

THE NATURE OF NORMATIVITY IN KANT'S PHILOSOPHY OF LOGIC

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I. INTRODUCTION

Immanuel Kant claims that logic is constitutive of thought: “without [the laws of logic] we would not think at all” (Jäsche Logic, 12). He also claims that logic is normative for thought: “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” (Jäsche Logic, 14). However, these two kinds of constitutivity seem mutually exclusive: If the laws of logic are constitutive in the sense that we *cannot think without them*, thus providing necessary conditions for the existence of thought, then it should be impossible to think illogically. However, if the laws of logic provide us with the *correct way to think*, then it should be possible to deviate from those laws, which is another way of saying that it should be possible to think illogically. Christine Korsgaard makes this claim clear when she states, “There is no normativity if you cannot go wrong” (1996, 162).

The goal of this essay is to propose and evaluate an interpretation of Kant's philosophy of logic that makes sense of how the laws of logic can be both constitutive of and normative for thought, while also accounting for the problem of error. My interpretation is based on an analogy with the two-standpoints view found in Kant's moral philosophy. Towards this end, I will draw out and develop the analogy between his moral philosophy and philosophy of logic, which Kant does not make explicit in his writings. I begin by describing Kant's philosophy of logic, and then go on to explain the strong constitutive interpretation and the weak constitutive, normative interpretation, and explain why neither of these interpretations is satisfactory on its own. I will argue that it is possible for the same set of laws to be constitutive in a strong sense while those

laws from a different standpoint will be constitutive in a weaker, normative sense. I then go on to claim that the laws of logic as Kant describes them are constitutive insofar as the laws are viewed from the intellectual standpoint, and are normative insofar as we have the ability to err as viewed from the sensory standpoint.

II. KANT AND HIS LOGIC

Throughout this essay I will be concerned only with Kant's philosophy of logic, or with what Kant says about the relationship between logic and thought; I will not be discussing his system of syllogistic logic, as it is regarded as incomplete in comparison to our modern system of symbolic logic. Kant describes logic as the "science of the necessary laws of the understanding and of reason in general" (Jäsche Logic, 13). Thus, it is important to make sense of what Kant means by "the understanding" and "reason in general," as these terms are typical of Kant's transcendental psychology, yet are still very confusing.¹

Throughout all of his works, Kant describes our perceptual and cognitive abilities as *faculties*. The faculties of sensibility and imagination, as he calls them, *input* our experiences of the external world, and then the faculties of the understanding and reason take this external input and organize the information according to objective schemata. These objective schemata provide the *universals* under which the *particulars* given by experience are subsumed. For example, I have the visual experience of seeing a tree. This experience is of a singular, particular object. This experience is then subsumed under the universal concept 'tree.' Cognition requires both a particular and a universal, which echoes in Kant's famous line: "Thoughts without content are empty, and intuitions without concepts are blind" (*Critique of Pure Reason* B75/A51). Thus,

¹ His use of the faculty psychology throughout all of his works is problematic, as it is unclear exactly how to interpret the talk of the faculties. For the purpose of this paper I assume that this talk is to be taken as metaphorical. Thus, I will use the language of the faculty psychology throughout because Kant does throughout his texts, but I will try to explain the meaning behind the metaphor throughout.

thought requires both content and form; the content comes from experience and the faculties of understanding and reason give the form. Because the laws of logic are to be taken as equivalent to the laws of *thought*, the study of logic is the study of those rules that are applicable to *all* uses of the understanding and reason.

He describes logic as the necessary laws of the understanding *and reason*. Here the use of the term 'reason' is problematic, as there is a distinction in Kant's work between *theoretical* reasoning, which he discusses in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, and *practical* reasoning, which he discusses in the *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* and the *Critique of Practical Reason*. Kant states that the laws of logic govern both the understanding and *reason*. Here he does not specify exactly what kind of 'reason' he is talking about; I will assume that he is indicating that the laws of logic underlie *all* cognitive capacities, which underlie both theoretical and practical reason. In order to think about the natural world or act in the world, cognition is required, and the laws of logic are exactly those laws that govern the creation of cognition. Kant states, "Logic itself is occupied merely with the rules of thought in concepts, judgments, and inferences, as that through which all thought takes place" (Jäsche Logic, 33).

In the *Critique of Pure Reason*, at the beginning of the *Transcendental Logic* (B75/A51), Kant makes an important distinction between the two types of logic: general and particular. "The former contains the absolutely necessary rules of thinking, without which no use of the understanding takes place, and it therefore concerns the rules without regard to the difference of the objects to which it may be directed. The logic of the particular use of the understanding contains the rules for correctly thinking about certain kind of objects" (*Critique of Pure Reason*, B76/A52). Insofar as matters concern the necessary laws of logic, then, we are discussing general

logic.² Note that throughout this paper when I refer to Kant's logic I am referring to pure, general logic as described here, unless indicated otherwise. There are also rules of the understanding within specific areas of cognition; for example, there are rules for thinking mathematically, or for thinking about the physical world, or for thinking about psychology, etc. Kant states that these rules are still logical insofar as they are rules for the use of the understanding, but they are particular and cannot be necessary for *all* of thought.³

III. STRONG AND WEAK CONSTITUTIVITY

According to Kant the constitutivity of the laws of logic is tied to the *general* nature of logic.⁴ He states, "If we now put aside all cognition that we have to borrow from *objects* and merely reflect on the use just of the understanding, we discover those of its rules which are necessary without qualification, for every purpose and without regard to any particular objects of thought, because without them we would not think at all" (Jäsche Logic, 12). This general nature of logic can be interpreted in two ways, and these two interpretations correspondingly provide two different ways of understanding the constitutivity of logic. As we shall see, both interpretations are supported by textual evidence despite the fact that the two interpretations seem mutually exclusive. On the one hand, Kant can be seen as giving a *descriptive* characterization of generality, claiming that logic provides the necessary conditions for the act of thought to occur at all—one simply can not be engaged in the activity of thought if one is not abiding by the laws of logic. In this case, the laws of logic are constitutive of thought in a *strong*

² Within the category of general logic, he distinguishes *pure* general logic from *applied* general logic: pure general logic "has to do with strictly *a priori* principles... but only in regard to what is formal in their use, be the content what it may," and applied general logic "is directed to the rules of the use of the understanding under the subjective empirical conditions that psychology teaches us." (*Critique of Pure Reason*, B77/A53)

³ Kant's conception of *particular* logic is strange given our contemporary views; the laws that are specific to physics are not a special kind of logic. However, this does not complicate our discussion, as this paper only addresses concerns within the realm of general logic.

⁴ At certain points throughout this essay I discuss the *formal* nature of logic in Kant's works. The formality of logic is a consequence of the generality of logic, not a separate feature. The importance of this point is discussed in MacFarlane's 2002 paper "Frege, Kant, and the Logic in Logicism."

sense; logic constitutes the act of thought because its laws simply describe the basic, essential aspects for an activity to be the activity of thought. The other interpretation casts Kant as providing a *normative* characterization of generality, claiming, “Logic is general in the sense that it provides constitutive norms for thought *as such*, regardless of its subject matter” (MacFarlane, 35). Here a ‘norm’ implies an ‘ought.’ Instead of describing how something is, a norm prescribes how something *ought* to be. On this view, the laws of logic are constitutive in a *weaker* sense; instead of providing necessary conditions for the act of thought, these laws prescribe how the activity of thought ought to proceed; the basic idea underlying such interpretations are that these laws are binding in some normative way on the activity of thought.

On the *strong* constitutive interpretation there is no way to deviate from these laws, i.e., it shouldn’t be possible to consider them to be *norms* for thought. Douglas Lavin, in his essay “Practical Reason and the Possibility of Error,” discusses what it means for a principle to be normative, or as he calls it, for the relation of *being under* to hold between a principle and an agent. He states that the *being under* relation holds if it consists of a principle that “an agent can abide by or follow” (Lavin, 426). There are principles of etiquette, for example, that say how one should act; these principles, if one chooses to abide by them, are principles that an agent can follow. Thus, such an agent can be considered *under* the principles of etiquette.

However, he claims, if there is no way to act that does not accord with that principle, the relation of *being under* cannot hold between a principle and an agent. He uses our understanding of logical truth, or tautology, to make his point: “Now, a putative principle formulable as ‘Do A or don’t do A’ or ‘You must either do A or else not do A’ isn’t something which an agent can violate... for this reason we want, I think, to say that its violation is logically impossible. And for

this reason in turn we want to deny that an agent can be under it” (Lavin, 426).⁵

This interpretation leaves us with an unsatisfactory account of Kant’s logic; if the laws of logic are constitutive of thought in the way Lavin describes, it follows that the relation of *being under* does not hold between the laws of logic and thinking agents. This has implications for Kant’s claims regarding the normative nature of logic. For example, Kant should not say, “Logic does not really contain the rules in accordance with which man actually thinks but the rules for how man ought to think. For man often uses his understanding and thinks otherwise than he ought to think and use his understanding” (Blomberg Logic, 26). Here Kant is very clear that we *can* think illogically, and that logic can be used as a guide for thinking *correctly*. Thus, accepting this strong interpretation of the constitutivity of the laws of logic leaves us without an explanation of a central aspect of Kant’s philosophy of logic.

A version of the weak constitutive interpretation is found in John MacFarlane’s essay “Frege, Kant, and the Logic in Logicism,” where he claims that the laws of logic as described in Kant’s work should be considered norms for thought; we should interpret Kant’s laws of logic as “‘necessary,’ not in the sense that we cannot think contrary to them, but in the sense that they are *unconditionally binding* norms for thought—norms, that is, for thought *as such*” (MacFarlane, 43). On this interpretation the laws are constitutive in a weaker sense that allows for deviation, which the strong constitutive interpretation does not. On this view, the laws of logic *bind* thought insofar as the activity of thought can be *assessed* as right or wrong in relation to these laws; MacFarlane states, “to count an activity as thinking at all is to hold it assessable in light of the laws of logic” (MacFarlane, 38).

For example, consider the activity of hitting a baseball with the intent of laying down a

⁵ Although Kant did not posit the law of the excluded middle in the exact same way that we do today, the principle of contradiction is the most basic and important of all of the laws of logic on his account: the principle of contradiction in Kant’s logic provides the rule that all thought “*not contradict itself*” (Jäsche Logic, 51).

bunt. The action performed constitutes bunting because it is assessable as successful or unsuccessful according to a set of rules—these rules are just the set of constitutive norms that bind the agent in the act of bunting. In order to perform the activity of bunting, one must be following the rules for bunting. However, this same action could be assessed in the light of some other set of rules and in this case it would not constitute bunting. As MacFarlane states, “only by opting out of that activity altogether... can one evade the force of these norms” (MacFarlane, 37). Thus, one may bunt *poorly* and end up tapping the ball straight to the pitcher. Although the bunt was not successful, the activity is still considered bunting.

However, the laws of logic seem to differ from the rules for bunting; it is unclear *how* one could opt out of the act of thinking. For example, imagine you hit a baseball with a bat and someone comes up to you and says ‘That was an improper bunt.’ You reply that you were not attempting to lay down a bunt; you were, in fact, attempting to hit the ball to your friend who is standing out of bounds. You have opted out of the act of bunting, and your action should be evaluated in reference to different laws. The laws of logic seem to govern thought in a *stronger* way; if the laws of logic are those laws which all thought must be evaluated by, then opting out of being evaluated in reference to those laws means that thought cannot occur. If someone tells you that you aren’t thinking properly, you cannot say that you were not thinking. What else were you doing? In order to say that “to count an activity as thinking at all is to hold it assessable in light of the laws of logic” (MacFarlane 37) leads to the fact that those laws are constitutive in the strong sense, and, as has been argued for already, it follows that these laws cannot be normative for thought.

Christine Korsgaard also puts forth a version of the weak constitutive interpretation in her book *Self-Constitution: Agency, Identity, and Integrity*. To explain her notion of a *constitutive*

norm she describes how, although the laws of grammar are constitutive of a language, it is possible for someone to write an ungrammatical sentence.

The presence of both a noun and a verb in an English sentence is *constitutive* of its being a sentence, that is, of its expressing a complete thought. Yet those of us whose work includes grading papers have all encountered the verbless string of words that wants to be a sentence and fails, and yet is not mere gibberish. There is such a thing as speaking English badly, and it is not quite the same as not speaking it at all, although—importantly—it tends in that direction. For if you ignore the rules of English altogether, what you speak will simply not be English. (2009, 32)

In Korsgaard's example the string of words is considered a sentence because it is guided by the constitutive norms for an English sentence.⁶ Korsgaard states that "a constitutive principle for an inescapable activity is unconditionally binding" (2009, 32), using exactly the same language as MacFarlane. In this example, the laws of grammar are guiding the writing of the sentence, even if the sentence doesn't end up in exact accordance with those laws exactly. She writes, "Although it is not true that you are not performing an activity at all unless you do it precisely, it is true that you have to be *guided by* the precise version of the activity in order to be performing the activity at all" (2009, 31). In the case of thought, then, the laws of logic *guide* thought in that those norms are always 'in the background.' When you are writing a sentence, to relate this back to the example above, you aren't explicitly thinking about the grammatical rules you are abiding by, but you *are* abiding by them. In this way they are in the background guiding the activity of writing a sentence.

⁶ It is important to remember that logic is purely formal on Kant's view, and that in assessing whether or not a logical law is followed, one should abstract away from all content whatsoever. Once we abstract away from the content of the 'sentence' without a verb, it is more difficult to see how it *actually* constitutes a sentence, even a bad one. The string of words is completely deficient as an English sentence in the *purely* formal sense, which is the sense important for understanding the laws of logic. This is simply an observation of the relationship between Korsgaard's quote and Kant's specific discussion of logic. Korsgaard's example was not meant to illuminate Kant's discussion of logic specifically.

If the laws of logic are constitutive norms for thought in the same way that grammar is for language then there must be a way to be guided by the laws yet still think *badly*; if thinking badly *tends* in the direction of not thinking at all, there must be a way to make sense of *partly* violating the law and *completely* violating the law. However, it is unclear how to make sense of this in the case of thought. Korsgaard herself illuminates this problem: “The laws of logic govern our thoughts because if we don’t follow them we just aren’t thinking. Illogical thinking is not merely bad, it is *defective*, it is bad *as* thinking” (2009, 32). How can this be? If we don’t think logically, then we aren’t thinking. Yet we *can* think illogically?

Making sense of a thought being more or less successful while also maintaining the constitutive nature of the laws of logic proves difficult. MacFarlane’s account gives the example that “one can make an illegal move and still count as playing chess” (MacFarlane, 37), but how does this happen with the laws of logic? What counts as a violation of thought? If there is a way to account for partially violating the laws of logic, we have to accept the strong constitutive interpretation; whether or not an agent is thinking in accordance with the general laws of logic defines whether or not the agent is thinking *at all*. Thought that violates the laws of logic is not tending towards not thinking at all, it is impossible.

Given all of this, we find that interpreting these laws as constitutive in the weaker sense is unsatisfactory given the way Kant describes these laws. Although it adequately accounts for the normative nature that Kant ascribes to these laws, it is not able to account for statements such as “without [the laws of logic] we would not think at all” (Jäsche Logic, 12). Trying to account for the problem of error by interpreting the constitutive nature of logical laws to be unconditionally binding cannot be the correct interpretation if we are to understand the text as cohesive.

IV. KANT’S ACCOUNT OF ERROR

Given that Kant is so explicit about how logic can be constitutive in both the strong and weak senses, there has to be some way he can account for this nature. He himself notes the oddity of the problem of error in relation to his claim that these laws are constitutive in the strong sense. In the *Blomberg Logic* he asks: “But how can it happen that the understanding seems to have insight only with difficulty? That the understanding in judging deviates from its laws?” (Blomberg Logic, 102) Also, in the *Jäsche Logic*, he makes this difficulty explicit: “But it is hard to comprehend *how error in the formal sense of the word, 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.” (Jäsche Logic, 53).⁷ Thus, he was very aware that the constitutive necessity inherent in these logical laws *should not* allow for any kind of deviation.

He addresses this issue by claiming that the faculty of understanding itself *does not err*. Instead, error is the product of interference with our conceptual capacity: “Now if we had no other power of cognition but the understanding, we would never err... The ground for the origin of all error will therefore have to be sought simply and solely in the *unnoticed influence of sensibility upon the understanding*, or to speak more exactly, upon *judgment*” (Jäsche Logic, 54). Sensibility is our capacity for taking in the world, and all cognition requires input from sensibility and conceptual activity from the understanding. The laws of logic only govern those *higher* cognitive abilities and our ability to think *badly* stems *not* from a misapplication of the rules of logic, but rather from how we interact with the world. Given the necessary connection between the ability to err and normativity, it follows that the laws of logic are normative only insofar as there is this possibility of interference. It is at this point that the analogy between the logical laws and the moral law begins to appear.

⁷ Remember that the formality of logic is a consequence of its generality, as discussed earlier on in this essay.

V. CONSTITUTIVITY AND ERROR IN KANT'S MORAL PHILOSOPHY

When discussing the issue of error in the *Blomberg Logic*, Kant uses the moral law to illuminate his point about the laws of logic and error:

Deviation from the rules of the pure will constitutes the morally evil, and this arises only when and because other effects of other peoples 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, and error arises from the conflict of [this with] our judgments based on the laws of the understanding and of reason. (Blomberg Logic, 102)

Thus error only occurs when the laws are meddled with in some way such that “we hold subjective grounds of our judgment to be objective ones” (Blomberg Logic, 103). The objective laws are not *misapplied* but, rather, other subjective grounds are *mistaken* as the law.

In the *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, Kant describes the nature of a will that is untainted by inclinations and affects as “objectively necessary.” He states,

If reason infallibly determines the will, the actions of such a being that are cognized as objectively necessary are also subjectively necessary... However, if reason solely by itself does not adequately determine the will... then actions that are cognized as objectively necessary are subjectively contingent... (Groundwork 4:412-3)

Let us investigate what Kant means, in the context of practical reason, by ‘objective’ and ‘subjective.’ Generally, we think of a judgment as objective if it is true independent of who is making the judgment. In other words, the judgment, “That bottle is made of glass,” is objective because the truth of the statement does not depend on anything *I* am contributing to the judgment through my particular experience; the truth of such an objective judgment depends on how the world, the bottle in this case, *is*. However, the judgment, “That bottle is nice,” is subjective

because something's being *nice* depends on a particular individual's view of the world, their experience of it, and not how the world actually *is*. We typically do not consider *niceness* to be an actual property of an object in the same way that *being made of glass* is.

In the case of practical reason, objectivity is associated with the way the will *in general*, unadulterated by other considerations, works. If an action is assessed in light of the use of the will in a *general* sense then the agent is considering action objectively—where this general sense is that which considers whether *every* being with the ability for practical reasoning should act in a particular way.⁸ Subjective influences are exactly what lead to deviation from the objective moral law. Thus, if practical reason *infallibly* determines the will, then there is no way to deviate from the moral law because any action that such an individual takes will necessarily abide by the moral law. Just as in the case of logic, the faculty of reason, by itself, cannot deviate from its own laws.

An objectively necessary action should be an action that is recognized as right by all rational agents solely in virtue of their possessing the capacity for practical reason. In the Preface of the *Groundwork*, Kant states that “a law, if it is to hold morally, that is, as a *ground of obligation*, must carry with it *absolute necessity*” (Groundwork 4:393). Here the tie between normativity and necessity is made explicit in Kant's moral philosophy, as talk of obligation is inherently normative. If an action is going to be morally obligatory, then that obligation cannot be grounded solely on the subjective desires of an agent, and must hold for *every* agent in every relevantly similar case. This generality of the moral law provides it with the constitutivity that we also attributed to the laws of logic due to their constitutive nature. Moral laws claim something of *all* beings of a certain kind, specifically those with the capacity for practical reason,

⁸ We could say that to cognize an action as objective is to consider the action from a third-person perspective (the 'person' here must indicate a being with the capacity for reason).

because these laws stem from how the will is constituted. If a law carries with it absolute necessity, this law must simply be constitutive of, in the case of moral law, the faculty of reason. It is *essential* to what the capacity to act *is*, and in this way the law is absolutely necessary.

VI. THE ANALOGY: THE DIVINE WILL AND THE DIVINE THINKER

Objectivity in this context is similar to generality in the case of Kant's logic: logical rules "contain merely the conditions for the use of the understanding in general, *without distinction among its objects*" (Jäsche Logic, 12). As we strip away all the matter of thought, we are left with the foundation of our ability for thought, which constitutes the laws of logic. This takes us back to our discussion of Kant's logic in the second section of this essay; the matter of thought is the particular experience an individual has, whereas the form of thought is the universal schema that the particular is subsumed under. The matter of thought is subjective in that it depends on the individual who is having the perceptual experience, but the form of thought is objective in that it is the same for *all* beings that have the correct cognitive abilities. Abstracting away from the matter of thought leaves us with the pure form, and the laws of logic constitute that pure form. In a similar way, to consider practical reason in general is to consider the objectively necessary action without distinction among its agents; this leads to an abstraction from *any* and *all* interference with the faculty of practical reason, which will provide us with the laws of practical reason.

Due to the nature of this generality, then, the moral law is constitutive of the use of practical reason in the same way that the logical laws are constitutive of the use of all activity of thought in general. They both abstract away from any subjective influences to reveal the necessary form of their faculties, and thus for all thought and action respectively. Also similar to the laws of logic, the moral law is normative; it tells us how we *ought* to act. Given that these

two faculties are similar in these foundational ways, I now explore how an explanation of how the moral law is both constitutive and normative can be applicable to the logic case.

In the case of practical reason Kant provides a much more thorough explanation of our tendency to act in deviation from the law than he does in the case of thought. He explains how our will, which is influenced by the power of desire, is “not by its nature necessarily obedient” to the moral law” (Groundwork 4:413). This is because our sensory capacities create the need for things that can *get in the way* of our use of practical reason. Our need for food, shelter, sex, and the like may ‘cloud’ our use of reason. These distractions from the objective law, Kant calls them ‘inclinations,’ may have stronger motivational power than our sense of duty to act correctly. This is why we represent the objective principles of practical reason as *imperatives*, which are “expressed by an *ought* and indicate by this the relation of an objective law of reason to a will that by its subjective constitution is not necessarily determined by it (a necessitation)” (Groundwork 4:413).

Thus, these laws are not *inherently* normative; they are normative insofar as they are cognized as necessary by a subject that *can* deviate from them. This idea becomes clear when Kant considers a will that is infallibly determined by reason, which he calls “a perfectly good will,” or a “divine will” (Groundwork 4:414). In the case of the divine will, which operates purely on the objective laws of reason, the moral law is *not* normative:

Hence no imperatives hold for the *divine* will: the “ought” is out of place here, because volition is of itself necessarily in accord with the law. Therefore imperatives are only formulae expressing 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. (Groundwork 4:414)

The imperative imposes Levin’s relation of *being under* onto all agents; without subjective imperfections, however, the laws by themselves do not have this normative force.

Again, we should consider our analogy with the logic case. Just as with practical reason and the will, our capacity for thought alone cannot err; thus, if we consider a being whose thought and judgment always proceeded in accordance with the laws of logic, hence without any interference from our sensory capacities, we have an example of a *divine thinker*.⁹ In parallel with the quotation immediately above, we can say that logical *imperatives* would not be applicable to the divine thinker because the thoughts and judgments of such a being would themselves necessarily accord to the logical laws. Given this situation, the laws of logic do not have the same kind of normative force as they did in the case where interference is possible.

Let's consider an example in order to illuminate our discussion: we have the rules for the working of some kind of machine. These rules explain exactly how the machine works and what it does. We could say that these rules both explain how the machine *ought* to function, as well as describe what must happen for the machine to be considered to be functioning at all. There could be a rule in this manual that states that the red lever will move back and forth two times and this causes the green button to light up, which then goes on to cause other required functions of the machine. We can interpret this in the two ways being discussed. First, the red lever moving back and forth two times is constitutive of the working of the machine because if it does not move back and forth, the machine just is not working. Second, we can say that the red lever *ought* to move back and forth two times in order for the machine to work *properly*. The second way comes naturally because we are used to having to account for interferences in the world.

However, just because we normally interpret rules as normative, does not mean that it makes sense to do so in every case. Perhaps the rules describing the workings of the machine

⁹ It is important to note a potential disanalogy here: cognition cannot occur with an intuition being given to the understanding to conceptualize, whereas the faculty of reason does not need intuition to function. For now, let us assume that the divine thinker has some matter with which it uses its conceptualize powers on, but that this matter does not interfere with the divine workings of the laws of logic.

comprise an instruction set for a Turing machine, which will continue to follow its instructions until they are completed, or the process simply never terminates. We do not speak of how Turing machines *ought* to work because these machines exist in the abstract, which excludes the possibility of any interference. It follows that these rules are only constitutive and not normative. In the same way, both the laws of the understanding and reason are not normative in the *divine* cases.

VII. TWO-STANDPOINTS VIEW

Thus far I have argued that it is possible for the same set of rules to be constitutive in the strong sense, and then in a different context these same rules will be normative. Now I want to claim that the laws of logic as Kant describes them are constitutive insofar as the laws are viewed in the context of the faculties themselves, and then normative insofar as we have the capacity for error due to our sensory capacities. Kant himself makes this claim regarding the nature of the moral law when he describes the “two standpoints” from which we can cognize ourselves:

A rational being must regard himself *as intelligence* (hence not from the side of his lower powers) as belonging to the world of sense but to the world of understanding; hence he has two standpoints from which he can regard himself and cognize laws for the use of his powers and consequently for all his actions.

(Groundwork 4:454)

The first standpoint is from *sense*, from which one understands one's actions as “determined by other appearances, namely desires and inclinations” (Groundwork 4:454). The second standpoint is that from *understanding*, from which one perceives the faculties of understanding and reason as unadulterated, as constituted by specific laws. It is because these two standpoints are possible that we view the laws of logic as both constitutive and normative. They are constitutive in the strong sense when a thinking agent considers oneself from the standpoint of understanding: this

is like taking on the perspective of the divine will, cognizing that *because* one has these abilities one is constituted in just the way that these laws make explicit. However, when one considers the first standpoint *in relation* to the second standpoint, one sees that the influences of the sensory capacities often derail the agent from thinking correctly, and this forces the agent towards the perfection of the higher cognitive capacities; the laws which constitute the higher faculties then become imperatives for how the agent *ought* to think and act. As Kant explains in the case of the moral law: “The moral ‘*ought*’ is then his own necessary ‘*will*’ as a member of an intelligible world, and is thought by him as ‘*ought*’ only insofar as he regards himself at the same time as a member of the world of sense” (Groundwork 4:455).¹⁰

VIII. CONCLUSION

Thus the supposedly opposed interpretations given at the beginning of this essay are only opposed on the grounds of a false dichotomy. These laws are both constitutive in the strong sense *and* weak, normative sense without causing any worry about the possibility of error. The normative nature of the laws *follows* from the fact that we are constituted as beings in such a way that we do err. In the case of the moral law, Kant is explicit about this separation of the constitutive and normative nature of practical reason. We interpret the moral law as an *imperative* because of this separation: as a member of the intelligible world I understand that “if I were only this, all my actions *would* always be in conformity with the autonomy of the will; but since at the same time I intuit myself as a member of the world of sense, they *ought* to be in conformity with it” (Groundwork 4:454). Here “conformity with the autonomy of the will” can be understood as always acting in accordance with the objectively necessary laws of practical reason. The laws of logic are thus both constitutive of (in the strong sense) and normative for all

¹⁰ Note that here I am interpreting “intelligible world” as “standpoint of understanding,” and “world of sense” as “standpoint from sense.” This is to distinguish a “standpoint view” from a “world view.”

activity of thought. However, the normative force behind these laws is a consequence of the fact that we interact with the outside world. These laws are constitutive in the *weak* sense because of how *we* are constituted as a whole, while the laws are constitutive in the *strong* sense because of how they are essentially.

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