

From general practical philosophy to the metaphysics of morals^{*}

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ABSTRACT: This paper examines Kant's claim that the contrast between Wolff's general practical philosophy and his own metaphysics of morals corresponds to that between general logic and transcendental philosophy. It argues that this is to be understood in terms of the transition within the table of the logical functions of judgment that takes place when one moves beyond general logic by introducing the third function under each heading in the context of transcendental logic and that is paralleled in the table of the categories of freedom, where the third category under each heading is only introduced in the metaphysics of morals. The paper focuses in particular on the modal categories of freedom. It argues that the second modal category, namely 'duty', is to be interpreted in line with how this notion is understood in Wolff's general practical philosophy and also argues in favour of a revision of the third modal category and its correlate.

I Introduction

In the preface of the *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* and also in the contemporaneous *Moral Mrongovius*, Kant distinguishes the general practical philosophy developed by Christian Wolff from the metaphysics of morals that Kant intends to supply. He claims that the contrast between Wolff's project and his own corresponds to the contrast between general logic and transcendental philosophy.

sondern das Wollen überhaupt in Betrachtung gezogen mit allen Handlungen und Bedingungen, die ihm in dieser allgemeinen Bedeutung zukom-

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men, und dadurch unterscheidet sie sich von einer Metaphysik der Sitten, eben so wie die allgemeine Logik von der Transscendentalphilosophie, von denen die erstere die Handlungen und Regeln des Denkens *überhaupt*, diese aber bloß die besondern Handlungen und Regeln des REINEN Denkens, d.i. desjenigen, wodurch Gegenstände völlig a priori erkannt werden, vorträgt. (4:390)

Praktische Philosophie und Moral ist nicht einerlei. Allgemeine practische Philosophie verhält sich zur Moral wie Logic zur Metaphysic. (29:597)

This parallel that Kant draws with regard to general logic and transcendental philosophy has not been suitably appreciated so far.¹ This paper provides an account of the relationship between general practical philosophy and the metaphysics of morals. Understanding the transition from general practical philosophy to the metaphysics of morals turns out to be crucial for understanding the table of the categories of freedom, especially the modal categories, and the way in which the categorical imperative is to be understood in terms of the categories of freedom.²

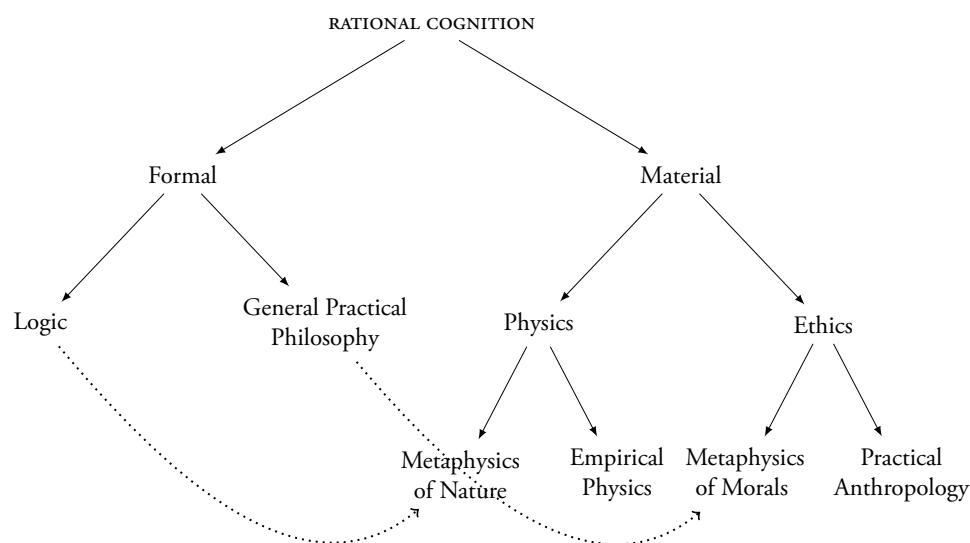
2 General and transcendental logic

At first sight, it might seem that Kant wants to compare the transition from Wolff's general practical philosophy to his own metaphysics of morals to the transition from the table of the logical functions of judgement to the table of the categories of nature.³ This, however, does not make sense. Morals and metaphysics are both material and a priori, whereas logic is formal and separate from them both. As Kant notes in the preface of the *Groundwork*, rational cognition is divided into three sciences on the basis of two consecutive divisions (cf. 4:387-388; also cf. 24:699). First, it is distinguished into formal and material cognition, with logic being the science of the form of thinking. Material cognition is then sub-divided into physics (which is the science of nature) and ethics (which is the science of freedom). These two are then further divided into pure/a priori and empirical/a posteriori parts: the metaphysics of nature is distinguished from empirical physics and, likewise, the metaphysics of morals is distinguished from practical anthropology. Now, if logic were to stand in the same relation to the metaphysics of nature as general practical philosophy does to the metaphysics of morals, then general practical philosophy would have to be a formal branch on the same level as logic. This, however, is impossible since practical philosophy is material, not formal.

¹Lee: 2004 appears to be the only one who has examined this parallel.

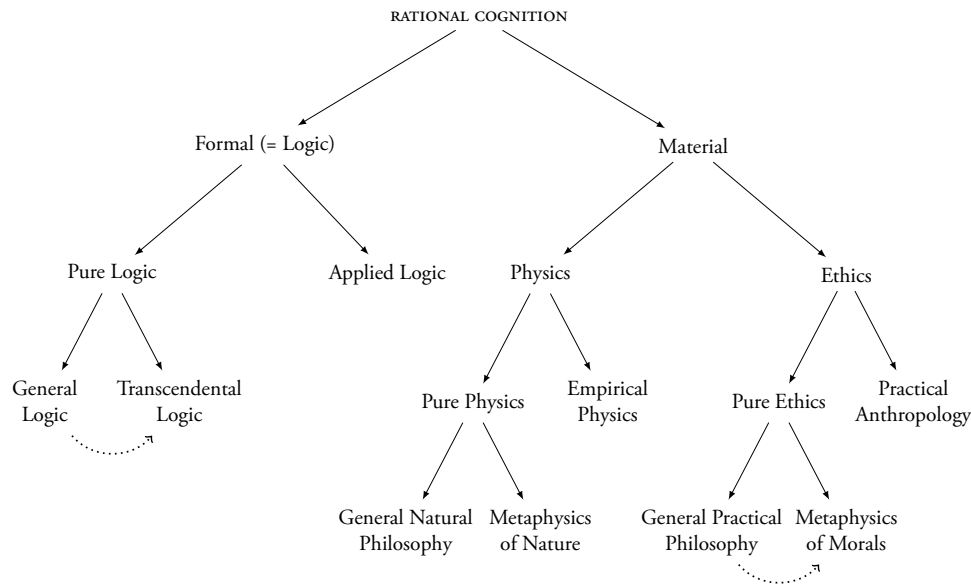
²This paper focuses on the modal categories. For an account of the other categories and how the categorical imperative is to be understood in light of this, cf. *Kant's Theory of Modality*, Part III (Bader: manuscript).

³This reading is accepted by Lee: 2004.



The relevant contrast is instead to be understood in terms of the contrast between pure general logic and transcendental logic. Pure logic is divided into general logic and transcendental logic. Whereas general logic is completely formal and abstracts from all content, transcendental logic takes content into consideration. This difference is reflected in the table of the logical functions of judgement. General logic involves eight functions, namely two under each heading that constitute analytic dichotomies and are based on logical divisions. Transcendental logic adds four further functions. In particular, it adds a third function under each heading.⁴ The third function plays the same role as one of the prior two from the perspective of general logic, but can be distinguished once content is taken into consideration. For instance, infinite judgements are considered to be equivalent to affirmative judgements by general logic, since both of them involve inclusion of the relevant part of the extension of the subject concept in the extension of the predicate concept. Yet, they are distinguished in transcendental logic, since they differ insofar as the predicate is positive in the case of affirmative judgements (S is P), whereas it is negative in the case of infinite judgements (S is non-P).

⁴As we will see later, this is not a matter of mere addition but also involves a partial reinterpretation and restriction of one of the prior functions under each heading. For a detailed treatment of the relationship between the dichotomies of general logic and the trichotomies of transcendental logic, cf. 'From general logic to transcendental logic' (Bader: manuscript).



Put differently, the relevant transition takes place within the table of the logical functions of judgement, rather than it being the transition from this table to the table of the categories.⁵ The relationship amongst these two sub-branches of logic is then mirrored in the case of freedom (as well as in the case of nature, where there is a corresponding transition from general natural philosophy to the metaphysics of nature). General practical philosophy likewise abstracts from determining grounds and examines willing in general, whereas a metaphysics of morals takes determining grounds into consideration. This gives rise to a corresponding transition in the table of the categories of freedom.

3 The categories of freedom

In the *Critique of Practical Reason* Kant introduces the table of the categories of freedom in regard of the concepts of good and evil.

⁵This taxonomy might be thought to conflict with the way in which Kant sets up the division of logic in the *Critique of Pure Reason*. There he distinguishes logic into general logic and special logic, where general logic is then divided into pure logic and applied logic (cf. A52/B76-A55/B79). However, the two taxonomies are equivalent since it is arbitrary in which order the two distinctions pure vs. applied and general vs. special are combined. One can either first divide logic into pure and applied logic and then in each case distinguish general from special logic, or one can first divide logic into general and special logic and then in each case distinguish pure from applied logic. (For a helpful discussion as to why transcendental logic classifies as a special logic cf. MacFarlane: 2000, sections 4.1.1 and 4.1.4.)

DER QUANTITÄT	
Subjectiv, nach Maximen (Willensmeinungen des Individuum)	
Objectiv, nach Principien (Vorschriften)	
A priori objective sowohl als subjective Principien der Freiheit (Gesetze)	
DER QUALITÄT	DER RELATION
Praktische Regeln des Begehens	Auf die Persönlichkeit
Praktische Regeln des Unterlassens	Auf den Zustand der Person
Praktische Regeln der Ausnahmen	Wechselseitig einer Person auf den Zustand der anderen
MODALITÄT	
Das Erlaubte und Unerlaubte	
Die Pflicht und das Pflichtwidrige	
Vollkommene und unvollkommene Pflicht	

This table has posed significant difficulties for interpreters. In one of the crucial passages for interpreting the table of the categories of freedom, Kant claims that a transition takes place within this table:

diese Kategorien nur die praktische Vernunft überhaupt angehen und so in ihrer Ordnung von den moralisch noch unbestimmten und sinnlich bedingten zu denen, die, sinnlich unbedingt, blos durchs moralische Gesetz bestimmt sind, fortgehen. (5:66)

How this transition is to be interpreted is somewhat unclear. Some have thought that there is a progression amongst the headings, i.e. that the categories of quantity, quality and relation are sensibly conditioned and that only those of modality are morally determined. A variant thereof sees the transition as taking place within the categories of modality, in particular with the switch to morality taking place with the second modal category: ‘duty’ and ‘contrary to duty’. An altogether different approach locates the progression under each heading, such that the first two categories under each heading are sensibly conditioned and the third is morally determined (cf. Bader: 2009).⁶

The contrast between general practical philosophy and the metaphysics of morals and the way in which it maps onto the contrast between general logic and transcendental logic supports the claim that the third category under each heading is morally determined, such that the progression from sensibly conditioned to morally determined takes place under each heading. General practical philosophy, which is the analogue of general logic, deals with what is morally undetermined and sensibly conditioned. By contrast, the metaphysics of morals, which is the analogue of transcendental logic, deals with what is sensibly unconditioned and determined by the moral law. The first two categories under each heading thus belong to general practical philosophy, whereas the third category

⁶The account developed here agrees in broad outline with the one presented in 2009 but makes important improvements as regards the details, most notably concerning the modal categories.

is only introduced in the metaphysics of morals in a way that is analogous to how transcendental logic introduces a third function under each heading in the table of the logical functions of judgement.⁷

This combination of general practical philosophy and metaphysics of morals brings out the way in which the categories of freedom “die praktische Vernunft überhaupt angehen” (5:66). What is at issue is practical reason as a whole, encompassing both empirical practical reason and pure practical reason. Correspondingly, the categories of freedom concern freedom in the broad sense that encompasses both transcendental and practical freedom.⁸ Likewise for the good and the bad, which includes both the natural good/bad and the moral good/bad. Whereas general practical philosophy, which is restricted to the first two categories under each heading, can make sense of technical (= problematic) and pragmatic (= assertoric) imperatives that issue from empirical practical reason, concern the natural good and bad and involve the exercise of practical freedom, a metaphysics of morals, which introduces the third category under each heading, is required to distinguish categorical (= apodictic) imperatives that issue from pure practical reason, concern the moral good and bad and involve the exercise of transcendental freedom.

4 Duty and contrary to duty

A major stumbling block for this interpretation of 5:66 is the second modal category: ‘duty’ (die Pflicht) and ‘contrary to duty’ (das Pflichtwidrige). On the face of it, it would seem to be difficult to provide a non-moral interpretation of this category. Beck even deems this to be a “fatal objection” (Beck: 1960, p. 150). Nevertheless, there are strong reasons in favour of this reading. Not only is it a natural reading of the 5:66 progression passage, Kant’s clarificatory remarks added in the preface, in which he maps the three modal categories onto problematic, assertoric and apodictic imperatives strongly support a non-moral reading of this category.⁹

⁷Likewise, the third categories under the various headings in the table of the categories of nature play a crucial role in making experience possible and form part of the transition from general natural philosophy to the metaphysics of nature.

⁸An act of Willkür as such is the practical analogue of a thing in general. Cf. “Auch was der *oberste eingetheilte Begriff* zu der Eintheilung *Recht* oder *Unrecht* (*aut fas aut nefas*) sei, hat seine Bedenklichkeit. Es ist der *Act der freien Willkür* überhaupt. So wie die Lehrer der Ontologie vom *Etwas* und *Nichts* zu oberst anfangen, ohne inne zu werden, daß dieses schon Glieder einer Eintheilung sind, dazu noch der eingetheilte Begriff fehlt, der kein anderer, als der Begriff von einem *Gegenstande* überhaupt sein kann.” (6:218 fn)

⁹“Es ist hier nur um den Unterschied der *Imperativen* unter *problematischem*, *assertorischem* und *apodiktischem* Bestimmungsgrunde zu thun.” (5:11 fn)

4.1 Wolffian ‘duties’

The parallel between general logic/general practical philosophy and transcendental logic/metaphysics of morals provides further support for this reading and, moreover, allows us to deal with this recalcitrant bit of the text. The way in which Kant’s table of the categories of freedom encompasses, whilst also crucially going beyond, Wolffian general practical philosophy makes it plausible that Kant uses the term ‘Pflicht’ to characterise the second modal category in a way that corresponds to how this term is used in the Wolffian system (though as reinterpreted by Kant, cf. section 6). He takes over the terminology as it is used in Wolffian general practical philosophy, even if he has some misgivings and thinks that duty proper only comes in once one moves to the metaphysics of morals.

This is analogous to how the bilineum rectilineum, which is the standard Wolffian example of the nihil negativum (see, for instance, §79 of Wolff’s *Ontologia*), is also used by Kant as an example of this type of nothing in the context of his table of nothing (cf. A291/B348), despite the fact that Kant himself had earlier in the *Critique of Pure Reason* claimed that the bilineum rectilineum is not an analytic/logical impossibility but instead a synthetic/real impossibility (cf. A220/B268) and so classifies not as a nihil negativum but as an ens rationis.¹⁰

As Kant notes, the concept of obligation in Wolffian general practical philosophy is anything but moral, which ensures that the category ‘duty’ and its correlate ‘contrary to duty’ in the table of the categories of freedom is not moral, when interpreted in accordance with the Wolffian paradigm.

Denn die Verfasser jener Wissenschaft bleiben ihrer Idee von derselben auch hierin treu; sie unterscheiden nicht die Bewegungsgründe, die, als solche, völlig a priori bloß durch Vernunft vorgestellt werden und eigentlich moralisch sind, von den empirischen, die der Verstand bloß durch Vergleichung der Erfahrungen zu allgemeinen Begriffen erhebt, sondern betrachten sie, ohne auf den Unterschied ihrer Quellen zu achten, nur nach der größeren oder kleineren Summe derselben, (indem sie alle als gleichartig angesehen werden,) und machen sich dadurch ihren Begriff von *Verbindlichkeit*, der freylich nichts weniger als moralisch, aber doch so beschaffen ist, als es in einer Philosophie, die über den *Ursprung* aller möglichen practischen Begriffe, ob sie auch a priori oder bloß a posteriori stattfinden, gar nicht urtheilt, nur verlangt werden kann. (4:391)

Baumgarten und Wolff sagen: Pflicht ist die Nothwendigkeit einer Handlung zufolge der größten und wichtigsten Bewungs Gründe. – Nun ist ihnen einerlei, ob die Bewegungs Gründe aus Neigungen oder aus Vernunft sind. . . . In der allgemeinen practischen Philosophie muß nichts von Moral vorkommen. (29:598)

¹⁰For a detailed discussion, cf. “Kant and the table of nothing”, section 5.2 (Bader: manuscript).

The concept of duty developed by Wolff (and also by Baumgarten) in his general practical philosophy corresponds exactly to that of an assertoric imperative, which necessitates the agent to perform that action which best promotes his happiness and so is supported by the greatest sensible determining grounds. “Der Imperativ der Klugheit setzt einen Zweck vest, der mir a posteriori gegeben ist, denn Glückseeligkeit ist der größte Grad der Befriedigung aller unserer Neigungen.” (29:598) Given that the second category belongs to general practical philosophy rather than the metaphysics of morals and that Kant says in the footnote in the preface that it corresponds to assertoric imperatives, it is plausible to think that Kant used ‘duty’ here in a way that corresponds to how this notion can be understood in Wolff’s general practical philosophy.

4.2 Pflichtwidrig

The (non-moral) Wolffian reading of ‘duty’ is also required for explaining how ‘das Pflichtwidrige’ classifies as the correlate of ‘die Pflicht’. On the face of it, this does not look like an exhaustive dichotomy. After all, there can be actions (or better: practical rules) that are neither duty nor contrary to duty, i.e. neither obligatory nor forbidden but instead permissible. Schütz already objected in a letter to Kant:

Der *Pflicht* steht nicht blos die *Pflichtwidrigkeit* entgegen, sondern wie in der Critik der reinen Vernunft, *Daseyn* und *Nichtseyn* entgegengesetzt wird, so muß auch hier nur *Pflicht* und *NichtPflicht* einander entgegengesetzt werden. *Nicht Pflicht* sind 1) alle Handlungen die unmöglich sind 2) alle Handlungen die durch kein Gesetz bestimmt, oder weder geboten noch verboten sind. 3) alle pflichtwidrige Handlungen. (10:542)

The first type of *NichtPflicht* that Schütz identified can be set aside. The second modal category and its correlate are generated by means of a sub-division of the first modal category, so that impossible actions have already been excluded at this stage. Or, more precisely, it is practical rules that cannot coherently be formed and so constitute practical impossibilities that have already been excluded. That is, what is excluded at the first stage is not impossible actions, such as squaring the circle, but practical rules that violate principles of possibility. ‘Das Unerlaubte’ refers to practical rules that involve practical contradictions and thus cannot be willed (in the same way that logical impossibility concerns judgements that involve theoretical contradictions and cannot be thought). In particular, practical contradiction is a form of means-ends incoherence.¹¹ This comes out clearly in the example that Kant gives in the footnote at 5:11.

¹¹In addition to impermissible rules that are contradictory and violate analytic conditions of possibility, there are impermissible rules that violate synthetic conditions of possibility, namely universalisability. These synthetic conditions, however, are not accessible from the point of view of general practical philosophy but are only introduced in the metaphysics of morals.

So ist es z. B. einem Redner als solchem *unerlaubt*, neue Worte oder Wortfügungen zu schmieden; dem Dichter ist es in gewissem Maße *erlaubt*; in keinem von beiden wird hier an Pflicht gedacht. Denn wer sich um den Ruf eines Redners bringen will, dem kann es niemand wehren.

The action per se is clearly possible. What is at issue rather is that it cannot coherently be willed by someone who has the end of being an orator, such that the practical rule that treats the action as a means for this end is a practical impossibility. The means that might well be appropriate for a poet are not allowed for an orator, since in the latter case they contradict the end of being an orator. A practical rule that conflicts with the principle of hypothetical imperatives, insofar as it involves means that undermine the end, conflicts with the analytic principle of willing and hence amounts to a rule that cannot be willed, since the willing of the end contradicts the willing of the means.¹² Such a rule, accordingly, cannot even constitute a problematic imperative.

This, however, leaves the second type identified by Schütz, namely permissible actions that are neither required nor forbidden. These actions (or better: their practical rules) are practically possible. Yet, they neither fall under 'Pflicht' nor 'Pflichtwidrig', thereby rendering the division non-exhaustive. It is for this reason that Schütz proposes the alternative: 'Pflicht' and 'NichtPflicht'. This revision of the table does ensure that the division is exhaustive. However, it leads to the problem that 'NichtPflicht' is then disjunctive and can itself be further divided into two categories, namely into what is merely permissible and what is contrary to duty, which contradicts the completeness of the modal categories.

Instead of establishing an exhaustive dichotomy by following Schütz's suggestion to replace 'Pflichtwidrig' by 'NichtPflicht', one could try to interpret 'Pflicht' as 'Pflichtmäßig'. When Kant does draw a binary contrast elsewhere, it is in terms of 'Pflichtmäßig' being opposed to 'Pflichtwidrig' (e.g. 9:70, 6:223). Being in conformity with duty is a way of being non-forbidden, i.e. 'Pflichtmäßig' encompasses both what is obligatory and what is merely permissible and thus exhaustively divides the sphere when opposed to 'Pflichtwidrig'. Accordingly, one might think that 'die Pflicht' could be interpreted in terms of 'das Pflichtmäßige' to ensure exhaustiveness.

This, however, is not adequate, since 'Pflichtmäßig' lacks an assertoric element; it is a form of permissibility that corresponds to possibility rather than actuality. Moreover, such a reading cannot yield the third modal category and its correlate by means of a sub-division. Since the second modal category is subdivided into 'perfect duty' and 'imperfect duty', these two have to jointly exhaust the second category. 'Pflichtmäßig', however, cannot exhaustively be divided into 'perfect duty' and 'imperfect duty', precisely because it includes the merely permissible actions that fall under neither of these and which it has to include

¹²The contradiction is analytic as far as willing is concerned yet requires synthetic means-ends connections to be established (cf. 4:417).

in order to ensure an exhaustive division together with 'Pflichtwidrig'. Instead, when sub-divided, 'Pflichtmäßig' would yield a division into 'obligatory' and 'merely permissible'.

These difficulties can be avoided by means of a non-moral reading that interprets 'duty' in the broad sense of what is to be done, so that it encompasses pragmatic imperatives. Whatever is not duty is then something that is contrary to duty. The obligatory and the forbidden, accordingly, exhaust all possible courses of actions. This is because any course of action that departs from what the pragmatic imperative requires of the agent in a given situation will be a course of action that is not maximally conducive to the agent's happiness. Whatever is not conducive to happiness detracts from happiness, such that it is in that sense something that is contrary to duty (rather than merely being something that is not a duty).¹³

What is contrary to prudential duty is distinct from and does not encompass what is analytically practically impossible. All possible practical rules are divided into those that are actual, in the sense that they involve an assertoric imperative based on an actual end, and those that are non-actual. Acting on one of the latter practical rules amounts to taking means for ends that one does not have (or at least means for ends that do not correspond to the sum total of one's ends, such that one acts on practical rules that realise some ends at the expense of others in a way that is not warranted by the balance of reasons), which amounts to acting in a way that is contrary to duty.

In the realm of prudence, mere permissibility is limited to the choice amongst disjuncts of a disjunctive imperative, all of which maximise the agent's happiness. When there are multiple undominated actions that are tied in terms of how much happiness they bring about, the pragmatic imperative requires one to perform one of them. Though each of them will be permissible without being obligatory, it is only the disjunctive maxim that will be put forward by prudence. Acting on this disjunctive maxim will be obligatory, such that performing any of the disjuncts is a way of doing one's prudential duty, whereas performing any other action will be contrary to duty. This is because empirical practical reason commands one to take all the necessary means for one's happiness. Since the disjunction of all sufficient means is a necessary means, prudence commands one to realise this disjunction.

Prudence differs in this way from morality, where we have a threefold distinction into what is obligatory, merely permitted and forbidden. There can be actions that are universalisable, without them being obligatory, given that there are alternatives that are likewise universalisable. Though one can take the disjunction of all the universalisable options and then show that one has to perform one of them, such that this duty has as its complement whatever is contrary to duty and that mere permissibility is limited to the choice amongst the various

¹³Unless, of course, what goes against happiness is morality, in which case the agent's duty consists in following morality.

disjuncts, this disjunction is not put forward by pure practical reason. This is because empirical practical reason has the first word in deliberation (cf. 5:146). Pure practical reason does not put forward any proposals by itself. In particular, it does not examine all possible courses of action and then requires the agent to perform the disjunction of all universalisable ones. Instead, it examines specific proposals advanced by empirical practical reason and then either lets them pass when they are universalisable or rejects or limits them when they are not universalisable.

5 Perfect and imperfect duty

The third modal category and its correlate, namely ‘perfect duty’ and ‘imperfect duty’, also pose difficulties for the proposed account. Since the third results from sub-dividing the second, a moral reading of the second seems unavoidable. Both ‘perfect duty’ and ‘imperfect duty’ are moral and are supposed to jointly exhaust the divided concept ‘duty’. After all, on the proposed account, the third category is meant to be morally determined and, even though this is compatible with its correlate not being morally determined, this cannot be the case when it comes to ‘imperfect duty’ since prudence does not allow for any imperfect obligations. Understanding ‘duty’ in a way that is not morally determined thus seems incompatible with its being subdivided into ‘perfect duty’ and ‘imperfect duty’.

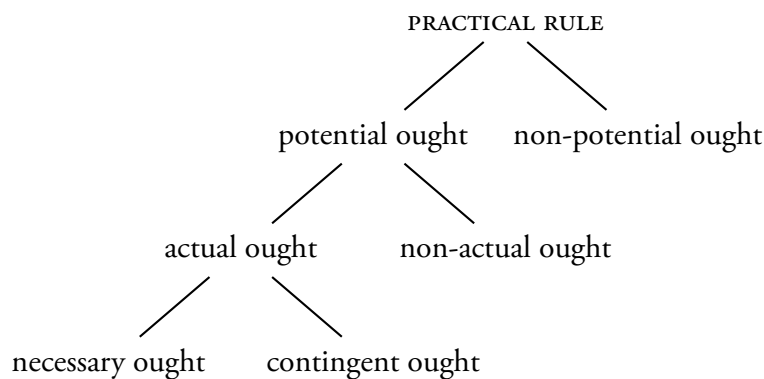
However, the alternative of understanding ‘duty’ as morally determined also runs into difficulties, in particular when it comes to sub-dividing the first modal category into ‘duty’ and its correlate ‘contrary to duty’. On the one hand, if the first modal category, which is divided into ‘duty’ and ‘contrary to duty’, is interpreted as not being morally determined, then this implies that there cannot be merely permissible actions. To avoid this, one would have to expand the correlate of the second by including the merely permissible, i.e. turning it into ‘non-duty’, as suggested by Schütz. As we have seen, however, this would have the problematic consequence that ‘non-duty’ could in turn be divided into what is merely permissible and what is contrary to duty, thereby threatening the completeness of the modal categories.

On the other hand, if the first modal category is interpreted as being morally determined, then it becomes difficult to see how what is morally permitted (*das Erlaubte*) could be divided into what is contrary to duty, since being contrary to duty cannot be a species of morally permitted behaviour. One would then have to read the correlate of the second as ‘non-duty’ in the narrow sense, where this excludes what is contrary to duty and only amounts to a division of what is permissible, namely into that which is duty and that which is merely permissible.¹⁴

¹⁴Zimmermann reads ‘Nichtpflicht’ such that it does exclude what is contrary to duty, since that is already taken to be excluded by ‘das Unerlaubte’, i.e. ‘Nichtpflicht’ is identified with what is morally indifferent (*adiaphoron*), cf. Zimmermann: 2011, p. 283.

In that case, one would end up specifying the deontic modalities, which are exhausted by the three modalities: ‘forbidden’, ‘merely permissible’ and ‘obligatory’, that are generated by two sub-divisions. Not only does this interpretation require replacing ‘contrary to duty’ by ‘merely permissible’, it also cannot make sense of the sub-division into ‘perfect duty’ and ‘imperfect duty’. The problem in particular is that perfect and imperfect duties do not fit in, given that they do not concern the deontic status of an action. Moreover, all practical rules would then be morally determined: one would then no longer have a progression and the categories of freedom would then not pertain to reason and freedom as such, but only to pure practical reason and transcendental freedom.

It looks like some revision of the modal categories is unavoidable. However, rather than revising ‘Pflichtwidrig’ to ‘NichtPflicht’ (whether in the broad or narrow sense), one should revise the third modal category. ‘Duty’ is not to be divided into ‘perfect duty’ and ‘imperfect duty’, but instead into ‘necessary/unconditional duty’ and ‘contingent/conditional duty’. These are mutually exclusive and jointly exhaust the sphere of ‘duty’ (when this is understood as not being morally determined). Put differently, assertoric imperatives can be divided into those that are also apodictic, namely morally determined categorical imperatives, and those that are merely assertoric, namely empirically determined pragmatic imperatives, which ensures that this revision coheres with the alignment of the modal categories with problematic, assertoric and apodictic imperatives that Kant asserted in the footnote in the preface.



The modal categories are not concerned, in the first place, with the deontic status of actions, i.e. whether they are forbidden, permitted or obligatory, but with the modal status of oughts. Rather than concerning actions, they concern the practical rules that enjoin the agent to perform or omit actions. These practical rules specify how one is to act and result from a synthesis of the manifold of desires, where this synthesis proceeds in accordance with the categories. That is, all practical rules tell one what to do, such that all of them amount to oughts, i.e. to imperatives. The modal categories then concern the status of these oughts.

The contrast between perfect and imperfect duties, like the contrast between

duties to self and duties to others, is not a modal contrast that concerns the status of oughts. It is a classification of duties in terms of their content, i.e. in terms of what these duties require. Perfect and imperfect duties differ in terms of content, since perfect duties require non-universalisable maxims that are put forward by prudence to be rejected, whereas imperfect duties require them to be limited. Modality, however, is not part of the content of the practical rule but concerns the value of the copula.¹⁵ Neither the distinction between perfect and imperfect duties, nor the distinction between duties to self and duties to others has a place in the table of the categories of freedom. All four types of duties issuing from these two distinctions are apodictic and so share the same modal status.

This can be brought out by noting that in the case of imperfect duties, just as much as in the case of perfect duties, the opposite is synthetically impossible, since it is contradictory when universalised. Though these types of duties differ in terms of whether a contradiction in will or a contradiction in conception is at issue, this is not a difference in modal status, but a difference in terms of what renders their opposites impossible, which has important upshots in terms of what they require to ensure universalisability, namely limiting or rejecting the opposite maxim. This means that duality does not hold when the third modal category is understood as ‘perfect duty’ with ‘imperfect duty’ as its correlate. Even though the opposite of a perfect duty is impermissible, it is not the case that the opposite of a practical rule that is impermissible is a perfect duty, since it could be an imperfect duty instead. By contrast, revising the third category to ‘categorical ought’ with ‘hypothetical ought’ as its correlate ensures that duality does hold for the modal categories of freedom in the same way as it does for the logical modalities: a categorical ought is one where the opposite is impermissible, i.e. it is an impossible rule that cannot be commanded, where this is a form of synthetic impossibility due to the synthetic requirement of universalisability.

It might be suggested that the difference between perfect and imperfect duties is modal after all, insofar as the latter allow for latitude, whereas the former do not, and that latitude is a matter of permitting exceptions. For instance, in the case of the imperfect duty of beneficence, both helping and not helping are permissible, i.e. deontically possible.¹⁶ This, however, misses the point that modality concerns not actions but practical rules. Even though the opposite action, e.g. not helping, might be allowed, the opposite practical rule is not allowed. Indeed, both helping and not helping fall under the disjunctive practical rule that the imperfect duty requires. The latitude of imperfect duties is not to be understood in terms of latitude at the level of compliance, but in terms of latitude at the level of content. Put differently, it is not the case that an imperfect duty imperfectly

¹⁵The value of the logical copula: ‘S is P’, the value of the real copula: ‘x instantiates F’, the value of the practical copula: ‘A is to ϕ ’.

¹⁶Cf. “A perfect duty is something where it is not possible to not do it, while an imperfect duty is something where it is possible to not do it.” (Bader: 2009, p. 818)

requires a practical rule, but rather that it perfectly requires a practical rule that has imperfect content, namely disjunctive content that retains in part what the practical rule put forward by prudence required but limits it and combines it, such that the rule is one that one can both act on on the basis of self-interest and on the basis of respect for the law.

6 Kant's take on Wolff

Distinguishing general practical philosophy and the metaphysics of morals and explaining how they come together in the table of the categories of freedom provides us with a better understanding of what is distinctive about Kant's project and how it relates to that of Wolff. Kant is not arguing in favour of rejecting Wolff's general practical philosophy but in favour of reinterpreting it as a theory of prudence that needs to be supplemented by his metaphysics of morals. Wolff's general practical philosophy is taken to be adequate when interpreted as an account of empirical practical reason that needs to be supplemented by an account of pure practical reason. "Allgemeine Practische Philosophie wird hier mit genommen, so fern sie eine Vorbereitung abgiebt" (29:599).

This involves a substantive reinterpretation of general practical philosophy. From Kant's perspective, what Wolff developed was not a truly general practical philosophy. This is because Wolff mistakenly excluded the possibility of a categorical imperative, given that his characterisation of duty implicitly presupposed that there are only empirical motivating grounds. Whereas general practical philosophy proper is so general that it encompasses the metaphysics of morals, Wolff's version is a restricted version that excludes the metaphysics of morals. Put differently, whereas general practical philosophy proper encompasses both empirical practical reason and pure practical reason, Wolff's version is restricted to the former.

Kant objects to the Wolffian concept of duty, understood as doing what one has most reason to do, that it is not sufficiently general but only applicable to prudence. This means that the Wolffian concept of duty does not correspond to the concept of duty of a truly general practical philosophy (which completely abstracts from determining grounds). The truly general concept can be subdivided, once one moves to the metaphysics of morals, into a distinctively moral notion, based on a priori determining grounds that render it non-contingent, and a merely prudential notion, based on sensible determining grounds that render it contingent. Instead, the Wolffian concept of duty corresponds to the prudential version that results from the sub-division effected in a metaphysics of morals. Put differently, the Wolffian notion is only a restricted notion that is contrasted with the general notion that encompasses both assertoric and categorical imperatives.

Since morality only comes in with the metaphysics of morals, Wolff's general practical philosophy turns out to be entirely non-moral. Since it is restricted to

empirical determining grounds and leaves aside pure practical reason, Wolffian general practical philosophy does not even get to morality, but only constitutes a theory of prudence. Although Wolff's general practical philosophy is from Kant's perspective fine when reconceived in this way as a theory of prudence that has to be supplemented by a metaphysics of morals, it is very far from the ambitions of what Wolff was trying to achieve, and from the point of view of Kant leaves out the most important thing, namely the categorical imperative.

7 Conclusion

In the same way that there is a transition within the table of the logical functions of judgement from general logic to transcendental logic, there is a corresponding transition in the table of the categories of freedom from general practical philosophy to the metaphysics of morals. The third function under each heading is only differentiated in a metaphysics of morals and issues from pure practical reason, concerns the moral good and bad and involves the exercise of transcendental freedom. Accordingly, one has to adopt a non-moral reading of the second modal category, that is in line with Wolff's conception of duty (as reinterpreted by Kant), and revise the third modal category and its correlate, so that it is a genuinely modal contrast that is introduced by the metaphysics of morals, namely the contrast between necessary/categorical and contingent/hypothetical oughts.

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