

The Main Transcendental Question I, §§6–13, Notes

Kant now begins to address the questions listed at the end of §5 (4:280). Starting again with mathematics (§6), he suggests its examination might reveal the foundation of *a priori* cognition. The question is further refined from ‘how is pure mathematics possible?’ to ‘how is pure intuition possible?’. In response (§§9–10), Kant hints at his positive theory, *viz.* transcendental or ‘critical’ idealism (cf. Note III, 4:293). The three notes are reactions to the *Göttingen Review* (cf. Hatfield, p. 201–7), where Kant aims to distance himself from idealism.

1. How would you describe the difference between ‘intuitive’ and ‘discursive’ judgements? (§7, 4:281)
2. What is the difference between an ‘empirical’ and a ‘pure’ intuition? (§7, 4:281)
- 3.★ Sketch the difficulty that Kant raises in §8 (4:281–2).
4. What is the important point about ‘things as they are in themselves’, which Kant discusses in §9 (4:282).
- 5.★ What does Kant mean when he says that space and time are ‘pure intuitions that underlie *a priori* the empirical intuitions’ (§10, 4:283)?
6. In §11, Kant declares the present problem solved, *viz.* how synthetic *a priori* cognition in mathematics is possible. The second sentence of this paragraph is crucial, but difficult. Try to analyse it. (4:283–4)
7. What is space and time for Kant? (§§10–1, 4:283–4)
- 8.★ Why is Kant’s position the ‘very opposite’ of idealism? (Note II, 4:288–9)

Background. (a) An intuition [*Anschauung*] means both a kind of representation and the act of representing. (Representation [*Vorstellung*] is Kant’s general term for any cognitive state.) As representation, an intuition is that through which a cognition immediately relates to a particular object. It is a representation by which we directly apprehend, or grasp, what is given to us in sensibility. Sensibility [*Sinnlichkeit*] is the mind’s capacity to receive representations, and so the capacity to intuit objects. In contrast, objects are thought by means of the understanding [*Verstand*], and thus the understanding produces concepts [*Begriffe*]. All thinking is ultimately grounded in intuition, and hence sensibility, for objects could not be given to us in any different way (see *CPR*, A19/B33, Hatfield p. 156). (b) In §9 Kant introduces the notion of ‘form’. This is, roughly, a system for ordering, organising, and relating content: “That in appearance [*Erscheinung*, i.e. whatever is given in a conscious intuition] which corresponds to sensation [*Empfindung*, i.e. ‘the effect of an object on the capacity for representation, insofar as we are affected by it’ [*CPR* A19/B33] I call its **matter**, but that which allows the manifold of appearance to be intuited as ordered in certain relations I call the **form** of appearance” (*CPR* A20/B34, see Hatfield p. 157). Example: when we abstract from the representation of a body what we think in it, e.g., substance, power, divisibility, and also what we perceive in it, e.g., colour, hardness, impenetrability, what is left is extension and shape

[*Gestalt*]. Such a representation is a pure intuition, i.e. devoid of any empirical content, and as such a ‘mere form of sensibility’ (*CPR* A20–1/B35). (c) There is a link between the rationalist understanding of intuition and Kant’s *transcendental idealism* (cf. Note III, 4:293). For Descartes, an intuition is “the conception of a clear and attentive mind which is so easy and distinct that there can be no room for doubt about what we are understanding. Alternatively, [...], intuition is the conception of a clear and attentive mind which proceeds solely from the light of reason. [...] Thus everyone can mentally intuit that he exists, that he is thinking, that a triangle is bounded by just three sides and a sphere by a single surface, and the like” (*Rules for the Direction of the Mind*, Rule III). Given that *intueri* means to look at, or inspect, something, a Cartesian intuition is the immediate rational gaze, or intellectual grasp, of some indubitable truth: we see in a flash, as it were, the truth of some proposition. This immediate cognitive access to things as they are in themselves, or to things as themselves, is the hallmark of rationalist metaphysical speculations. A key part of Kant’s transcendental idealism is the *rejection* of this approach: we are cognitively cut off from things as they are in themselves, but can only grasp things insofar as they appear to us (cf. *Prolegomena*, Appendix, 4:374ff.).

