NORMATIVITY IN KANT'S PHILOSOPHY OF LOGIC
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THE PROBLEM

1. *Kant claims logic is normative for thought and reasoning.*
    a. Logic does not tell us "how the understanding is and does think and how it has previously proceeded in thought, but rather how it ought to proceed in thought." (*Jäsche Logic* 14)
2. *For a law to be normative, it must be possible to violate it in some way.*
    a. As Korsgaard states: "There is no normativity if you cannot go wrong." (*The Sources of Normativity*, 162).
3. *Kant claims that logic is essential for thought and reasoning.*
    a. "Without [the laws of logic] no use of the understanding or reason takes place at all." (*Jäsche Logic*, 13)
4. *A law that is essential for the activity of the understanding (or any faculty by itself) cannot be violated.*
    a. "It is hard to comprehend how a power can deviate from its own laws, since it acts only according to certain laws. If these laws are essential, then the power cannot deviate form them[;] if, then, among the formal laws of the understanding that logic expounds an essential one is possible, then the understanding cannot deviate from it." (*Vienna Logic*, 824)
5. Given 3. and 4. there are some laws of logic which cannot be violated.
6. By 2. these laws of logic cannot be normative for thought and reasoning.
7. *But 1. and 6. are incompatible, and Kant's account is incoherent as stated.*

THE GOAL

The goal of my essay is to propose and evaluate an interpretation[1] of Kant's logic that explains 1-4 while explaining away the problems that follow in 5-7. I have been working on understanding this issue in light of what I consider to be a similar issue in Kant's moral philosophy, wherein the categorical imperative is meant to be both constitutive of and normative for practical action. Specifically I try to bring out how acknowledging the two-standpoint view is the important step in understanding Kant's position on the nature of logic.

COGNITIVE FACULTIES & TRANSCENDENTAL IDEALISM

- Form of sensibility—space and time
- Form of understanding—logic & the categories
- *Cognitive Idealism*: All the proper objects of human cognition are nothing but mind-dependent sensory appearances of phenomena, not things-in-themselves or noumena
- *Representational Transcendentalism*: All representations and their contents conform to the forms or structures imposed on them by our innate cognitive capacities.

TWO-STANDPOINTS: NOUMENAL & PHENOMENAL

- Two-ASPECTS view, not two-objects view.

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[1] The goal here is a *charitable* interpretation of Kant.

- "Kant's transcendental distinction is primarily between two ways in which things (empirical objects) can be 'considered' at the metalevel of philosophical reflection (transcendental reflection) rather than between the kinds of things that can be considered. Things can be considered either as they appear, that is, as they are in relation to the subjective conditions of human cognition, or as they are in themselves, independently of these conditions." (Allison 1996, p. 3)
- Two different ways of *considering* objects, not two different ways that objects *exist*.
- Epistemological distinction; not ontological distinction.

<div align="center">LOGIC</div>

- Logic is the science of the rules of understanding *in general*.
    - *General* because it "contains the absolutely necessary rules of thinking, without which no use of the understanding takes place, and it therefore concerns the these rules without regard to the difference of the objects to which it may be directed." (*CPR* A52/B76)
    - This logic must also be *pure* (which is in contrast to *applied* general logic), i.e., it must "abstract from all empirical conditions under which our understanding is exercised, e.g., from the influence of the senses, from the play of imagination, the laws of memory, the power of habit, inclination, etc., hence also from the sources of prejudice, indeed in general from all causes from which certain cognitions arise or may be supposed to arise, because these merely concern the understanding under certain circumstances of its application, and experience is required in order to know these." (*CPR* A53/B77)
- Formality from Generality: By abstracting away from all contents of cognition, it has to do with the mere *form of thinking*.

<div align="center">PROBLEM OF ERROR[2]</div>

- Throughout the introduction of the *Jäsche Logic* Kant makes claims regarding the normative nature of the laws of pure general logic:
    - "In logic we do not want to know how the understanding is and does think and how it has previously proceeded in thought, but rather how it ought to proceed in thought. Logic is to teach us the correct use of the understanding, i.e., that in which it agrees with itself." (*JL* 14)
- If there is a *correct use*, then it must be possible to use the understanding *incorrectly*.
- However, Kant makes claims that seem to say that the understanding cannot *itself* work incorrectly:
    - "It is hard to comprehend *how error in the formal sense of the world, i.e.,* how the *form of thought contrary to the understanding* is possible, just as we cannot in general comprehend how any power should deviate from its own essential laws." (*JL* 53)
    - "If we had no other power of cognition but the understanding, we would never err. But besides the understanding, there lies in us another indispensable source of cognition. That is *sensibility*, which gives us the material for thought… Error cannot arise from sensibility in and by itself, however, because the senses simply do not judge… The ground for the origin of all error will therefore have to be

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[2] See 1. in the section "Questions that Continue to Haunt Me" at the bottom of this handout.

sought simply and solely in the *unnoticed influence of sensibility upon the understanding*, or to speak more exactly upon *judgment*." (*JL* 53)

- Error occurs because of some kind of 'meddling' that happens in the 'mixture' of sensibility and understanding. However, the question is whether this a *logical error*?
- If we think of the understanding as some sort of program, perhaps the analogous situation is when the program is 'infected by a virus' in some sense. In this case, do we think that the program has performed an error?

KANT AND THE MORAL LAW

- This is where Kant's moral philosophy seems to come in handy.
- Kant himself makes several comments as to the similar nature of the moral law and the logical laws:
    o "Deviation from the rules of the pure will constitutes the morally evil, and this arises only when and because other effects of other powers mingle with the otherwise pure laws of the will. E.g.: The inclinations and affects. *Just in this way*, when foreign powers mingle with the correct laws of the understanding, a mixed effect arises from the conflict of [this with] our judgments based on the laws of the understanding and reason." (*Blomberg Logic*, 102)
    o "[General applied logic] deals with attention, its hindrance and consequences, the cause of error, the condition of doubt, of reservation, of conviction, etc., and general and pure logic is related to it as pure morality, which contains merely the necessary moral laws of a free will in general, is related to the doctrine of virtue proper, which assesses these laws under the hindrances of the feelings, inclinations, and passions to which human beings are more or less subject, and which can never yield a true and proven science, since it requires empirical and psychological principles just as much as that applied logic does." (*CPR* A54/B78)
- The objective moral law consists of those laws which are *necessary* for the proper use of the will (practical reason) in general.
- These laws describe how the faculty of practical reason *works* when considered in abstraction from the subjective influences of our faculty of desire. In this way we can consider the objective moral laws to constitute the *form of practical reason*; Kant claims that it is "the *form* and the principle from which action itself follows." (GMM 4:416)
- As in the case with the understanding, practical reason if working in isolation from the other cognitive faculties, does not err:
    o "If reason infallibly determines the will, the actions of such a being that are cognized as objectively necessary are also subjectively necessary, that is, the will is a capacity to choose *only that* which reason independently of inclination cognizes as practically necessary, that is as good." (GMM 4:412)
- Kant claims that in this case of such a *divine will* the moral law is *not normative* for action:
    o "Hence no imperatives hold for the *divine* will and in general for the *holy* will: the 'ought' is out of place here, because volition is of itself necessarily in accord with the law. Therefore imperatives are only formulae expression the relation of objective laws of volition in general to the subjective imperfection of the will of this or that rational being, for example, of the human will." (GMM 4:414)

TWO-STANDPOINTS & PRACTICAL FREEDOM

- The categorical imperative states that you ought to "act as if the maxim of your action were to become by your will a universal law of nature." (GMM 4:421)
- Korsgaard explains this in the following way:
  - "This formula merely tells us to choose a law. Its only constraint of our choice is that it have the form of a law. Nothing provides any content for that law. *All that it has to be is a law…* In a sense, the Formula of Universal Law simply describes the function or task of an autonomous will. The moral law does not impose a constraint on the will; it merely says what it has to do in order to be an autonomous will at all. It has to choose a law." (Morality as Freedom, 166)
- The question remains, why is it so important to choose a law? Why *ought* we choose a law?
- This is where the two-standpoint views comes into play:
  - First, from the phenomenal standpoint everything is completely causally determined, so the person who acts according to some subjective inclination "is in a sense not actively willing at all, but simply allowing herself to be controlled by the passive part of her nature, which in turn is controlled by all of nature." (Morality as Freedom, 168)
  - Yet the noumenal standpoint is supposed to *contain the ground*, whatever it might be of the laws of nature: "Although we can *know* nothing of the noumenal world, it is what we conceive as lying behind the phenomenal world and giving that world its character. To conceive yourself as a member of the noumenal world is therefore to conceive yourself as among the grounds of the world as we know it. And if you hold this position in so far as you have a will, then that means that the actions of your will make a real difference to the way the phenomenal world is." (*ibid*)
- So insofar as we are free we act according to a maxim that we could will as a universal law, but if we are to consider ourselves as *acting at all* then we must take ourselves to be free. Because we can take on the noumenal standpoint we see ourselves as participating in the creation of the phenomenal world.
- So the objective moral law is *constitutive* from the noumenal standpoint; acting is constituted by choosing a law to act on.
- The moral law is *normative* because of the **relationship** between the noumenal and the phenomenal standpoints. In acting according to a law we are acting as we *ought* because we are, in a sense, asserting our freedom over the phenomenal world and thus our rational nature.
- *Questions I Have*: Is the moral law *really* normative, or does it *appear* to be normative? Do we just *think* it is normative? What would this mean?

TWO-STANDPOINTS & (MAYBE) SOLVING THE PROBLEM

- The goal here is to try and take the two-standpoint view and explain the normative force of logic in the same way.
- Because we have the ability to consider ourselves as noumenal *thinkers* as *imposing* logical form onto the phenomenal world, we see the laws of logic as essential for the act of thought itself.

- But we also know that the phenomenal world is where all of our judgments take place, and because of this there is 'mixture' of the pure form of thought with intuition.
- The logical laws are normative *because of* the possibility of error. Because we can take on these two standpoints and consider ourselves in the world from the noumenal and phenomenal perspectives, we see ourselves as necessarily law-like animals that sometimes err.
- Thus, in the *act of thought* we are logical, but the result (judgment) may not be correct.
- Perhaps this calls for an account of *theoretical freedom*; what would this look like?

QUESTIONS THAT CONTINUE TO HAUNT ME:
1. Is error intelligible? If so, what does it look like?
    a. After all of the explanation, I am still unclear how to understand what error is. Kant makes it clear that we *do* err, but where does the error occur? It error metaphysically impossible, or is it that we can never actually explain the error in full?
2. What does it mean to 'take on' the noumenal standpoint or the phenomenal standpoint?
3. How can I set up the problem as another antinomy?