

Mr. Dennis Maust
 Mr. Frank Hunt
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Was über Raum und Zeit?

*Ein Traum, ein Traum ist unser Leben
 Auf Erden hier.
 Wie Schatten auf den Wogen schweben
 Und schwinden wir.
 Und messen unsre trägen Tritte
 Nach Raum und Zeit.
 Und sind (und wissen's nicht) in Mitte
 Der Ewigkeit.*

*A dream, a dream is our life
 here on earth.
 Like shadows on the billows
 we float and vanish.
 And measure our slothful steps
 by space and time.
 And are (and know it not) in the midst
 of eternity.*

Herder's first stanza from *Amor und Psyche auf einem Grabmal*¹ opens this essay for a number of reasons: the poem's title alludes to our temporal existence; lines four, seven, and eight place that existence within eternity while hinting at our imperfect knowledge; and lines five and six serendipitously² point to the specific question before us regarding Kant's *Prolegomena*.

Now, first things first, I do not know the German language. My exposure consists of two semesters of undergraduate study, oh too many years ago, and a few days touring Austria, Germany, and Switzerland – also too many years ago. Therefore, my suggestions within this paper rest largely (and perhaps unsteadily) on several different translations of the *Prolegomena*, supplemented with a generous dose of the Google Translate online application.

I started down this path in an attempt to work out a question that aroused my interest while reading Kant's "Conclusion" (specifically, section 60), and apparently I could not deter myself otherwise. My primary English translation of *Prolegomena*, Hatfield's edition, informs

¹ Johann Gottfried Herder, a theologian, philosopher, and minor poet, lived from 1744 to 1803 (Steinhauer, 155). The title of this poem translates to *Cupid and Psyche on a Tomb*.

² In my fledgling attempts to grasp the various possible meanings of *Raum*, which Kant uses both separately and together with *Zeit* in the *Prolegomena*, I accidentally discovered this poetic rendition of *Raum und Zeit* in the very first poem of Steinhauer's *First German Reader* (2). Whether Kant (1724 – 1804) was familiar with it, I will not venture a guess, but Hatfield informs us in his "Chronology" that Herder attended Kant's lectures for a number of years (1762 – 64), about twenty years before Kant published *Prolegomena*.

us how Kant's transcendental ideas are meant to serve. By negating "the impudent assertions of *materialism*, *naturalism*, and *fatalism*, which constrict the field of reason . . . they . . . provide moral ideas with space outside the field of speculation" (-364³). The reference to "space" in this passage draws our attention to a commonality that Kant's freshly introduced moral ideas might possibly share with his apodictic and necessary intuitions required for all cognitions and judgments of pure mathematics: namely, "space and time" (283+).

Nonetheless, "space outside the field of speculation" (-364) does not feel as necessarily "dimensional" (up to three dimensions) as the "space" Kant associates with intuitions:

That full-standing space (a space that is itself not the boundary of another space) has three dimensions, and that space in general cannot have more, is built upon the proposition that not more than three lines can cut each other at right angles in one point. (-285)

In English, the "space" provided for moral ideas seems less precise than that associated with intuitions, at least as translated. Notions like region, expanse, area, room, and berth come to mind. Indeed, at least two other English versions of *Prolegomena* (Ellington and Carus) use "scope" instead of "space" in their language regarding moral ideas just before marginal page 364.⁴ Is Hatfield trying to be helpful, perhaps to a fault? Are Ellington and Carus inadvertently inaccurate? Does Kant mean for us – precisely mean for us – to relate the cognitions and judgments of moral ideas to those of pure mathematics?

A quick check of the *Prolegomena* in its original German shows us that Kant uses *Raum* in both locations, and he always uses *Raum* when pairing it with *Zeit*. Hence, we become quite

³ When referencing the closest marginal pagination, a preceding dash implies above or before, while a subsequent plus implies below or after.

⁴ Perhaps because Ellington revised the 1902 Carus translation, "scope" gets used in both editions, or perhaps Ellington's revision of Carus occurred in 1977, his own 2001 translation merely carries it over. In either case, Ellington is the common thread.

familiar with space and time as the foundational intuitions for cognitions and judgments of pure mathematics. So, “Raum und Zeit” as a pair very likely suffer no mistranslations.

Standing alone, however, Raum can certainly take on the English notions already mentioned above, to which can be added chamber and sphere, as well. But whereas (via Google Translate) the primary German equivalent of scope is Umfang, room is Zimmer, and berth is Liegeplatz, to offer a few examples, the primary English equivalent of Raum is space. As a sanity check, I searched Carus’ online version of the *Prolegomena* and found but one other instance where Raum is translated as scope. Here, too, Ellington again agrees with Carus. It occurs in the paragraph immediately preceding the passage cited above:

When I compare all the transcendental Ideas, the totality of which constitutes the particular problem of natural pure reason, compelling it to quit the mere contemplation of nature, to transcend all possible experience, and in this endeavor to produce the thing (be it knowledge or fiction) called metaphysics, I think I perceive that the aim of this natural tendency is, to free our notions from the fetters of experience and from the limits of the mere contemplation of nature so far as at least to open to us a field containing mere objects for the pure understanding, which no sensibility can reach, not indeed for the purpose of speculatively occupying ourselves with them (for there we can find no ground to stand on), but because practical principles, which, without finding some such scope for their necessary expectation and hope, could not expand to the universality which reason unavoidably requires from a moral point of view.
(Carus, -363)

Hatfield’s edition, in this passage, adheres to Raum as space. As a reverse sanity check, I searched the German version of *Prolegomena* for Umfang and found it variously translated in English editions as scope, extent, extensive, and sphere – but not space. This search was not exhaustive; however, it leads me to believe that Hatfield’s *Prolegomena* reveals Kant’s intent most accurately. That is, Kant means for his readers to connect the space he provides for

cognitions and judgments of moral ideas to the space he requires in his earlier discussion of pure mathematics.

In fact, Kant seems to provide more hints about his destination.⁵ For his moral ideas, he only needs space, not time. If we return to the passage on pure mathematics regarding “space and time”, we see that Kant distinctly associates space with geometry and time with arithmetic:

For mathematics must first have all its concepts in intuition, and pure mathematics in pure intuition, that is, it must construct them. If it proceeded in any other way, it would be impossible to make any headway, for mathematics proceeds, not analytically by dissection of concepts, but synthetically, and if pure intuition be wanting, there is nothing in which the matter for synthetical judgments a priori can be given. Geometry is based upon the pure intuition of space. Arithmetic accomplishes its concept of number by the successive addition of units in time; and pure mechanics especially cannot attain its concepts of motion without employing the representation of time. (283+)

Combining this passage with his “Conclusion”, we can deduce that Kant places moral ideas in the same “space” with geometry. Noting also that “the basis of mathematics actually are pure intuitions, which make its synthetical and apodictically valid propositions possible” (285+), we see further that Kant makes use of the *Prolegomena* not only to lay the foundation for his upcoming metaphysics of morals but to indicate that his moral ideas will stand on the same firm ground as geometry.⁶

Because the “space” Kant provides for his moral ideas is “outside the field of speculation”, he also removes them as a function of the mind, or rather, offers that his moral

⁵ Destination perhaps lends itself too much to a sense of finality. We should more appropriately note that his next stop, as for works on metaphysics after the *Prolegomena* (1783), is *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* (1785).

⁶ For Kant, geometry stands on exceedingly firm ground: “But if this image [the space of the geometer], or rather this formal intuition, is the essential property of our sensibility, by means of which alone objects are given to us, and if this sensibility represents not things in themselves, but their appearances: we shall easily comprehend, and at the same time indisputably prove, that all external objects of our world of sense must necessarily coincide in the most rigorous way with the propositions of geometry; because sensibility by means of its form of external intuition, viz., by space, the same with which the geometer is occupied, makes those objects at all possible as mere appearances” (287+).

propositions, like those of the geometer, will not be drawn “from any fabricated concept, but from the subjective foundation of all outer appearances, namely sensibility itself” (288+).

Indeed, Kant’s *Prolegomena* must be foreshadowing a kind of security he feels for his moral propositions, similar to the security he claims geometers should feel:

In this and no other way can the geometer be secured regarding the indubitable objective reality of its propositions against all the chicaneries of a shallow metaphysics, however strange this way must seem to such a metaphysics because it does not go back to sources of their concepts. (288+)

Having now looked more closely at Kant’s use of “Raum und Zeit”, I feel comfortable positing that his “Conclusion” to the *Prolegomena* connects his moral ideas to the indisputable propositions of geometry in the “Main Transcendental Question, First Part” through intentional use of Raum – and that “space” is its most appropriate English translation because his moral ideas require the same apodictic and necessary intuition required by geometrical propositions.

I should stop.⁷ However, Herder’s first stanza contains two unavoidably provocative lines: “And measure our slothful steps / by space and time.” I am moved to ponder them more deeply. Kant specifies measure (das Maß) in his table at marginal page 303 as a transcendental quantitative concept of the understanding, leading from logical judgments of the universal to pure physiological principles of natural science – that is, to axioms of intuition. Herder seems to invoke Kant’s quantitative concept of the understanding while simultaneously imagining a more nuanced relationship between the eternal and the temporal, the divine and humanity. It seems purposefully anti-Kantian and presents further food for thought, but another day.

⁷ Of course, I should really return to the *Groundwork* to see if my position holds up.

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