents individual things, not types or kinds or classes of individual. Thus, any object represented by intuition must be a single thing, not multiple. The significance of this above point becomes evident when we consider that in the arguments for intuitiveness, Kant points to the apparent fact that space and time are represented by us as *single* things (albeit manifold). Any representation that is of an individual, not a type, is an intuition.
- By contrast, the faculty of conceptual thought is a faculty of *general* representation.

- Concepts: Concepts have an intension (sense, meaning) and an extension (denotation, reference). That is, a concept *means* something to me; and, in doing so, it can *refer* to a variety of things. Note that the meaning or intension is not imagistic, but rather conceptual. I.e., the meaning of my concept of hamster is given in terms of the further concepts of rodent, mammal, small, furry, etc. These concepts may indeed conjure to mind an image, but that is distinct from the meaning of the concept, properly speaking. Thus, in order to understand a concept, i.e., to understand its meaning, I must be able to understand those further concepts that constitute its intension. Obviously, I cannot understand a concept if its intension is infinite: i.e., if the meaning of a concept is endlessly complex, I cannot grasp it.
- The *extension* of a concept, on the other hand, is potentially infinite. I.e., there is no mental difficulty for us humans if a given concept refers to more things than we can count or even conceive. For we needn't "think" all these things when we think the concept. That's part of what it means to say that a concept is a general representation. It calls to mind a class of things, without requiring that we enumerate each in order to have the thought.
- Kant takes advantage of these structural differences in arguing for the intuitiveness of space and time. See below, and **A23-25/B38-40**.

Inner and Outer Sense

- In the Transcendental Aesthetic, Kant examines the intuitive form of representation. He determines that there are two basic forms of intuition giving us experience of an inner world and an outer world. The two faculties of sense, inner and outer, each result from a specific way of representing things. These two forms of representation are, respectively, Time and Space.
- Think about this: How is it possible for an organic being, a hunk of biological stuff, to "have experiences" of the world? It must have some means of reproducing the outside world, a language or medium for doing so. A medium is required since, as above, the being cannot place the outside world inside its head: it must make models of the outside world. Our medium for modeling the outside world is what we experience as Space.
- Similarly, we have an awareness of another "world," the inner world of our consciousness. We are, after all, aware of our own thoughts and experiences. That is, not only am I aware of that red automobile outside the window, but I am also aware that I am aware of it: I can notice how the piercing light reflected off its chrome feels in striking my eye. I am, in other words, aware of myself. But, again, I need a medium or form of representation in order to be so aware: I cannot put myself inside myself. So, I employ a medium in which to represent my own states of mind to myself. This medium is Time.

Space and Time

- Space and Time, for Kant, are not features of the external world as it is in itself. Rather, they are characteristics of how we experience the world. It is important that you understand the difference, as it is central to Kant's theory. Space and time are "a priori intuitions," in other words.

- The following arguments are developed by Kant at A23/B38-A25/B40.
- **Space is a priori.** That is, space is not an object of awareness, it is a form of representation that we have prior to any contentful experience. Kant supplies two arguments for this thesis:
  1. The representation of space must be presupposed in order for sensations to refer to something outside of me.
  2. The representation of space must be presupposed in order for sensations to present things as external to one another.
  3. Hence, the presentation of space cannot derive from the relations between objects as we experience them.
  4. Hence, the representation of space is an a priori representation.

  Here, Kant is arguing that the representation of space is prior to any contentful experience inasmuch as in order for me to represent *anything* as "other" than me, I must represent it as in space. In other words, space provides me with a medium in which to represent things as other than me. Similarly, in order to represent any two things as distinct from each other, I must represent them in space. Thus, I couldn't gain my idea of space *from* the experience of objects out in the world, because I must already represent space in order to experience anything as "out in the world."
  1. Space can be represented as empty of objects, but we cannot represent there being no space at all.
  2. If x can be represented without y, but y cannot be represented without x, then x is a condition of the possibility of y.
  3. Hence, the representation of space cannot be posterior to the representation of objects, for the representation of those objects themselves is conditional upon the representation of space.
  4. Hence, the representation of space is an a priori condition of the representation of objects.

  Kant's second argument is perhaps easier to understand. We can, he maintains, represent a space empty of objects. But we cannot represent objects without any space in which to reside. This implies that space is prior to objects. So, in other words, we could not get our notion of space from the experience of objects; space must come before any such experience.
- **Space is intuitive.** As a representation, space must be either a concept or an intuition. Kant maintains that it is an intuition. He supplies two arguments for this thesis, as well.
  1. Every representation is either a concept or an intuition (and not both).
  2. If the representation of space were a concept, then (a) space would be composed of individual spaces, and (b) individual spaces would be logically prior to space as a whole.
  3. But space is represented as a single unity; it is not a composite of individual spaces, and individual spaces are logically secondary to the totality of space.
  4. Hence, the representation of space is an intuition.

  The key point here is that concepts are composite in nature.
  A concept is a collective composed of further, partial concepts. E.g., "body" is composed of "extension" and "substance." The elements of a concept are logically prior to it. This is not the case with space. We represent space as a single whole,

rather than as composed of units. The notion of spatial units is secondary, derivative of the notion of space as a whole. We do have various concepts of space, which give us a general concept of space. These are concepts of determinate figures (shapes) drawn, so to speak, within a preexisting space. By imposing limits, we conceive of determinate spaces (figures and magnitudes). Abstracting from such determinate concepts, we form a general concept of space as a whole. Since the intuition is prior, and since it cannot be an empirical intuition (since it cannot be derived from experience; as above), the concept of space is formed from a pure intuition of space.

1. Every representation is either a concept or an intuition (and not both).
2. While the extension of a concept may be infinite, its intension cannot.
3. Space, however, is represented as a homogenous single containing an infinity of parts. (If it were a concept, its intension would thus be infinite.)
4. Hence, the representation of space is an intuition.

The key point here concerns the logical structure of concepts. The extension of a concept contains under it a hierarchy of further concepts, related as genus to species, and distinguished by various differentia. E.g., the genus 'physical body' can be divided into 'inanimate' and 'animate', and the latter can be divided into 'vegetable' and 'animal,' and so on. The extension of a concept is potentially infinite in its governance over further concepts. The intension of a concept concerns the "marks" or partial, composite concepts which inform its meaning. "Body," thus, is composed of "extension" and "substance." The complexity of a given concept cannot be infinite; it cannot contain within it an infinite number of different ideas, for otherwise we wouldn't be able to grasp it. Thus, Leibniz's notion of an infinite Individual Essence is an impossible concept (for us, anyway). Space is represented by us in terms of an infinity of parts or elements. Given our representing it in these terms, it cannot be a concept. Space and time are both given to the mind as infinite. This is not to be conceived in terms of the innumerability of parts. Those parts are themselves conceived only as limitations of the unlimited whole. However large a portion one conceives, it is bounded by more of the same. I.e., the representations of space and time are infinite in virtue of being limitless, rather than in virtue of being endlessly composed of units. (Note: Kant thinks of a spatial point as a limit, not as a unit of space.)

- **Time.** The arguments for the aprioricity and intuitiveness of time are similar to those above.

An Analogy

- We've already used one analogy, the clay used to model a tree. Here is another.
- The role that space plays as a form of representation is analogous to that played by light used by a film projector. A film projector uses light to create an image. The image is, thus, made of light. However, the thing represented in the image is not, typically, made itself of light. The projected image of a tree is the image of something made of wood and leaves, etc. Becoming somewhat fanciful: suppose that the projector is conscious. It's a kind of being that is "awake" when it's light is on. It is possible for it to cast simply a beam of light (if no slide is in place); this corresponds to the role space plays as prior to the objects that fill it. Ordinarily,

however, something will fill the projector's "field of vision," so to speak. When this happens, we might imagine, the projector is aware of the image it casts. But if we ask, what will the projector know about the things it represents, we find that its knowledge of them will be skewed. The projector will "think" that trees, for example, are made of light. But they aren't; it only uses light to represent them, and mistakes its way of representing for a way that things are in themselves.

- We are in a similar position with respect to space. Kant maintains that space is not a feature of how things are in themselves; it is only a feature of things as represented by us. Furthermore, space cannot be a feature of things as they are in themselves. As a form of representing, it is they way things in themselves feel to us. (Compare: the quality of warmth we feel from hot things, and the quality of heat. Warmth, how we experience the hot, is not how the hot is, in itself.)

Geometry

- The Transcendental Aesthetic culminates in the account of our knowledge of geometry. Geometry is the science of space. We are able to prove many propositions about space using geometry. But how can this be? That is, how can we come to know necessary, universal truths concerning space?
- If Space is something completely external to us, then it should not be possible for us to know its forms a priori. For if space were a completely external object, then we should have no a priori access to it.
- We know, however, that our access to space is a priori. This was argued by Kant (above), and is plain from the form of geometrical truth: geometrical truths are necessary and universal. For example, the area of a circle is equal to π times the square of its radius. This is necessarily so: it is not possible for any single circle to have a different area than specified by this formula. And it is universally true: all circles at all times and places have this area.
- Notice, too, that our knowledge of geometry does apply to the world we experience. It is true of any circle that we should encounter in our experience that its area is equal to π times the square of its radius.
- So, how is possible for us to have a priori access into the nature of the world we experience? The only way, says Kant, is for space to be a form of our representation of the external. If space is how we mentally compose the external world, then, as a product of the mind, we have a priori access to it. And as a form of the representation of the outer world, space will characterize all the outer world. Anything that we know about its form, then, will be true of the outer world, as experienced by us.