

# REASON, INFERENCE, & PRINCIPLES

Colin McLear | PHIL 971

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## 1 Basing & Inference

*Basing relation:* a relation that exists between acts, states, etc. (i.e. “conditions”) such that one is rationally “based” on the other

*Inference:* the *mental act* of connecting one contentful mental condition with another *because* of your representing one as “supporting” (in some sense) the other

- Kant’s view of basing is *causal* and connected to *consciousness*; it is by virtue of one’s consciousness of the rational relation between conditions that one *makes it the case* that they stand in that relation
- Rational basing consists in the representation (or consciousness) of the act of basing *in that very act of representation*, such that the act of basing and the representation of it (or consciousness of it) are the same act<sup>1,2</sup>

### 1.1 Two Kinds of Inference

- Kant distinguishes between different kinds of inference, only one of which is within the ambit of reason proper<sup>3</sup>

*Immediate inference:* The (formal) derivation of one judgment from another without any intermediary; an “inference of understanding”

- All men are mortal. ∴ Some men are mortal

*Mediate inference:* The (material) derivation of one judgment from another via an intermediary judgment; an “inference of reason”<sup>4,5</sup>

- All men are mortal, Socrates is a man, ∴ Socrates is mortal

### 1.2 Reason & Mediate Inference (Reasoning)

- QUESTION: What are the distinctive features of reasoning (as opposed to inference more generally)?
1. Reasoning involves a *material* derivation (or connection) of one judgment from another, and not merely a *formal* derivation<sup>6</sup>
  2. The material derivation of one judgment from another is in virtue of one judgment’s being the “condition” of the other
    - Q: What is a “condition”?
      - That which, if posited, is *sufficient* for the existence/properties of the conditioned

<sup>1</sup> To reflect [*Reflectiren*] (to consider) [(*Überlegen*)], however, is to compare and to hold together given representations either with others or with one’s faculty of cognition, in relation to a concept thereby made possible. (CPJ 20:211; cf. A262/B318)

<sup>2</sup> [the] inner activity, (spontaneity), by means of which a concept (a thought) becomes possible, [is] reflection [*Reflexion*] (An §4 On self-observation, 7:135, note)

<sup>3</sup> An **immediate** inference (*consequentia immediata*) is the derivation (*deductio*) of one judgment from the other without a mediating judgment (*judicium intermedium*). An inference is **mediate** if, besides the concept that a judgment contains in itself, one needs still others in order to derive a cognition from it. (JL 9:114)

<sup>4</sup> An inference of reason is the cognition of the necessity of a proposition through the subsumption of its condition under a given universal rule. (JL 9:120)

<sup>5</sup> What stands under the condition of a rule also stands under the rule itself. (JL 9:120)

<sup>6</sup> The essential character of all immediate inferences and the principle of their possibility consists simply in an alteration of the *mere form* of judgments, while the *matter* of the judgments, the subject and predicate, remains *unaltered, the same*. (JL 9:115)

3. In reasoning, the “comprehension” (*Begreifen*) of a thing through its conditions is accomplished<sup>7</sup>

- The product of reasoning is knowledge of a necessary truth (i.e. of the necessity of the conditioned by its conditions)
- The conditioning relationship grasped in or through reasoning is (or is taken to be) the very same kind of conditioning relation as what is reasoned about

4. All reasoning is either reasoning *from* or reasoning *to* “principles”

- A principle is a “universal proposition”<sup>8</sup>
  - Two kinds of principles: “absolute” vs. “comparative”<sup>9</sup>
    - \* Theoretical reason cannot obtain synthetic cognition from concepts at all; it may only obtain cognition from comparative principles—i.e. those principles that provide cognition relative to some further principle or body of cognitions
    - \* Practical reason *can* provide synthetic cognition from principles, insofar as Kant thinks that our knowledge of the moral law is synthetic a priori knowledge
  - Q: Why does Kant say that a principle is a “representation of a law”?<sup>10</sup>
    - \* Laws are *universal* (i.e. if they hold anywhere they hold everywhere) and laws are *necessary* (i.e. if something is subject to a law then it is subject to it by virtue of its nature)
    - \* The representation of a law is accomplished through a judgment that has the form of universality and necessity
    - \* A “principle” is a judgment that represents a law, and thus has the form of universality and necessity
- So all reasoning either ascends from some actuality to its principle or condition, or descends from some condition to that actuality of which it is the condition

<sup>7</sup> to comprehend something (*comprehendere*), i.e., to cognize something through reason or a priori to the degree that is sufficient for our purpose. For all our comprehension is only *relative*, i.e., sufficient for a certain purpose; we do not comprehend anything *without qualification*. (JL 9:65)

<sup>8</sup> since every universal cognition can serve as the major premise in a syllogism, and since the understanding yields such universal propositions a priori, these propositions can, in respect of their possible use, be called principles (A300/B357)

<sup>9</sup> Thus the understanding cannot yield synthetic cognitions from concepts at all, and it is properly these that I call principles absolutely; nevertheless, all universal propositions in general can be called principles comparatively. (A301/B358)

<sup>10</sup> Everything in nature works in accordance with laws. Only a rational being has the capacity to act in accordance with the representation of laws, that is, in accordance with principles (GUL, 4:42)

## 2 Acting from Principles: Theoretical Reasoning

1. All men are mortal
2. Caius is a man
3. ∴ Caius is mortal

- Theoretical reason can either ascend, through a chain of “prosyllogisms” to the unconditioned condition of all cognitions in the chain, or it can descend, through a series of “episylogisms”, to the particular determinate actuality<sup>11</sup>

### 2.1 Theoretical vs Practical Reasoning

- QUESTION: What distinguishes theoretical (or “speculative”) reasoning from practical reasoning?

<sup>11</sup> In the series of composite inferences one can infer in two ways, either from the grounds down to the consequences, or from the consequences up to the grounds. The first occurs through *episylogisms*, the other through *prosyllogisms*. An episylogism is that inference, namely, in the series of inferences, whose premise becomes the conclusion of a *prosyllogism*, hence of an inference that has the premises of the former as conclusion. (JL 9:134)

- Theoretical reasoning is not, while practical reasoning is, productive of its “object” (in the broadest sense of that term)<sup>12</sup>
  - \* However, in theoretical reasoning the reasoner is nevertheless productive of the *judgments* and their relation to one another, though not productive of the *objects* of these judgments (e.g. in reasoning about Caus, one’s reasoning does not make it the case that he is mortal)
- It isn’t clear that practical reasoning ascends or descends through a chain of reasoning in the manner that theoretical reason does (i.e. via the second or minor premise)

<sup>12</sup> [the faculty of desire is] the faculty of the soul for becoming the cause of the actuality of the object through the representation of the object itself (29:1012; see also An 7:251; 6:211, 399; 29:894, 1024; 25:577, 1109, 1514)

### 3 Acting from Principles: Practical Reasoning

1. Let no insult pass unavenged<sup>13</sup>
  2. I have been insulted (or perhaps: To avenge my insult do *this*)
  3. ∴ ???
- It isn’t immediately clear what should go in the conclusion of a practical inference<sup>14,15</sup>
    - Is it a *judgment*, such as one of the following?
      1. I should avenge the insult
      2. Avenging the insult is good
      3. Avenging the insult is the thing to do
      4. Avenging the insult is the thing to do because it is good
      5. I intend to avenge the insult
    - Or is it an *action* (i.e. the act of avenging the insult)

<sup>13</sup> someone can make it his maxim to let no insult pass unavenged and yet at the same time see that this is no practical law but only his maxim – that, on the contrary, as being in one and the same maxim a rule for the will of every rational being it could not harmonize with itself. (CPrR 5:19)

<sup>14</sup> reason is concerned with the determining grounds of the will, which is a faculty either of producing objects corresponding to representations or of determining itself to effect such objects (whether the physical power is sufficient or not), that is, of determining its causality. (CPrR 5:15)

<sup>15</sup> Since *reason* is required for the derivation of actions from laws, the will is nothing other than practical reason. (GII, 4:412)

#### 3.1 Maxims

- What is a ‘maxim’?<sup>16</sup>
  - A ‘subjective principle of willing’ or principle on which a person acts
    - \* Contrasts with objective law<sup>17</sup>
- Designates an action to be performed in a context and for some purpose on the basis of some evaluation of the Good: In C, I (ought, may, etc.) to do A for purpose P, because that would be G
  - A maxim functions as the major premise in a rational inference to some action (or volition to act) as a conclusion
- Kant’s examples of maxims
  - let no insult pass unavenged (5:19)
  - when I believe myself to be in need of money I should borrow money and promise to repay it, even though I know that this will never happen (4:422).

<sup>16</sup> A *maxim* is the subjective principle of willing; the objective principle (i.e., the one that would also subjectively serve all rational beings as the practical principle if reason had complete control over the desiderative faculty) is the practical *law*. (4:400, note)

<sup>17</sup> The former [a maxim] contains the practical rule determined by reason conformably with the conditions of the subject (often his ignorance or also his inclinations), and is therefore the principle in accordance with which the subject *acts*; but the law is the objective principle valid for every rational being, and the principle in accordance with which *he ought to act*, i.e., an imperative. (4:421, note)

- Action from a maxim contrasts with merely acting from inclination
- Non-rational beings lack the capacity to act on maxims, so their actions (or behaviour) is completely determined by their sensible impulses

### 3.2 Roles for Maxims

1. Everyone always acts on maxims.
2. Maxims determine how we act in specific situations through the use of practical rules.
3. Everyone has a highest maxim that affects the other maxims she adopts.
4. Maxims can be linguistically/propositionally formulated and then evaluated for their moral worth (and the deontic status of their accompanying actions) by the FUL.
5. Because maxims determine how we act, the deontic status and moral worth of our actions, and whether we are good or evil people, maxims express our character.
6. Maxims adopted for action *describe* what we intend to do or what we see as good rather than *prescribe* courses of action that we may or may not live up to.

### 3.3 Practical Reason & The Will

*The Will (der Wille)*: The capacity (or its law) through which choice determines its activity

*The Power of Choice (die Willkür)*: The capacity to be, through one's representation and as one pleases, the cause of a condition (e.g. object or state of affairs)<sup>18</sup>

- Rational choice is a kind of self-conscious efficacious representation
- Non-rational beings can make choices, but these are not self-conscious, and they are controlled by the "will of nature"<sup>19,20</sup>
- Kant is addressing the issue of a will *in general*, so the laws in question are *objective* laws, not *subjective* maxims
- The will is a *capacity*, and as such exists even when not exercised, or exercised appropriately (i.e. in conformity with a law)
- Two kinds of rational will
  1. *Holy will*: a will which *always* acts in conformity with reason/rational law
  2. *Finite (human) will*: a will exposed to subjective and non-rational (sensible) incentives
    - Only finite wills have imperatives that apply to them<sup>21</sup>

### 3.4 Imperatives

- Imperatives are principles (representations of laws) that have normative force for an agent

<sup>18</sup> The capacity for desiring in accordance with concepts, insofar as the ground determining it to action lies within itself and not in its object, is called the capacity for *doing or refraining from doing as one pleases*. Insofar as it is joined with one's consciousness of the capacity to bring about its object by one's action it is called the capacity for *choice*; if it is not joined with this consciousness its act is called a *wish*. The capacity for desire whose inner determining ground, hence even what pleases it, lies within the subject's reason is called the *will*. The will is therefore the capacity for desire considered not so much in relation to action (as the capacity for choice is) but rather in relation to the ground determining choice to action.

<sup>19</sup> Freedom in the practical sense is the independence of the power of choice from necessitation by impulses of sensibility. For a power of choice is sensible insofar as it is pathologically affected (through moving-causes of sensibility); it is called an animal power of choice (*arbitrium brutum*) if it can be pathologically necessitated. The human power of choice is indeed an *arbitrium sensitivum*, yet not *brutum* but *liberum* because sensibility does not render its action necessary, but in the human being there is a faculty of determining oneself from oneself, independently of necessitation by sensible impulses (A533-4/B561-2; see also *Metaphysik L<sub>1</sub>* 28:255 (c. 1778-1781); *Metaphysik Mrongovius* 29:896 (c. 1782/3); *Metaphysik L<sub>2</sub>* 28:589 (c. 1790); MM 6:213)

<sup>20</sup> Animals have a will, though they do not have their own will but rather the will of nature [*den Willen der Natur*] (*Naturrecht Feyerabend* 27:1320 (1784))

<sup>21</sup> The representation of an objective principle in so far as it is necessitating for a will is called a command (of reason), and the formula of the command is called IMPERATIVE. All imperatives are expressed by an ought, and by this indicate the relation of an objective law of reason to a will that according to its subjective constitution is not necessarily determined by it (a necessitation). (4:413)

- In what sense ‘normative force’?
  - \* phenomenological (feeling of compulsion or “necessitation”)
  - \* favoring/representing as good<sup>22</sup>

*Hypothetical Imperative:* command to do something whose value is conditioned by its status as a means to some further end, which is also willed

- In virtue of willing some end, Kant thinks it is *analytic* that one wills the means to that end<sup>23</sup>

*Categorical Imperative:* command to do something whose value is unconditioned – i.e. whose value is an end in itself

- A categorical imperative is synthetic a priori since we experience it as a command, which is not entailed simply by the concept of a rational (holy) will as such<sup>24</sup>

### References & Further Reading

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<sup>22</sup> Practical good, however, is that which determines the will by means of representations of reason, hence not by subjective causes but objectively, that is, from grounds that are valid for every rational being as such. It is distinguished from the *agreeable*, as that which influences the will only by means of feeling from merely subjective causes, which hold only for the senses of this or that one, and not as a principle of reason, which holds for everyone (GII, 4:413)

<sup>23</sup> Whoever wills the end also wills (in so far as reason has decisive influence on his actions) the indispensably necessary means to it that is in his control. As far as willing is concerned, this proposition is analytic; for in the willing of an object, as my effect, my causality is already thought, as an acting cause, i.e. the use of means, and the imperative already extracts the concept of actions necessary to this end from the concept of a willing of this end (GII, 4:417)

<sup>24</sup> Without a presupposed condition from any inclination, I connect the deed with the will a priori, and hence necessarily (though only objectively, i.e. under the idea of a reason that has complete control over all subjective motives). This is therefore a practical proposition that does not derive the willing of an action analytically from willing another that is already presupposed (for we have no such perfect will), but connects it immediately with the concept of the will of a rational being, as something that is not contained in it. (GII, 4:420, note)