

TSK Online Fall 2008
Week 3 Orientation

This week we move into a consideration of space, which will be our focus for the rest of the fall. The question I want to explore is how this relates to the work we have been doing in the first two weeks, which relates more to inquiry and the layers of mind.

Chapter 1 of DTS asks how something can have its origin in nothing. It does so by asking us to shift perspectives, recognizing that if we look at any object, in the end it seems to disappear into empty space. The thought experiments that introduce this idea may be hard for some of you to relate to, but the basic message is clear: the notion of substance depends in the end on questions of perspective and scale.

Now, the way to connect this with our focus during the first two weeks is by recognizing that the world we inhabit is the world we experience. Since this is a key point for our inquiry, let me go into a bit more.

In our ordinary thinking, we make a sharp distinction between subjective experience and objective reality (for a great discussion of this, see chapter 5 of *Love of Knowledge*). We assume that space fits into the objective realm, since space is where physical things show up. That whole model is very suspect, and at one level, the discussion in the reading is meant to question the assumptions that need to operate for that picture of objective reality to make sense.

Here we want to make a different move. For the past two weeks, we have been looking at how the content of experience is supported by other layers of experience (the non-content layers, or the 'context' of experience, as we called it in the conference call for week 1). We have tried to shift the relative significance of these two by focusing on the non-content layers.

Now, there is a connection here to the relation between space and objects. Just as experiential non-content (feeling, orientation, etc.) supports content, and in some ways is more basic than content, so space supports the objects that show up in space, and is more basic than what shows up in space.

As long as it applies to the objective realm, this claim can seem very abstract. So we want to make it more experiential. I want to suggest doing this in two steps:

1. Try treating space as context or non-content. For instance, when you reach out to take hold of something, be aware of the space within which you are moving, the space in which the object exists, and the space that you yourself occupy. It may just all be the same space, but it may not. You can try this many times, trying to get familiar with the availability of space in your experience. In effect, we are asking how space 'supports' the physical world.
2. So far we are still taking a view that accepts that space belongs in the objective realm. To go beyond that, go back to the exercise we have been doing (Layers of Mind/Body-Mind-Thought Interplay). As you notice the layers of experience, ask about the space that supports these layers. How does the space of embodiment relate to the space of feeling;

that is, the space within which feeling arises? The same question holds for the layer of orientation and the layer of background.

To expand the exercise in this way, you need to expand the sense of space. For now, you could just think of this as a metaphor. In other words, the 'space' of experience is not 'real' space, but metaphorically it is like real space, because we have to somehow inhabit it in order for experience to show up. An analogy from the book may help make this more clear: If we are driving through the countryside in a car, we can experience ourselves as occupying the space of the car or as occupying the space of the countryside. In a sense, these are two different spaces.

If all this seems a bit confusing, you could stay with the practice for the first two weeks, and just try to relate to the reading on a more theoretical level. Things should become more clear later on.