

Once Again: What is the ‘First Proposition’ in Kant’s *Groundwork*? Some Refinements, a New Proposal, and a Reply to Henry Allison

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Abstract

Discussing the concept of duty in *Groundwork* 1, Kant refers to a ‘second proposition’ and a ‘third proposition’, the latter being a ‘Folgerung aus beiden vorigen’. However, Kant does not identify what the ‘first proposition’ is. In this paper, I will argue that the first proposition is this: An action from duty is an action from respect for the moral law. I defend this claim against a critique put forward by Allison according to which ‘respect’ is a concept that is not, and could not be, introduced in paragraphs 9–13 of *Groundwork* 1. Further, I will argue that the first proposition as I understand it can also be reconstructed as the conclusion (‘Folgerung’) of a deductive argument proper; however, I will also discuss the option that ‘Folgerung’ could be understood as a corollary rather than a conclusion. Finally, Allison’s own interpretation will be criticized.

Keywords: corollary, first proposition, *Groundwork*, respect

The problem is well-known: Discussing the concept of a good will and the concept of duty in *Groundwork*, Kant refers to a ‘second proposition’ (GMS 4: 399, 35)¹ and ‘third proposition’ (GMS 4: 400, 17). However, Kant does not identify what the ‘first proposition’ (P₁)² is. Yet there is an important hint: Kant says that (P₃) – ‘duty is the necessity of an action from respect for the law’ (4: 400, 17) – is a ‘Folgerung aus beiden vorigen’ (‘Folgerung of the first two’, GMS 4: 400, 17; my emphasis).³ The fact that Kant calls P₃ a ‘Folgerung’ of P₁ and P₂ is a touchstone, I submit, for the correctness of any interpretation of P₁.⁴ It is all the more remarkable that in the literature regarding P₁ the question of what *exactly* ‘Folgerung’ means, and how Kant makes use of this term elsewhere, has not been raised.

As far as I can tell, Kant uses ‘Folgerung’ in at least four different ways:

1. as a broad logical term;
2. as the term for the *conclusion* of a deductive argument;
3. as another term for a *corollary*;
4. as another term for a *Verstandesschluss*.

In what follows, I will take into account these different meanings in explaining what P₁ is. ‘Folgerung’ as a *Verstandesschluss* I can rule out without further ado. By a ‘Verstandesschluss’ Kant means the immediate derivation of one judgement from another within the doctrine of categorical propositions (or syllogistic logic), for example, a particular affirmative proposition such as ‘Some men are mortal’ is a ‘Folgerung’ of the universal affirmative proposition ‘All men are mortal’, and there are other forms based on the distinction between quantity, quality, relation, and modality. It is obvious, I take it, that P₃ is not a ‘Folgerung’ in the sense of such a ‘Verstandesschluss’ simply because P₂ and P₃ are not categorical propositions.

In an earlier paper I argued that the (missing) ‘first proposition’ is this: an action from duty is an action from respect for the moral law.⁵ I will first outline and refine this interpretation (section 1), interpreting ‘Folgerung’ as a broad logical term which is used to refer to the ‘combining’ of certain elements; however, ‘Folgerung’ can also be reconstructed in terms of a conclusion proper. I will then discuss a new possible interpretation, based on the assumption that ‘Folgerung’ could be read as ‘corollary’ (section 2). Finally (in section 3), I will defend my interpretation against Allison’s critique, put forth in his new commentary on the *GMS*.⁶

1. Reading the ‘First Proposition’ as a Proposition about Respect

1.1 ‘Folgerung’ as a ‘Combining’ of P₁ and P₂

Kant often uses ‘Folgerung’ in a very *broad* sense such that, roughly speaking, a proposition *r* is a ‘Folgerung’ of a proposition *p* in that there is reason to believe that *r* is the case because there is reason to believe that *p* is the case. Quite often Kant speaks of such a ‘Folgerung’ without specifying *how* exactly that which follows from something else *does* follow.⁷ As I claimed in Schönecker (2001), this is what happens in *GMS* 1: P₃ is, in the sense in question, a ‘Folgerung’ of P₁ and P₂ inasmuch it follows once one *combines* P₁ and P₂.⁸

Kant does not explicitly say that P₂ and P₃ *are* indeed propositions regarding *duty*; he simply speaks of a ‘second proposition’ and a ‘third proposition’. Given that there *is*, of course, a *very* first proposition (to wit, the famous first proposition of *GMS* 1 about the good will that

alone is good without limitation), and given that Kant, right after his discussion of duty, returns to the good *will* as 'the highest and unconditioned good' (*GMS* 4: 401. 10), one might be tempted to think that the 'first proposition' (P_1), and possibly P_2 and P_3 as well, are not about duty, but about the good will, and that P_1 is identical with the very first proposition of *GMS* 1. In brief, P_1 would be this:

(P_{1_1}) It is a good will alone that is good without limitation.

Three reasons speak against this interpretation. To begin with, it is true that P_2 and P_3 are not explicitly introduced as propositions that deal with the concept of duty.⁹ But of course they *are* about duty. For P_2 begins like this: 'an action from *duty* has its moral worth' (*GMS* 4: 399. 35; my emphasis), and P_3 even like this: '*duty* is ...' (*GMS* 4: 400. 18; my emphasis); so whatever P_1 is about, P_2 and P_3 *are* certainly about duty, and this suggests that P_1 is so as well. Second, bear in mind that in *GMS* I (4: 397. 1–10) Kant makes an explicit move from the concept of a good will to the concept of duty: 'But now in order to develop the concept of a good will ... we will put before ourselves the concept of *duty*, which contains that of a good will, although under certain subjective limitations and hindrances' (*GMS* 4: 397. 1). Certainly every action that is done from duty is an action done from a good will, and in this sense the three propositions are about the good will. The opposite, however, is not true; not every action done from a good will is an action done from duty. In 4: 397 Kant develops the concept of duty, and given that P_2 and P_3 are about duty, it would be very strange indeed if P_1 were not about duty. In any event, based on a broad understanding of 'Folgerung', the interpretation of P_1 in terms of P_{1_1} cannot be correct for a third reason. For how could P_3 , being a proposition defining duty, be 'a *Folgerung* of the *two* preceding', i.e. of P_1 and P_2 , if P_1 were not about duty, but just about the good will? (As we will see, there might be an answer to this based on the alternative reading of 'Folgerung' as 'corollary'.)

So let us for the moment assume that P_1 cannot be the very first proposition of *GMS* 1.¹⁰ Since the analysis of the concept of duty begins in 4: 397. 11, and P_2 is mentioned in 4: 399. 35, P_1 must be found in paragraphs 9–13 (*GMS* 4: 397. 11–39. 34). However, P_1 *cannot* be identified as a specific single sentence as such in these paragraphs; it must be, in one way or other, reconstructed.¹¹

As I see it, Kant's qualification of P_3 being a 'Folgerung' of P_1 and P_2 , along with the fact that a tad later he writes that 'there is left for the will

nothing that could determine it except objectively the *law* and subjectively *pure respect* for this practical law' (GMS 4: 400. 31; my emphasis), gives strength to the claim that P₃ *combines* the elements of P₁ and P₂. In P₃, the elements that define what 'duty' is are 'necessity of an action' and 'respect for the law'. The former, I argue, is developed in P₂;¹² hence P₁ must be about the latter, i.e. about the 'respect for the moral law'.

So Kant's line of thought could be as follows: He begins with his famous claim that all that could be considered good without limitation is a good will:

(o) It is a good will alone that is good without limitation.

Kant then specifies this thesis with regard to (human) beings whose wills are not perfectly good. The question then is by what an imperfect will must be determined in order to be good. The answer is: objectively, it must be determined by the moral law; subjectively, it must be determined by respect for this law. The subjective moment of determination is expressed in:

(P₁S) An action from duty is an action from respect for the moral law.

P₂ captures the objective moment:

(P₂S) An action from duty follows a maxim that is necessarily commanded by the moral law.

The principle of a morally valuable action must be the categorical imperative; this is the 'objective' requirement. The 'subjective' requirement is respect for the moral law. Thus we get:

(P₃) Duty is the necessity of an action from respect for law.

1.2 'Folgerung' as 'Conclusion'

One could argue that Kant does often speak of 'Folgerung' without specifying it, and yet it is clear, on reflection, that at least in some cases a specification in strict logical terms is possible (and even intended). One such strict understanding of 'Folgerung' would be to read it as 'Verstandesschluss'; however, it was easily shown that this is ruled out when it comes to P₃. But Kant also uses 'Folgerung' in a strict logical sense to refer to the conclusion of a deductive argument; such a 'Folgerung',

at least if it is the conclusion of a syllogism, he sometimes calls 'Vernunftschluss'.¹³ Now Allison agrees with all interpreters that to understand the term 'Folgerung' in such a deductive sense proper¹⁴ 'seems to be a non-starter' (Allison 2011: 134). But is it really a 'non-starter' to understand 'Folgerung' in this second, deductive sense? After all, Kant says P₃ is a 'Folgerung', and it is a 'Folgerung', he says, 'of the first two' propositions, which certainly sounds very much as if he had a deductive argument in mind. So maybe a deductive reading of 'Folgerung' is possible; here is a proposal:

(1) All actions from duty are actions from respect for the moral law.
 (2) Subjectively considered, all duties are actions from duty.
 Therefore: Subjectively considered, all duties are actions from respect for the moral law.

(1) All necessary actions according to a formal principle *a priori* are actions according to the necessity of the moral law.
 (2) Objectively considered, all duties are necessary actions according to a formal principle *a priori*.
 Therefore: Objectively considered, all duties are actions according to the necessity of the moral law.

P₃ then combines these:

(1) If all duties are actions from respect for the moral law and according to the necessity of the moral law, then duty is the necessity of an action from respect for the moral law.
 (2) All duties are actions from respect for the moral law and according to the necessity of the moral law.
 Therefore: Duty is the necessity of an action from respect for the moral law.

This final conclusion is P₃. So why not understand P₃ as a 'Folgerung' in terms of a deductive conclusion?

2. Could P₃ be a Corollary of P₂ and P₃?

There is yet another occurrence of 'Folgerung' in Kant that has a somewhat logical meaning. Recall §7 of the *Critique of Practical Reason*; there one can read a proposition that Kant calls a 'Folgerung' (*KpV* 5: 31). Interestingly, this is translated in English as 'corollary' rather than 'consequence'. The equivalent German term 'Corollar' (or Latin

‘corollarium’) is indeed known to Kant; in §39 of the *Jäsche-Logik*, he distinguishes between ‘Theoreme, Corollarien, Lehrsätze und Scholien’ (9: 112), and there he says that ‘Corollarien’ are ‘unmittelbare *Folgen* aus einem der vorhergehenden Sätze’ (ibid.). One might object that ‘Folge’ is different from ‘Folgerung’. However, Kant uses these terms occasionally as synonyms,¹⁵ and there is at least one well-known passage in one of his other works which demonstrates that Kant avails himself of the term ‘Folgerung’ when he clearly has in mind ‘Corollar’. Thus in his *Idee zu einer allgemeinen Geschichte in weltbürgerlicher Absicht*, Kant states the ‘eighth proposition’, and then says: ‘Der Satz ist eine *Folgerung* aus dem vorigen’ (8: 27. 7; my emphasis).¹⁶ Clearly, with ‘Folgerung’ he cannot mean a ‘Verstandesschluss’; but it is also obvious that he cannot mean a deductive ‘Folgerung’ (because that sentence or proposition is a ‘Folgerung aus *dem* vorigen’ which is singular).¹⁷ Thus ‘Folgerung’ here must mean ‘Corollar’, and this is all the more plausible given that ‘Folgesatz’¹⁸ is a synonym for ‘Corollar’.

If we understand P₃ as a ‘Corollar’ to P₁ and P₂, our understanding of what P₁ is could change. Besides the fact that Kant does use ‘Folgerung’ as a synonym for ‘Corollar’, three reasons make it *prima facie* very attractive to pursue such a reading. First, for a corollary it is not necessary that the terms used in it are already used in the sentence from which it is a ‘Folgerung’; this is important, because the crucial elements in P₃ (‘respect’, ‘law’) are not (directly) used in P₁ and P₂ (I will get back to this in my reply to Allison). Related to this, if P₃ is a corollary, then, second, it might not be necessary to understand P₁ as a proposition about duty. Third, it would then, after all, be possible to understand P₁ as the very first sentence of *GMS* I, i.e. as P_{1I}, which would make for a nice explanation why Kant does not mention a ‘first’ proposition in the first place.

Note, however, that reading ‘Folgerung’ as ‘Corollar’ yields *two* possible reconstructions. In the first (R₁), P₁ is understood as (o):

- (o) It is a good will alone that is good without limitation.
- (P₂S) An action from duty follows a maxim that is necessarily commanded by the moral law.
- Corollary: (P₃) Duty is the necessity of an action from respect for law.

The alternative reconstruction (R₂) would understand P₃ as a corollary as well, but read P₁ as a proposition about duty and as a proposition

about the subjective element without, however, using the term 'Achtung' (respect):

(P1*) Only actions from duty have moral worth.

(P2S) An action from duty follows a maxim that is necessarily commanded by the moral law.

Corollary: (P3) Duty is the necessity of an action from respect for law.

So far, so (maybe) good and promising. There are, however, severe difficulties.

First, Kant speaks quite interchangeably of 'Folgerung', 'Folgesatz', 'Corollarium' and also of 'Consectarium'. Here is not the place to offer an analysis of the passages in which Kant speaks about these terms (especially in his *Logik* and lectures on logic) or actually uses them (as, say, in the second *Kritik* or the *Idee*). In any event, such an analysis, I am afraid, would yield the result that there is *no* precise understanding of what a *Folgesatz*, a *Corollarium*, or a *Consectarium* really is; sometimes they all seem to be the same, sometimes they seem to be different things. Thus it is simply not clear what Kant means by saying that that proposition in the context of §7 of the second *Critique* is a 'Folgerung'; it is not even clear what or where that 'Folgerung' follows *from*. When it comes to mathematics,¹⁹ it might be clear what a 'Corollarium' is, i.e. a proposition that follows from another directly, without a proof. When it comes to philosophy, we are pretty much in the dark.

Second, in the *Jäsche-Logik* Kant says that 'Corollarien' are 'unmittelbare Folgen aus *einem* der vorhergehenden Sätze'.²⁰ With P1 and P2, however, we have *two* propositions, and this suggests that here P3 is not meant to be a corollary.

Third, corollaries are '*offenbare Folgerungen*' (2: 90), i.e. they are obvious, can be cognized without further proof or with little effort (that is why they are *called* 'corollarium', i.e. an 'addition' or 'present'). This is partly the reason why it is so difficult to define whether a proposition is a 'corollarium' or a 'theorem' (something proven deductively): it depends on the spectator what she considers to be 'obvious', and how much is 'little'. P3, however, can hardly be taken to be such an 'addition'; it is not some sort of welcome side-effect, not simply a 'Folgesatz'.

In the end, I am not quite sure what to make of this option; more research, I propose, needs to be done on what a ‘Folgesatz’ is.

3. A Reply to Allison

Let us now turn to Allison’s critique of my interpretation; replying to it will also allow me to further develop my interpretation.

3.1 Allison’s Critique of Schönecker’s Interpretation

Allison says:

The obvious problem with this proposal is that the first mention of ‘respect’ is in the third proposition (GMS 4: 400₁₉) and the concept is explicated in a long footnote attached to Kant’s analysis of this proposition (GMS 4: 401_{17–40}). Schönecker is aware of this and in justification of his proposal argues that paragraphs nine through thirteen all deal with the first proposition and that the latter cannot be identified with any particular claim contained in these paragraphs, but rather must be identified with ‘the abstract quintessence of his [Kant’s] thoughts about the “subjective moment” of the concept of duty, which, when analyzed, turns out to be respect.’ [Quoted from Schönecker 2001: 92.] Although Schönecker is correct in regarding respect as the concept underlying Kant’s account of moral motivation, it does not follow from this that we should construe Kant’s first proposition as referring to it. The problem is not only that the concept is not, in fact, introduced in these paragraphs, but that it *could not be*. Since, as Schönecker notes, the concept of respect presupposes the concept of a practical law and that concept is only introduced in paragraph fourteen (under the guise of a ‘principle of the will’), it makes no textual sense to read it into the earlier paragraphs. Rather, it seems more reasonable to say that these paragraphs prepare the way for the introduction of the concept of respect, which, presumably, could also be said of the first proposition, whatever it turns out to be. (Allison 2011: 123)

So Allison finds fault in my interpretation for two reasons. First, he argues, the concept ‘respect’ *is*, as a matter of fact, not introduced in paragraphs 9–13; second, the concept ‘respect’ ‘*could not be*’ introduced in paragraphs 9–13. Here is my reply.

- (i) The mere fact that a *term* is not used in a given text is no conclusive argument that what the term *stands for* (refers to) is not discussed in this text.

- (ii) Much more importantly: *none* of the terms used in P₃ is used before P₃ is actually formulated; nowhere in paragraphs 9–14 (in paragraph 14, P₂ is introduced) does Kant expressly speak about 'necessity of an action' or 'respect' or 'law' (as it turns out, this is not quite true; I get back to this later). However, as noted above, Kant does say that P₃ is a 'Folgerung', and if we understand this word in its broad meaning (specified, in this case, as 'combinatory', as suggested above) or in its strict deductive meaning, it must mean that what P₃ states, its content, *is somehow present* in paragraphs 9–14. In 4: 397, Kant says that he will now analyse the concept of duty; the main result in 4: 400 then is that 'duty is the necessity of an action from respect for law' (P₃). So if paragraph 14 is about the law, how could it be that paragraphs 9–13 are *not* about respect? (As we saw, there is possibly an answer to this question, but then we must understand 'Folgerung' as 'corollary'.) Later, Allison says of his own formulation of P₁ that Kant does not formulate this proposition himself, and yet, Allison claims, 'it is clearly implicit in his [Kant's] account' (Allison 2011: 125); this, however, can also be said of P₁S.
- (iii) Allison is willing to say that P₂ is about the moral law, although both P₂ itself, and paragraph 14 in which it is formulated, do *not* refer to such a thing called 'law'. The concept of a moral law, says Allison, is therein introduced '*under the guise* of a "principle of the will"' (Allison 2011: 123). However, if this is acceptable with regard to P₂, why should it be a problem to say that the concept of 'respect' is introduced in paragraphs 9–13 '*under the guise of*' the concept of 'duty' and '*under the guise of*' examples that exemplify what respect is? Certainly, in paragraphs 9–13 Kant speaks only about acting 'from duty'.²¹ But with regard to the motivation and moral content of an action, to act from duty is *nothing but to act from respect*.²²
- (iv) The concept of respect 'could not be' introduced in paragraphs 9–13, says Allison, because 'respect' is respect for the moral law, and this law is only introduced (though not expressly) in the following paragraph. Again, it all depends on how we understand Kant's own account of P₃ as a 'Folgerung' of P₁ and P₂. Putting the corollary-interpretation aside, the minimum understanding must be that what is in P₃ must be present in P₁ and P₂ as well; and if P₂ is about the moral law, then respect *must* be found in the preceding paragraphs despite the (alleged) fact that no law is directly mentioned. And again, note that in paragraph 14, the law is also only mentioned indirectly; also, recall that it is only *after* P₃

is stated and further elaborated upon that Kant raises the question of ‘what kind of law [it] can be’ (*GMS* 4: 402. 1) that he has referred to without, obviously, explaining it. Still Allison is right that indirectly there must be a reference to the moral law in paragraphs 9–13 in order to understand what respect is about and in order to make sense of P₃. But it is easy to see how Kant does this. For he distinguishes from the word go between actions that are ‘contrary to *duty*’ (*GMS* 4: 397. 11; my emphasis) and those that are ‘in conformity with *duty*’ (*GMS* 4: 397. 15; my emphasis); but here ‘*duty*’ refers to the objective element of duty, i.e. to duty as that which is to be done according to the *law*. Thus it is a duty to preserve one’s life, to be beneficent, to secure one’s happiness, to love one’s neighbours (to list the four examples Kant himself gives in paragraphs 9–13); and as a matter of fact, ‘to secure one’s happiness’ Kant even calls expressly a ‘*law*’ (*GMS* 4: 399. 24; my emphasis).

- (v) Suppose it is true that paragraphs 9–13 and P₁ are about respect. Then *why*, one could further object, is it that Kant never makes use of the term ‘respect’ in these paragraphs? At first sight, it might be tempting to provide the following answer: Kant’s ‘method in this work [the *GMS*]’ (*GMS* 4: 393. 17) is to make three ‘transitions’, one in each of the three chapters in the *GMS*.²³ The transition in *GMS* 1 is from ‘common rational moral cognition to philosophical [moral cognition]’ (*GMS* 4: 393. 2).²⁴ Basically, this means that Kant begins with concepts familiar to common rational moral cognition which he then clarifies philosophically without going in substance beyond this common rational moral cognition. Thus with regard to the idea of the good will Kant claims that even common reason is in ‘agreement with it’ (*GMS* 4: 394. 34); and so the ‘good will’ known to common rational moral cognition is the starting point of the analysis. Kant then makes that already mentioned substantial move in 4: 397 from the concept of a good will to the concept of duty; there again he puts emphasis on his claim that the concept of a good will ‘dwells already in the naturally healthy understanding’ (*GMS* 4: 397. 2). In what follows, Kant deals with this concept of duty, and he does so according to the method of the transition from common rational to philosophical moral cognition. This is to say – so that answer might go – that Kant assumes that the concept of duty is, though in a somewhat unreflected manner, known to common rational moral cognition, just as the concept of the good will is known to common rational moral cognition. In paragraphs 9–13 Kant then develops this common concept of duty; and as we all know, he does so by using a series of commonsense examples, not by introducing philosophical

concepts proper. *Achtung* (respect), however, is such a concept. According to this answer, Kant does not use the term 'respect' in paragraphs 9–13 because he begins with common rational moral cognition; to speak of respect is to make the transition to philosophical moral cognition. P₃ explicates in a philosophical way what common rational moral cognition knows already: that only acting from duty has moral value, and to explicate this philosophically is to say that only acting from respect has moral value. So when it comes to the subjective element of duty Kant makes the transition from the concept of 'acting from duty' to 'acting from respect'; and this is why respect does not show up in paragraphs 9–13 but only in P₃ and paragraph 15.²⁵ But this answer has an obvious drawback: P₁, whatever it is, is a proposition Kant could or should have subscribed to. And if there is a good reason for Kant not to have used 'respect' in paragraphs 9–13, then the reconstruction of P₁ must not make use of this term either. Now, as we saw, P₂S also does not make use of the term that is crucial to it, to wit, the 'law'. But not only is P₂S a reconstruction of a sentence that is available to us (i.e. P₂), even if P₂ were not written down it certainly has reached the stance of *philosophical* moral cognition. For P₂ itself as well as the paragraph explaining it (paragraph 14) are as philosophical as it gets; after all, there is talk about a 'maxim' (GMS 4: 399. 37), a 'principle of the volition' (GMS 4: 400. 2) and a 'principle *a priori*' (GMS 4: 400. 11). So we are faced with a dilemma: If we accept 'respect' as the crucial element of P₁, then we can explain why there is a 'Folgerung', but we cannot explain why Kant does not actually use this term; if, on the other hand, we can explain why Kant does not use 'respect' in paragraphs 9–13, then we cannot make sense of the 'Folgerung'. The latter, I submit, is worse than the former.²⁶

3.2 A Critique of Allison's Alternative Proposal

Let us now turn to Allison's own 'alternative proposal' (Allison 2011: 124). Allison says that 'Kant's missing first proposition shall be expressed as follows: "A good will under human conditions is one whose maxims have moral content"', by which is understood one for which the dutifulness of a course of action is contained in (incorporated into) its maxim as a condition of its adoption' (Allison 2011: 125). So Allison identifies P₁ as follows:

(P₁A) A good will under human conditions is one whose maxims have moral content.

(PIA), says Allison, is ‘implicit’ (ibid.) in Kant’s account. For several reasons, I do not find this convincing.

First, Allison puts much emphasis on the distinction between ‘moral worth’ (*Wert*) and ‘moral content’ (*Gehalt*); the former concept, Allison claims, is applied to actions while the latter concept is applied to maxims. But not only does Kant himself draw no sharp line between these concepts, I really cannot see how this is relevant to the problem. This being said, the crucial point Kant wants to make in paragraphs 9–13, and thus the information to be identified in PI, cannot simply be that ‘a good will under human conditions is one whose maxims have moral content’. This is true, of course; but the real question is *how* a good will under human conditions *can* have maxims that *do* have moral content, and the answer is that it does so by acting *from duty*. Consider Kant’s first example:

By contrast, to preserve one’s life is a duty, and beside this everyone has an immediate inclination to it. But the often anxious care that the greatest part of humankind takes for its sake still has no inner worth, and its maxim has no moral content. They protect their life, to be sure, *in conformity with duty*, but not *from duty*. If, by contrast, adversities and hopeless grief have entirely taken away the taste for life, if the unhappy one, strong of soul, more indignant than pusillanimous or dejected over his fate, wishes for death and yet preserves his life without loving it, not from inclination or fear, but from duty: then his maxim has a moral content. (GMS 4: 397. 33)

Consider a little thought experiment: To this end, let us (not without reason) assume that the philosophical point Kant wants to make in those four examples in paragraphs 9–13 is one and the same (a point that is then expressed in PI); so there are several examples that all illustrate the very same proposition. Now suppose Kant would only give *one* example, rather than four, and that this one example would be the one just quoted about preserving one’s life. Would this point be properly expressed by PIA? I do not think so. Rather, I submit, the point is that maxims of a human being have moral content only if they are maxims of a being that acts *from duty*, and that is from respect. Look at the last sentence of the passage quoted: ‘If ... the unhappy man ... preserves his life *from duty*: *then* his maxim has a moral content’. The main assertion is *not* that a good will under human conditions (in this case: the good will of the unhappy man) is one whose maxims have moral

content; the point is that the maxim of such an unhappy man to preserve his life has moral content if (because) he really has this maxim (and thus acts accordingly), that is, if he preserves his life from duty; '*alsdann* hat seine Maxime einen moralischen Gehalt'. So what it says is this:

(P1**) If an action is done from duty, then it has moral worth.

This is what Allison (2011: 122) calls the 'standard view' on what P1 is;²⁷ yet it seems evident that Allison's own view is by no means a '*variant* of the standard reading', as he claims it is (2011: 126, n. 12; my emphasis).

Second, when it comes to the question in what sense P3 is a 'Folgerung' of P1 and P2, I am under the impression that Allison is not quite sure what to say. As already mentioned, he accepts the proposal to understand P3 as a 'Folgerung' inasmuch it *combines* the 'objective' and 'subjective' elements of duty. But if he agrees with this, how can he then disagree with P1S? As already quoted above, Kant says very clearly that an 'action from duty' (GMS 4: 400. 30) is one that is determined 'objectively [by] the *law* and subjectively *pure respect* for this practical law' (GMS 4: 400. 31); but then Allison's proposal (P1A) must be wrong. Now Allison does say that 'a maxim of a moral content is this subjective element' (Allison 2011: 134); but he also says 'that respect for the law just is the moral content' (ibid.). So what is the difference from P1S? That seems hard to see.

Note, by the way, that Allison misunderstands P2. He claims that Kant, who 'had emphasized that the goodness of a good will is not a function of what it accomplishes', with P2 'now adds ... that it is also not a function of its intentions' (Allison 2011: 127). However, Kant explicitly says that *both* these insights have been gained already: 'It is clear *from the preceding* that the *aims* we may have in actions, *and* their *effects*, as ends and incentives of the will, can impart to the actions no unconditioned and moral worth' (GMS 4: 400; my emphasis).

Allison holds that 'the question of the identity of the first proposition is hermeneutical rather than philosophical in nature' (Allison 2011: 124). I would disagree. If Kant's rationalism and formalism – his anti-Humean claim that reason is both a *principium diiudicationis* and *executionis*, and that it is so without relying on some presupposed concept of the good – are essential to his moral philosophy, then to decipher how exactly Kant argues for these claims in GMS 1 is not just

a hermeneutical question; and since Kant's rationalism and formalism are essential to his moral philosophy indeed, the 'Folgerung' is this: to decipher how exactly Kant argues for these claims is not just a hermeneutical question. To discuss and criticize Kant's ethical theory is certainly 'philosophical in nature'. However, since it is *Kant's* ethical theory that is put under scrutiny, such a philosophical enterprise cannot be separated from so-called 'hermeneutical' considerations.

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Notes

- 1 The *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* (GMS) is quoted according to the translation by Allen Wood (Kant, 2002). Numbers in brackets refer to the volume, pages and lines of the GMS in the *Akademieausgabe*. The following abbreviations are used: KrV for the *Critique of Pure Reason*; Prol. for the *Prolegomena*; KU for the *Critique of the Power of Judgment*; KpV for the *Critique of Practical Reason*. For a discussion of the literature up to 2000 cf. Schönecker (2001). In passing, I will discuss the interpretations made in some recent commentaries other than Allison's (Horn/Mieth/Scarano, Sedgwick, Timmermann). I would like to thank Richard Aquila very much for very helpful comments and editorial work.
- 2 I will refer to the 'first proposition', whatever it is, as 'P1'; my own interpretation of P1 I call 'P1S', Allison's I call 'P1A'; 'P1₁' stands for the actual first sentence of GMS 1, interpreted as P1.
- 3 'Folgerung' is translated by Wood (Kant 2002) and Gregor (Kant 1998) as 'consequence' and by Gregor/Timmermann as 'conclusion' (Kant 2011); however, there is reason to believe it could be rendered as 'corollary'. As a matter of fact, in the Italian translation of the *Groundwork* by Filippo Gonnelli (Kant 1997) 'Folgerung' is translated as 'corollario' (many thanks to Carmelo Alessio Meli for pointing this out to me). I will always use the German term and get back to the issue later.
- 4 For this reason, I am afraid, the interpretations offered by Sedgwick (2008) and Horn et al. (2007) are of little help: Sedgwick mentions Kant's talk of P3 as a 'Folgerung', but does not account for it; Horn et al. do not refer to this 'Folgerung' at all.
- 5 Cf. Schönecker (2001).
- 6 Cf. Allison (2011: 121–35).
- 7 Cf. for instance KrV B294, B365, B549; Prol. 4: 260; 4: 372; KU 6: 172; KpV 5: 91; KpV §7.
- 8 Allison (2011: 134) agrees with this 'combinatory' reading.
- 9 In their commentary (2007: 186), Horn et al. claim that no argument independent from my interpretation was given for the claim that all three propositions are about duty. Sedgwick (2008: 70) speaks of 'three propositions of morality', even using quotation marks at one place suggesting that this is Kant's own wording; but of course this is not the case, and Sedgwick gives no reason why we should understand the three propositions as propositions 'of morality'. My guess is that this goes back to Beck's translation (in Kant 1959: 16) in which a 'first proposition of morality' is included in brackets.
- 10 Allison (2011: 122) agrees with this.
- 11 Allison (2011: 121) says that Kant 'never expressly formulates' P1, so he and I agree on this as well.

- 12 I will not repeat this here; cf. Schönecker (2001). As I see it, the main fault in Timmermann's account is that he reads the subjective element into P₂ and the objective element into P₁; for a brief critique of Timmermann's interpretation (2004), cf. my review of his German commentary on the *GMS* (Schönecker: 2007).
- 13 Cf. *KrV* B360. Note that Kant speaks, besides of 'Verstandesschlüssen', of other forms of 'Schlüssen' as well ('Schlüsse der Urteilkraft' and 'dialektische Schlüsse').
- 14 Cf. *KrV* B360. Note that by 'Schluss' (as well as by 'Folgerung') Kant refers both to the result of such an act, i.e. the 'Folgerung' (the conclusion or 'Schlußsatz') as well as to the act of 'Folgern'.
- 15 Cf. 2: 51, 58, 156.
- 16 Beck (Kant 1959) translates: 'This is a corollary to the preceding (i.e. proposition 7).'
- 17 To be sure, there are deductive conclusions based on one premise only (as in addition or simplification); but these deductive forms are ruled out here as well.
- 18 With regard to 'Folgesatz' cf. for instance *KrV* B228.
- 19 Cf. Kant's example in *Refl.* 3147 (16: 680).
- 20 As we saw with regard to the *Idee*, proposition no. 8 is a 'Folgerung aus *dem* vorigen', i.e. from proposition no. 7; cf. *Logik Pöhlitz*: 'corollaria, welches unmittelbare Folgen aus *einem* der vorhergehenden Sätze sind' (24: 583; my emphasis).
- 21 Cf. *GMS* 4: 398. 13, 397. 18, 397. 27, 397. 31, 398. 2, 398. 6, 398. 20, 398. 26, 399. 2, 399. 25, 399. 29 (*aus Pflicht*).
- 22 Cf. *KpV* 5: 81: 'aus Pflicht, d.i. aus Achtung fürs Gesetz'.
- 23 Thus the 'method' of the *GMS* is *not* 'to take the way analytically from common cognition to the determination of its supreme principle and then, in turn, synthetically from the testing of this principle and its sources back to common cognition' (*GMS* 4: 392. 18); rather, Kant says, he has chosen his method (to make transitions) 'if one wants to take' (*GMS*, 4: 393. 18; my emphasis) that way, so the 'method' and the 'way' (or taking it) cannot be identical. Therefore, the 'method' also must not be confused with the analytic and synthetic method described in the *Prolegomena* (if this were the case, then *GMS* 3 also would follow the analytic method); for a detailed analysis of this problem – which, by the way, keeps causing misinterpretations and problems in the literature – cf. Damschen and Schönecker (2012: 212–42). Freudiger (1993) misunderstands the 'method', although he is right in pointing out a connection between the 'method' and the 'first proposition' (cf. pp. 77–9).
- 24 Cf. Schönecker (2009).
- 25 The term 'respect' is only fully accounted for in a footnote to the summary presented in paragraph 16. In that footnote, it is remarkable that Kant introduces 'respect' as a 'concept of reason' (*GMS* 4: 401. 18) that runs the risk of referring to an 'obscure feeling' (*GMS* 4: 401. 18). The characteristics of respect laid out in that footnote certainly go beyond what common rational moral cognition knows (or rather, what it knows in a reflected philosophical manner). Also, note that Kant says twice that *Achtung* is 'eigentlich' (*GMS* 4: 401. 28, 35) this and that; he explicates what is not known, or at least not clearly known, to common rational moral cognition.
- 26 As Mirella Capozzi suggested to me, another possible answer could be that according to Kant philosophy must not begin with definitions (cf. for instance 2: 267ff. or *KrV* B758 ff.); but still the dilemma remains.
- 27 Note, however, that he formulates it as a biconditional ('an action has moral worth if and only if it is performed from duty alone', *ibid.*) while P₁** is a conditional. What is missing for a biconditional is the condition that the action is in conformity with the law (which, I believe, is spelled out in P₂). However, if one believes that one cannot act from the motive of duty unless the action is also in conformity with duty, then P₁ can be spelled out as a biconditional.

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