

Kant Study Guide II

The Transcendental Aesthetic

Reading: Transcendental Aesthetic: A19/B33-A30/B45 (pp. 25-31); compare Section II on Time (pp. 32-38; optional)

Notes:

- Rather than thinking of reason and the senses primarily as tools of knowledge, Kant thinks of them primarily as the tools for the construction of conscious experience. They are faculties of *representation*.
- That is, the senses (like reason), e.g., are not so much like a window through which we view the world, where oneself as subject and the world as object are both independent of sensation. In sensation, there is no absolute distinction between subject, sense, and object sensed. A better metaphor for sensation might be *modeling clay*, where the *medium of representation* is not distinct from the *object represented*.
- Consequently, as even Descartes saw, we cannot read the features of mind-independent reality directly off sensory objects. Rather, certain qualities of the objects represented in sense will turn out to be features of the medium of representation.
- In this section, Kant will argue that *space* and *time* themselves are features of our sensory apparatus, not features of mind-independent reality.
- (Remember, however, that Kant also thinks space and time to be empirically real. They are not merely figments of our imagination.)

Transcendental Aesthetic of Space and Time (pp. 25-35)

Central Question: What is the metaphysical nature of space and time?

Subsidiary Questions (more general):

1. What is a “pure intuition,” as Kant uses that expression? (A20/B35) What is the difference between the “matter” and “form” of sensibility? (A20/B34-A21/B35)
2. What does Kant mean by “inner sense”? What does he mean by “outer sense”? (A22/B37)
3. What does it mean for Kant to say that space (like time) is an intuition, not a concept? (See A23/B38-A25/B40, where he argues for this claim, as well as the next.)
4. What does it mean for Kant to say that space (like time) is an a priori representation?(*ibid*)
5. In what sense is Kant doing metaphysics in his investigation of space and time? (Recall that he denies that we have access to the thing in itself.)
6. How does one distinguish between (i.e., identify as numbering “two”) two qualitatively identical objects in one’s visual field? (Hint: intuition is particular, never general.)
7. Why does Kant think that his exposition of the concept of space explains the possibility of geometry as a science issuing in synthetic a priori principles?

- (A25/B40-41) [Answering this question, you will *apply* what Kant is saying about space; try focusing on an example, e.g., some true statement about triangles.]
8. Explain, then, what it means for Kant to say that space is (a) a form of receptivity, (b) characteristic of things only insofar as they appear to us, and (c) not (ever) characteristic of things in themselves. (A26-270B42-43)
 9. And, so, what does it mean to say that space is *empirically real* but *transcendentally ideal*? (A28/B44)

(Kant's general line of thought here is reproduced with respect to time in the passages following our reading.)