

Audun Øfsti · Peter Ulrich · Truls Wyller (eds.)

Indexicality and Idealism

The Self in Philosophical Perspective

Preface

Contributors

Olav Ashmos

I, That Perspective

Gerrit Köp

Indexicalität und Intelligibilität

Lucien Kroll-Hardy

Identity and the Use of Self-Ascription

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Audun Øfsti

Die Deutsche Philosophie – CP, Daseinsphilosophie

Thinking in German

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The Self in
Philosophical Perspective

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Sensibility, space and public display¹

Jens Saugstad

As I look around in the room, I see that there is a rectangular door at the back, that a person I know is seated in front of me, and that the tables stand approximately a meter apart. Sight is not, of course, the only sense through which I get informed about my surroundings in this automatic way. But I need not brag about all the other things that I can tell you about this room off the cuff. It is a plain fact that we form a host of beliefs, and often get to know many things about our surroundings just by being sensuously affected in appropriate ways.

No wonder, then, that we tend to believe that knowledge, in its most elementary form, is just the result of passively receiving information through our sense organs. Hallucinations and other exceptions apart, it seems that having sensations is sufficient for forming elementary beliefs and knowledge-claims about the world. It has also been argued that what goes beyond this is the result of various ways of combining these elements by means of association and inference. On such views, our entire web of factual epistemic beliefs and knowledge, however complicated, is composed of the kind of knowledge that we derive from our senses: "Nothing in the intellect that was not previously in the senses."

This empiricist, indeed sensualist, view has traditionally had – and continues to have – a strong influence on philosophy. Locke, Berkeley, Hume, and Russell are just the most famous representatives. What is important, however, is that it is the common sense view. This is how we all naturally think about knowledge. For sensualism is encouraged by the existence of perceptual knowledge that I gave samples of at the beginning. The fact that we form beliefs and knowledge about the world on many occasions without so much as lifting a finger, without speaking, even silently to oneself – in brief, without doing anything except perhaps placing oneself in position for receiving the relevant sensations – leads us to infer that we could have had perceptual beliefs and knowledge even without language and overt action.

From the last sentence, you will have understood that I do not accept sensualism. It has left out of the picture a crucial ingredient, that *coping* with the world is a necessary condition of perceptual beliefs and indeed of knowledge in general. Actually, I deem this oblivion the most serious and consequential

¹ Thanks to Jonathan Knowles for help with the English and for general comments.

mistake one can possibly make in philosophy; the "arch-error" of philosophy. But the problem is whether we can *argue* that sensualism is wrong. How can it be shown that just being sensuously affected in appropriate ways – in spite of the seemingly so overwhelming evidence to the contrary – is *insufficient* even for perceptual belief and knowledge? How can it be argued that being sensuously affected only yields perceptual belief and knowledge against a background of human practice? How can we determine *which* practices are a presupposition for our knowledge-claims? And is there a transhistorically fixed set of epistemic practices? I don't think it would be wise to try to answer such large and complex questions from scratch. But we are fortunate to have a tradition of philosophers who have emphasized that coping with the world is a condition of thought, understanding and knowledge. Those that first spring to mind are the later Wittgenstein and Heidegger. Wittgenstein inspires the position I am about to present, but I believe it is more properly seen as orthodox Kantian. Admittedly, it is not very common to see Kant as a representative of the position that coping with the world through language and free, intentional actions involving the human body (as opposed to mere mental acts or some other kind of invisible activity) is a transcendental condition of the possibility of experience; but that is precisely what I believe.² Part of the reason I find Kant more attractive than Wittgenstein and other philosophers who see practice as a basis of knowledge is Kant's idea of a fixed system of epistemic principles, and, not least, the fact that he has given *principled arguments* against sensualism.

To my mind, the chief purpose of the Transcendental Aesthetics in *Kritik der reinen Vernunft* is to contribute to such an argument. By focusing on space and time, as opposed to individual predicates of objects and states, Kant attempts to prove *once and for all* that a concept must be presented in its corresponding sensible intuition – in a *public display*, as I shall argue – if it is to yield knowledge. This is one important aspect of the overall argument against sensualism, and the aspect with which I will be concerned in this paper.

It might be objected that I shouldn't focus so one-sidedly on sensualism in connection with an interpretation and defense of Kant. Surely, he wanted just as much to take the rationalists to task. Transcendental realism, the position that we know things in themselves and which Kant tried to refute, is common to empiricists and rationalists. To view an object as a thing in itself, however, is to view it "unangesehen der Art, dasselbe anzuschauen" (B 55). Thus, what both schools of thought ignore is that our knowledge of objects is mediated by sensible intuitions given and produced in accordance with the two forms of sensibility, space and time. We will see that the sensualist ignores this mediation by conflating the distinction between sensations (*Empfindungen*) and sensible intuitions. One may, of course, ignore the mediating role of sensible intuitions without being a sensualist, by ignoring sensibility as an independent source of knowledge altogether. Kant's claim that "Leibniz intellektuierte die

² Cf. Jens Saugstad, "Kant on Action and Knowledge", in: *Kant-Studien* 83, 1992.

Erscheinungen" (B 327) seems intended to characterize such a rationalist position. Still, I believe that the chief form of transcendental realism is sensualism. As sensibility cannot plausibly be left out if we are to understand how our knowledge-claims can be about objects in the external world, pure rationalists have insurmountable problems accounting for the objectivity of knowledge – even though sensualists have their good share of skeptical problems too. One may indeed say that rationalists are perverted sensualists: they dismiss sensibility as an independent source of knowledge on an interpretation of experience that is sensualist. Descartes' dreaming and demon arguments testify to this tendency, and perhaps the same could be said for Leibniz' view of the senses as merely a source of confusion and distortion (B 332).

In this talk I want to focus on space as the form of outer experience. But before we proceed to Kant's arguments, I want to stress that for Kant transcendental idealism is merely a *critical reminder*:

Dagegen ist der transzendente Begriff der Erscheinungen im Raume eine kritische Erinnerung, daß überhaupt nichts, was im Raume angeschaut wird, eine Sache an sich, noch daß der Raum eine Form der Dinge sei, die ihnen etwa an sich selbst eigen wäre, sondern daß uns die Gegenstände an sich gar nicht bekannt sind, und, was wir äußere Gegenstände nennen, nichts anderes als bloße Vorstellungen unserer Sinnlichkeit sind, deren Form der Raum ist, ... (B 45).

If a thesis is merely a *critical reminder*, then presumably it cannot state anything that we did not already know. In Wittgenstein's terms, it would be a thesis that everyone would agree to.³ So although Kant's thesis that external objects are mere representations of our sensibility, whose form is space, may seem esoteric, this must be a misleading appearance. Being a *critical reminder*, transcendental idealism must be an utterly uncontroversial thesis – once understood. Indeed, I take this to be a criterion of correct interpretation.

For Kant, space as the form of outer sense is fundamental to all our concepts of the external world, even our psychological concepts, since time, the form of inner sense, can only be represented by means of space (B 49-50). Space as a transcendental principle is therefore relevant to more than our knowledge of just spatial properties. But for convenience I shall focus on very simple spatial concepts, such as 'circle,' 'triangle' or 'length.'

Here is a sketch of the position I want to argue for. Kant's doctrine that concepts like the above are rules for their construction in sensible intuition (A 105, B 180, B 287) means that they are rules for the *overt* construction of the corresponding figures. In virtue of being produced by overt, rule-following action, these self-made figures serve as paradigms for the judgmental application of their predicates to objects given in sense. Such paradigmatic public displays of concepts are a species of what Kant labels sensible intuitions. Hence, the thesis that thoughts without content are empty (B 75) means in the geometrical case that concepts must be displayed publicly by means of overt

³ Wittgenstein, *Philosophische Untersuchungen*, Frankfurt am Main 1971, # 128.

construction in order to have meaning. It is emphatically not enough just to create mental images in "the mind's eye." Kant is explicit at this point. In *Kritik der reinen Vernunft* he says:

Daher erfordert man auch, einen abgesonderten Begriff *sinnlich zu machen*, d.i. das ihm korrespondierende Objekt in der Anschauung darzulegen, weil, ohne dieses, der Begriff (wie man sagt) ohne *Sinn*, d.i. ohne Bedeutung bleiben würde. Die Mathematik erfüllt diese Forderung durch die Konstruktion der Gestalt, welche eine den Sinnen gegenwärtige (obzwar a priori zustande gebrachte) Erscheinung ist. Der Begriff der Größe sucht in eben der Wissenschaft seine Haltung und Sinn in der Zahl, diese aber an den Fingern, den Korallen des Rechenbretts, oder den Strichen und Punkten, die vor Augen gestellt werden (B 299).

It is evident that to represent a mathematical concept in sensible intuition *a priori* for Kant is to display the concept in public. The produced figure which is "an appearance present to the senses" and the fingers, the beads of the abacus, and the strokes and points "which can be placed before the eyes" are clearly material objects. Thus, mathematical concepts require public display; a sensible intuition is such a public display. (This applies to inner intuitions as well, but they are not my topic in this talk (B 50, B 292).) We are prone, however, to construe sensible intuitions as visual impressions of objects, as a looking-at, or generalized to all five senses, as the sensible awareness of particular objects. This has indeed become the standard interpretation.⁴ But in *Kritik der Urteilskraft*, Kant is emphatic that the presenting (*das Darstellen*) of a concept in sensible intuition amounts to a demonstration of that concept:

So sagt man von einem Anatomiker: er demonstriere das menschliche Auge, wenn er den Begriff, den er vorher diskursiv vorgetragen hat, vermittelst der Zergliederung dieses Organs anschaulich macht.⁵

If the anatomist's demonstration of the human eye is an example of presenting concepts in sensible intuition, then clearly sensible intuitions must be representations of a kind that can be shown to others. Sensible intuitions, therefore, cannot be either sense impressions or mental images, but must rather be physical objects that display concepts.⁶

Notice that there is still ample room for the distinction between *a posteriori* and *a priori* sensible intuitions. The crucial point is that sensible intuitions are not all produced by us; they are also *given* in sensibility. If, for example, someone shows me a dice, it displays, *inter alia*, a square *a posteriori*. This is an empirical intuition, a display that the *object* does just by affecting our sense organs. Here we are *passive*. Objects still do not display properties in themselves, for objects only have their display function in virtue of *our* ability to display concepts *actively*. If the activity involves no more than the construction of a paradigmatic, sensible representation of the concept, the display is an

⁴ See e.g. Sebastian Gardner, *Kant and the Critique of Pure Reason*, London 1999, p. 66.

⁵ Kant, *Kritik der Urteilskraft*, B 240-241/342-343.

⁶ Saugstad, *ibid.*, p. 394.

a priori intuition. If, for example, I draw a triangle on a piece of paper, then I construct its concept *a priori* in sensible intuition. Of course, the figure drawn is perceptually on par with triangles not drawn by me; it is therefore an empirical intuition. But still the display of a triangle by means of my own action has a different and more fundamental status, because the figure is *made* by me in a rule-following way. So although the end-product of the act of construction is an empirical intuition, it

dient gleichwohl den Begriff, unbeschadet seiner Allgemeinheit, auszudrücken, weil bei dieser empirischen Anschauung immer nur auf die Handlung der Konstruktion des Begriffs ... gesehen ... wird (B 742).

Evidently, what accounts for the *a priori* status of the concept is the action of constructing the concept. This shows that there is no need for any kind of inner, mental representation in order to explain the *a priori* status of mathematics. The *a priori* pertains to the publicly self-made. And since the figure produced on a piece of paper, in the sand, etc., is an empirical intuition, the *a priori* intuition – the pure intuition which Kant at one place says that “der Mathematiker allen seinen Demonstrationen zum Grunde legen muß”⁷ – can only be the *display* by means of the motion of the constructing hand. Unlike the figure imprinted in a material medium as a result of the action of constructing, the display of the concept by means of the performance of the overt action itself is *a priori*. As Kant says, “Bewegung, als *Beschreibung* eines Raumes, ist ein reiner Aktus...” (B 155n). The term “pure act” shouldn’t mislead us to interpret such descriptions as mental acts or some other kind of invisible, incorporeal activity. A description of a space is clearly an intentional action that involves the motion of the human body. It is a pure act first of all in virtue of its fundamental role as a presupposition of experience. For example, the acquired ability to display the concept ‘circle’ in public through construction is a presupposition for experiencing objects given in sense, such as a plate, as circular (B 176). Another reason why the overt description of a space is a pure act is, I believe, that it is free in Kant’s transcendental sense (B 476–480). Thus, the public display of a geometrical concept by means of such a free, overt description of a space is an *a priori* intuition (indeed a *formal* intuition, B 160n) because it “inherits” the *a priori* status of that pure act.

The Kantian counterposition to sensualism is now simply this. When we passively perceive figures that “congrue” with the sensible figures that we learned to construct as we acquired the meaning of geometrical predicates, the figures passively given to sense also represent the predicates. For as they are isomorphous with the figures we made, the representing function of the former “rub off” onto those figures that are just given to us in perception. Thus, what we naively take to be objects informing us of their geometrical properties all by themselves are in fact objects representing geometrical predicates in virtue of our learned ability to overtly construct their corresponding sensible intuition.

⁷ Kant, *Über eine Entdeckung*, BA 13n/191n.

In other words, what we naively take to be objects which *in themselves* provide us with belief and knowledge through the senses are in fact *appearances* which inform us because we have already endowed them with information through the way we represent concepts in sensible intuition. Notice that an appearance is not a mental image or a sensation. Kant's examples are ordinary physical objects, such as a rose or drops of water (B 45, B 319). It contradicts our concept of physical object to deny that they exist independently of the mind, which clearly cannot be the position of someone who declares: "so bleibt es immer ein Skandal der Philosophie und allgemeinen Menschenvernunft, das Dasein der Dinge außer uns ... bloß auf *Glauben* annehmen zu müssen" (B XXXIXn). Kant's thesis that physical objects are appearances must, therefore, be understood in the ordinary sense of "physical object", not in a phenomenalist or reductionist sense. What is not independent of the mind, however, is the *representing function* that makes physical objects into appearances. Road signs, for example, do not represent a triangle, square or circle *in themselves*. They could not, "da ihre Eigenschaften nicht in meine Vorstellungskraft hinüber wandern können."⁸ Rather, they represent these qualities in virtue of our ability to display the relevant predicates *publicly* in sensible intuition *a priori*.

Let us now turn to Kant's doctrine of space as a pure intuition. If we are to understand it, we should look at plain facts about our use of spatial terms – uses with which we are all familiar. Consider the following dialogue: "Look at that bird!" person A says. "Where?" person B asks. "There, next to that tree," A answers, pointing with his hand towards the bird. Spatial terms like "there" and "next to" are typically accompanied by ostensive actions. This also applies to related spatial terms like "behind," "in front of," "to the right of," "to the left of," "over," and "under." In certain situations even "here" is accompanied by ostensive actions. For instance, when we play lawn bowling I might say "Stand just here!" as I point to my footprints in the grass. Often a speaker makes a movement of his hand towards himself when he says, "Come here!" And in still other situations, I might, for instance, say "Here is Nidarosdomen," pointing towards a cathedral. Of course, we often use "here" without an accompanying bodily action. If I want someone to find me in the fog, I may simply say, "I am here." But in this case, I point at where I am, as it were, with the sound of my voice. The ostensive nature of "here" is perhaps more clearly evinced in locutions like "I stand here, you can stand over there." In *The Blue Book*, Wittgenstein famously says, "It would be wrong to say that when someone points to the sun with the hand, he is pointing both to the sun and himself because it is *he* who points."⁹ Though this remark pertains to the first person pronoun "I," it may also be wrong, or at least misleading, to say that by pointing at the place *there*, I also point at the place *here*. Even so, the use of "here" in this case is clearly interwoven with an ostensive act accompanying "there" that also attracts attention to where I am located.

⁸ Kant, *Prolegomena*, A 52/282.

⁹ Wittgenstein, *The Blue and Brown Books*, Oxford 1958, p. 67.

I think it is a fact that spatial terms like the above are, again putting it in Wittgensteinian terms, *woven into* ostensive actions in the "space language-game."¹⁰ Obviously, such *deictic* terms, as they are sometimes called, are used occasionally without accompanying ostensive actions, e.g. in books, but in their primary use, they are interwoven with various ways of pointing to objects and areas, and pointing out directions. Of course, we do not always point with the tip of the forefinger; sometimes a nod or a movement of the eyes will do, and sometimes relocating oneself is a way of pointing. If, however, I use deictic spatial terms without ostensive acts, or in such a way that you cannot gather from the context what I am pointing at, then a vital element for making myself understood is missing. If, for example, I place myself towards the wall so that you cannot see where I am looking and now say "Look over there!" without moving my body, then you will not understand me. And if I insist upon using deictic spatial terms in this strange way, then I think you would be forced to conclude that I do not understand what I am saying either.

This strongly suggests that the *meaning* of spatial terms depends on ostensive actions. Ostensive actions are not secondary, something we just need to *communicate* thoughts about space, but essential for having such thoughts in the first place. I do not wish to imply that the deictic terms mentioned above suffice for having a concept of space. Presumably, one would at a minimum also need the concepts of distance, plane and volume, as well as of being contained. But I do not think one could have a concept of space without mastering deictic spatial terms. Appeals to deictic spatial terms therefore seem pivotal in an argument with the aim of demonstrating the ostensive basis of the concept of space and indeed of *all* particular spatial predicates. If deictic spatial terms are essential to the concept of space, then pointing must be fundamental for the concept of space and for all concepts of spaces. On this view, the concept 'circle,' for instance, is a rule for pointing out a public representation of that concept through *ostensive* construction (B 745). In this way a paradigmatic representation of the concept is produced *a priori*. Notice that I do not say that we form the concept of circle by being shown examples of circular shaped objects, that is, by so-called ostensive definitions. The acquisition of geometrical concepts involves essentially learning how to *construct* their corresponding figure in the ostensive manner. My thesis, then, is (a) that the concept of space is based upon ostensive action, (b) that all concepts of geometrical properties and relations are rules for the ostensive construction of public, paradigmatic representations of those properties and relations, and (c) that these features about our concepts of space can be proven, *inter alia*, by appealing to deictic spatial terms.

Here I would like to issue another warning. Just as there is the tendency to overlook the conditions of experience, there is the contrary tendency to fill them with foreign content. The fact that I have used a dialogue to exhibit the ostensive nature of our representations of space could lead us to infer that the

¹⁰ Cf. Wittgenstein, *Philosophische Untersuchungen*, # 7.

conditions of experience are essentially *social* in nature. But we could easily imagine a monological situation which incorporates the ostensive use of spatial terms. If, say, I want to measure a piece of land, I might say to myself, "I shall start here and move towards the stone over there, and then turn right," while accompanying the utterance with the relevant ostensive acts. There may be contingent, empirical barriers to learning a language in isolation from other people, but I am aware of no *conceptual* reasons that entail that a monologue like the above is parasitic on dialogical use. A monologue is not a private language,¹¹ and what is conceptually required is that the use of words is *public*, not that it is *social*, to invoke a familiar distinction from the Wittgenstein-literature.

The point of focusing on deictic spatial terms was to help prove the ostensive nature of all spatial concepts, including geometrical predicates like 'circular.' But now it seems that I have just kicked the problem one level up. If we need an argument to prove that the meaning of the term "circle" depends on public display by way of ostensive construction *a priori*, how can we so confidently assume that deictic spatial terms, even granted their intrinsic connection to ostensive action, are so basic as to prove the ostensive nature of the concept of space? Could it not be argued that the use of deictic spatial terms *presupposes* the concept of space, and that the latter must be acquired prior to the learning of ostensive action? Recall Hume's account:

Upon opening my eyes and turning them to the surrounding objects, I perceive many visible bodies; and upon shutting them again, and considering the distance betwixt these bodies, I acquire the idea of extension.

The table before me is alone sufficient by its view to give the idea of extension. This idea, then, is borrowed from, and represents some impression which this moment appears to the senses. But my senses convey to me only the impressions of coloured points, disposed in a certain manner. ... the idea of extension is nothing but a copy of these coloured points, and of the manner of their appearance.¹²

In such or some similar manner, the sensualist could insist that the very concept of space is derived from sensation, and that *this* is the primary representation of space. I just *see* that this table is extended, that it is in front of me, that there is another table to the left of it, and a third behind it. I need to point to these tables only in order to *communicate* my experience to you. But my experience, understanding, belief and knowledge that the tables are extended, and so located relative to each other, do not depend on this ability for ostensive action. Thus, a position like Hume's would seem to undermine the strategy of refuting sensualism by assembling critical reminders about, *inter alia*, our use of deictic spatial terms.

What I need to show is that by kicking the problem one level up, we find resources for a proof that were not available at lower levels. Put otherwise, instead of trying to argue *casuistically* that for terms like "circle," "square,"

¹¹ Wittgenstein, *Philosophische Untersuchungen*, # 243.

¹² Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, London 1968, Book I, Part II, Section III, p. 41.

"triangle," "length," "volume" we form the concepts they express by learning how to construct the corresponding figure, it may instead be that focusing on the use of deictic spatial terms and facts about the concept of space which are intrinsically related to this use will provide the resources for a *principled* proof.

Kant's proof-strategy is that certain facts pertaining to our concept of space force us to conclude that the original representation (*die ursprüngliche Vorstellung*) of space is a pure intuition (*eine reine Anschauung*). The technical terms Kant needs for his project of establishing a scientific metaphysics (B 22) capable of strict proof tend to mislead readers to look beyond the ordinary in order to decipher their meaning. But if theses like the transcendental ideality of space are just *critical reminders*, then everyday examples must fully capture the meaning of Kant's technical terms. Thus, my suggestion is that the seemingly so esoteric claim that the original representation of space is a pure intuition in reality is just Kant's technical way of expressing that the concept of space is embedded in ostensive actions. It is in keeping with my discussion of the *a priori* above, to say that the display through the ostensive actions that accompany sentences like "Look at the bird over there!" is a species of *a priori* intuition. For it is a display done actively *by us*, not passively by *objects*. However, unlike *a priori* geometrical intuitions, such as the public display of a triangle by means construction, the purpose of the public display accompanying deictic spatial terms like "there" and "next to" is not to display *figure*. Unlike predicates like "straight line," "round," "triangle," or "cube," the content of deictic spatial terms is not captured by any paradigmatic figure, even though a figure might be used as a means of their display. We may for example use a point and a line to display that the ball is behind the wall, but being behind something is not captured by any such figure. Objects are behind something always relative to *someone*, and this implies that the display of this deictic spatial term must include a standpoint. In the end, any standpoint needs to be referred to the standpoint of the speaker. Thus, deictic spatial terms are intrinsically connected to ostensive display involving the speaker's standpoint. I believe this is what Kant wants to capture by distinguishing the *pure* intuition of space from the mere "garden-variety" *a priori* intuitions corresponding to geometrical concepts. Hence, when he says that we construct geometrical concepts *in* pure intuition this just means that we construct paradigmatic geometrical figures by pointing them out by means of the speaker's intentional motion of a finger or some bodily part put to that use.

My reading of pure intuition as ostensive display is controversial. Standard approaches to Kant surely do not see ostensive actions as basic. Instead, the pure intuition of space is taken as some kind of underlying visualization, often as a mental "visualization" before the inner eye, and sometimes as the projection of space upon objects in the visual field, as when we "see" the non-existing lines of constellations on the starry heaven. There may be other ways to read Kant, but I think it is fair to say that it is not customary to honor the ostensive meaning of "Anschauung."

But Kant's paper from 1768, "Von dem Ersten Grunde des Unterschiedes der Gegenden im Raume," supports the ostensive interpretation, at least half of the way. Kant here says:

In dem körperlichen Raume lassen sich wegen seiner drei Abmessungen drei Flächen denken, die einander insgesamt rechtwinklicht schneiden. Da wir alles, was außer uns ist, durch die Sinnen nur insoferne kennen, als es in Beziehung auf uns selbst stehet, so ist kein Wunder, daß wir von der Verhältnis dieser Durchschnittsflächen zu unserem Körper den ersten Grund hernehmen, den Begriff der Gegenden im Raume zu erzeugen.¹³

Though the passage stresses the bodily basis of spatial orientation, there is no mention of ostensive actions, at least not explicitly. I am inclined to think that even the position in 1768 is best construed in terms of ostensive, bodily acts, but it may be safer to say that this is what it developed into in Kant's critical philosophy. It is a fact that Kant never abandoned the main argument in *Von dem ersten Grundes* for the corporeal subjectivity of space, viz., the appeal to incongruent counterparts. This makes it plausible that the role of the body in the paper from 1768 is still a prominent feature of Kant's critical philosophy. The following remark from *Kritik der reinen Vernunft* seems to capture the point:

Wir können demnach nur aus dem Standpunkte eines Menschen, vom Raum, von ausgedehnten Wesen usw. reden (B 42).

The doctrine of the corporeal subjectivity as the first ground of our orientation in space is also well suited for explaining the transcendental ideality of space:

Der Raum ist nichts anderes, als nur die Form aller Erscheinungen äußerer Sinne, d.i. die subjektive Bedingung der Sinnlichkeit, unter der allein uns äußere Anschauung möglich ist (B 42).

The ideality of space, therefore, implies,

daß er nichts sei, sobald wir die Bedingungen der Möglichkeit aller Erfahrung weglassen, und ihn als etwas, was den Dingen an sich selbst zum Grunde liegt, annehmen (B 44).

If space is relative to the experiencing subject in its role as a corporeal coordinate system, so to speak, then clearly space is nothing apart from our way of representing it.

But still the doctrine of the corporeal subjectivity of space is some distance away from my claim that its original representation is a set of ostensive actions. One of the novel ideas in the proof in *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, heralded already in the inaugural dissertation from 1770, is the metaphysical discussion of space (and time). Kant's genius was to see that we can argue conclusively for

¹³ Kant, "Von dem Ersten Grunde des Unterschiedes der Gegenden im Raume," p. 995/378.

the ostensive ground of spatiality by appealing to *metaphysical* facts contained in our conception of space. The metaphysical discussion begins with an appeal to deictic spatial terms, and goes on to invoke metaphysical propositions pertaining to the way we represent space which are intrinsically connected to our ostensive mode of representing it. To be more specific, the appeal to the ostensive nature of the deictic spatial terms "there," "outside of" and "next to" in the first metaphysical argument is supplemented in the second argument by a metaphysical proposition pertaining to the necessary spatial nature of objects of outer experience and the conceivability of empty space, in the third by the metaphysical proposition that space is essentially one and all-embracing, and in the fourth that space is an infinite given magnitude. The purpose of the discussion is to assemble critical reminders of metaphysical facts contained in our conception of space, to adapt a remark by Wittgenstein,¹⁴ that cannot be made sense of unless we take ostensive action to be the original – the most fundamental – representation of space. In the transcendental discussion of space Kant concludes that our ostensive mode of representing space is the form of outer sense, that is, a transcendental condition of the experience of objects in space.

Clearly I cannot go through the metaphysical and transcendental discussions in full detail here, but I want to show how they support my interpretation, thereby suggesting how they support Kant's philosophical thesis itself. However, with regard to the latter objective I shall confine myself to primarily rebutting some counterarguments, in particular the charge that Kant is committed to Euclidean geometry.

Before I go on, I want to stress that I see no way of introducing the ostensive nature of space from anything but a description of the use of language. There are no metaphysical facts that allow us somehow to deduce it independently of such a description. In the metaphysical discussion the ostensive nature of spatial terms is introduced, if only tacitly, with the appeal to deictic terms in the first argument, and in general the ostensive component of knowledge is referred to by Kant's distinction between concept and intuition, which is a basic premise in the metaphysical discussion, in particular in the third and fourth argument. And while the distinction itself, in the final analysis, is given content by Kant's examples of actual uses of language, its fundamental status as a mark of all theoretical uses of reason depends upon the whole critical system. Obviously, then, the four metaphysical arguments only work within the framework of Kant's architectonics. Still, given the concept-intuition distinction, the metaphysical discussion of the concept of space serves as a way of deciding between the following two, opposed positions: (1) The original representation of space is the set of ostensive actions that accompany the use of spatial terms. (2) The set of ostensive actions is secondary, and there is a more original representation of space. Given that position (2) would only be plausible – according to the problems with rationalism mentioned above – on

¹⁴ Wittgenstein, *Philosophische Untersuchungen*, # 127.

some version of a sensualist theory of knowledge, Kant can focus on whether the concept of space is abstracted from experience. If it is, then position (2) would be right. If, on the other hand, the original representation of space is not a concept, but a pure intuition, then position (1) is right (given the ostensive interpretation of "Anschauung").

The first metaphysical argument is obviously directed against sensualism:

Der Raum ist kein empirischer Begriff, der von äußeren Erfahrungen abgezogen worden. Denn damit gewisse Empfindungen auf etwas außer mich bezogen werden, (d.i. auf etwas in einem anderen Orte des Raumes, als darinnen ich mich befinde), imgleichen damit ich sie als außer- und nebeneinander, mithin nicht bloß verschieden, sondern als in verschiedenen Orten vorstellen könne, dazu muß die Vorstellung des Raumes schon zum Grunde liegen (B 38).

The argument here consists in an appeal to deictic spatial terms. At least, it is highly plausible that part of the representation of space that must already be presupposed are those ostensive actions which accompany deictic spatial terms like "there," "outside of" and "next to." I say "part of," because one would not want to accredit anyone who knew how to use only these three terms with a concept of space. But this only means that a whole set of ostensive actions must be presupposed in order to be able to refer to objects in space, not that there is some more original representation of space than this set.

Several interpreters have seen a tautology in the first metaphysical argument: We need the *representation* of space in order to *represent* the position of objects in space. Ralph Walker has articulated the charge:

Obviously we cannot think of objects as spatio-temporally located without having the ideas of space and time; but we may still have acquired these ideas by observing objects which now, after having performed the abstraction, we can think of as located spatio-temporally.¹⁵

Henry Allison has attempted to get Kant clear of the criticism by arguing "that 'ausser' here does not already involve a reference to space."¹⁶ But as this move flies in the face of the text, we better look for another response. Walker's sensualist objection suggests that Kant's claim would not be vacuous if the representations in question are not of the same kind. And that is exactly Kant's point. His claim is that we could not *experience* objects as spatially located if we did not already have the representation of space. In other words, experience could not represent space to us *passively* were it not for our ability to represent space *actively* by means of ostensive action. There is no tautology in this claim!

But even if the first metaphysical argument is not a tautology, it is more like a *statement* of the position than an argument. At least its point is not made clear without the remaining arguments. While the second argument establishes the *a priori* status of the representation of space, its ostensive nature is first

¹⁵ Ralph C.S. Walker, *Kant*, London 1978, p. 29.

¹⁶ Henry E. Allison, *Kant's Transcendental Idealism*, New Haven 1983, p. 83.

brought out in the third and the fourth. I shall thus focus on these two arguments, even though the second has its problems too.

In the third metaphysical argument, Kant argues from the fact that we do conceive of all particular spaces as parts of the one and only all-embracing space to the intermediate conclusion that "der allgemeinen Begriff vom Räumen, beruht lediglich auf Einschränkungen" (B 39). From this he concludes that an *a priori* intuition underlies all concepts of space, a conclusion followed by an appeal to geometry:

Hieraus folgt, daß in Ansehung seiner eine Anschauung *a priori* (die nicht empirisch ist) allen Begriffen von demselben zum Grunde liegt. So werden auch alle geometrischen Grundsätze, z. E. daß in einem Triangel zwei Seiten zusammen größer sind, als die dritte, niemals aus allgemeinen Begriffen von Linie und Triangel, sondern aus der Anschauung und zwar *a priori* mit apodiktischer Gewißheit abgeleitet (B 39).

Michael Friedman argues that the appeal to geometry here betrays Kant's deep commitment to Euclidean geometry:

In the end, therefore, Kant's claim of priority for the singular intuition space rests on our knowledge of geometry.¹⁷

But this is to turn Kant's argument on its head. It is quite evident that the third metaphysical argument is an independent argument for the constructive nature of geometry. Kant wants primarily to use geometry to *illustrate* his conclusion about limitations (*Einschränkungen*) as the basis for general concepts of space. Even if he must have believed that the geometrical proof-method of his days supports it, this does not alter the fact that the third metaphysical space-argument itself does not rest on the subsequent appeal to geometry. So I doubt Friedman's diagnosis that the lack of polyadic logic was what compelled Kant to see construction as essential to geometry.¹⁸ If this is right, then even the transcendental discussion of space does not presuppose the synthetic *a priori* nature of geometry as a mere fact of science, albeit Kant appeals to geometry here too.

The "Euclidean charge" is also directed at the fourth metaphysical argument. Here Kant argues that our representation of space as an infinite given magnitude can only be accounted for if the original representation of space is an *a priori* intuition. If being an infinite given magnitude implies *metrical infinity*, the charge goes, then the argument shares a crucial assumption with Euclidean geometry. Many interpreters, for example Parsons and Allison,¹⁹ have tried to rescue Kant by arguing that "an infinite given magnitude" is to be taken in the sense of *boundlessness*. If space is curved, then space is unbounded, but not infinite in the metrical sense. The surface of a sphere, by

¹⁷ Michael Friedman, *Kant and the Exact Sciences*, Cambridge, Mass. 1992, p. 70.

¹⁸ Friedman, *ibid.*, esp. pp. 63ff.

¹⁹ Charles Parsons, "The Transcendental Aesthetic," in: P. Guyer (ed.): *The Cambridge Companion to Kant*, Cambridge 1992, p. 71; Allison, *ibid.*, p. 93.

analogy, is unbounded as there is no barrier to going endlessly round and round. But as the surface is measurable, it is not infinite in the metrical sense.

I am not convinced that Kant made this distinction. But it does not matter. For all he says is that we *represent* space as an infinite given magnitude, not that we *have to* represent it thus. The argument proceeds from a metaphysical *fact* about what we conceive space to be like, to the conclusion that we must represent space through ostensive action. The necessity pertains to the conclusion, not the premise. Thus, unlike the thesis that the original representation of space is a pure intuition, the infinity of space does not enjoy a transcendental status. All Kant needs for his purposes is the fact that we *do* conceive of space as infinite – even if this infinity may be metrical. It would not falsify his argument if our metaphysical conception of space is wrong. And if we were to change it tomorrow, say, if science comes to have an impact on the ordinary understanding such that its theory of space becomes our everyday conception, then we would just have to find other premises for a new argument that the original representation of space is the set of ostensive actions. A change of premises does not entail that we would come to another conclusion.

The transcendental discussion completes the argument by arguing from position (1) above (that the original representation of space is the set of ostensive actions accompanying the use of spatial terms) to the conclusion that space is the form of outer sense. Its aim is to account for *the fact* that the objects we observe display the concepts of spatial properties and relations passively to sense. How can objects just affecting our senses represent *a posteriori* the spatial properties and relations whose concepts depend upon our acquired ability to represent them *a priori* in sensible intuition? How can paradigmatic representations of space made by us apply to objects not made by us? In general, how can the *a priori* representation of space by means of ostensive action apply to objects given *a posteriori* in sense? Kant answers:

Offenbar nicht anders, als so fern sie bloß im Subjekte, als die formale Beschaffenheit desselben, von Objekten affiziert zu werden, und dadurch *unmittelbare Vorstellung* derselben, d.i. *Anschauung* zu Bekommen, ihren Sitz hat, also nur als Form des äußeren Sinnes überhaupt (B 41).

I take his point to be that objects given in sense represent spatial properties and relations only because our way of actively displaying spatial concepts by means of ostensive actions is *what makes* objects passively display the same conceptual content. A road sign, for example, is a sensible intuition that displays a triangle in virtue of our learned skill to display the concept of triangle publicly by means of ostensive action. In general, our ostensive mode of representing space *a priori* is the transcendental condition under which objects given in sense display space *a posteriori*. Consequently, perceptual belief and knowledge presuppose our ability to represent spatial terms *a priori* by means of ostensive action. We have finally reconciled the transcendental ideality of space with the fact that tends to mislead us into endorsing sensualism, and which made the investigation necessary in the first place.

Let me end with a remark about the problem of indexicals. In a famous passage Wittgenstein says:

"Ich" benennt keine Person, "hier" keinen Ort, "dieses" ist kein Name. Aber sie stehen mit Namen in Zusammenhang. Namen werden mittels ihrer erklärt.²⁰

If this is not to be construed as a trivial claim, it cannot be that "I" and "here" are not *names* of persons and places, as in Anscombe's translation.²¹ Surely "benennen" must be a synonym for "denote" or "refer." The claim that "I" does not refer to the person who says it has been well explained by Peter Hacker. When I use the first-person pronoun in utterances like "I think that such-and-such," Hacker argues, "I do not pick out one person from among others."²² My expression may, however, give *others* occasion to pick me out as the person who thinks so and so. The idea that I refer to myself is a grammatical illusion created by confusing the first- and the third-person perspective. If so, though Hacker does not draw the conclusion, it seems that it must be highly misleading to classify the personal pronoun "I" as an indexical. For an indexical is defined precisely as "[a]n expression whose reference on occasion is dependent upon the context."²³ Although there are innocuous uses of "refer" on which one may say that "I" refers, the idea that it is an indexical encourages the confusion of treating it as an ordinary referring term. With this qualification the Wittgensteinian position seems to fit Kant's critique of rational psychology quite well. One may indeed say that the Paralogisms result from treating "I" as an ordinary referring term.

Hacker does not elaborate Wittgenstein's parallel claim about "here," and I am not aware of any discussions of it. But if the parallel holds, presumably it holds for "there" as well. If so, then it would be nonsense to say with Ernst Tugendhat,

daß derselbe Ort, der an diesem Ort mit "hier" bezeichnet wird, von einen anderen Ort aus mit "dort" bezeichnen werden kann, ...²⁴

If "here" and "there" do not denote, then Tugendhat is wrong that their meaning depend upon such a system of reciprocal denotation. But is it not obvious that these terms denote? Is it not a paradigm of denotation to say, for instance, "Look at that place over there!"? I do indeed refer to a place *by means of* "there." But it is not the term "there" which denotes the place that I point to, but "the place." In the same manner, when I answer someone who asks where I am by saying, "I am here," I do indeed refer to a place. But as the expression

²⁰ Wittgenstein, *Philosophische Untersuchungen*, # 410.

²¹ Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. G.E.M. Anscombe, Oxford 1958, # 410.

²² Peter Hacker, *Wittgenstein: Meaning and Mind*, Part 1, Essays, Oxford 1993, p. 227.

²³ Simon Blackburn, *The Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy*, Oxford 1994, p. 190.

²⁴ Ernst Tugendhat, *Selbstbewußtsein und Selbstbestimmung*, Frankfurt am Main 1979, p. 73.

is elliptic for, say, "I am here in room 608," we create a grammatical illusion by confusing the reference of the term "room 608" with the *means* of referring to it: the ostensive use of the term "here." Again I believe this conclusion fits the Kantian view well. For the transcendental ideality of space means that space is a *means of representation*, not an object represented. In the relevant terminology, space is a *means of reference*, not an object referred to. If spatial terms like "here" and "there" are taken to refer to places, positions in space, or even points in space,²⁵ then this seems to me the very *reification* of space that Kant wanted to avoid.

All references to *Kritik der reinen Vernunft* are placed in brackets in the main text, e.g. A 23 or B 38, where A and B refer to the first and second edition, respectively, of that work. All references to other works of Kant are either to the original pagination or to the Weischedel edition (before the slash), and to the Akademie edition (after the slash).

²⁵ Truls Wyller, *Indexikalische Gedanken*, Freiburg/München 1994, p. 28 and pp. 129-137.