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## How is a categorical imperative possible?

Kant's deduction of the categorical imperative (GMS, III,4)

Kant's deduction of the categorical imperative is the answer to the following question: "How is a categorical imperative possible?" The answer is given in subsection 4 (Sec. 4) of chapter three of the *Groundwork*. It is impossible to understand this answer, and hence impossible to understand Kant's deduction of the moral law, without taking into account the overall context of *Groundwork III* (GMS III). However, here I can only sketch the overall structure of GMS III, and therefore only present a sketch of what I call Kant's *thesis of analyticity*.<sup>1</sup> This thesis is developed in Sec. 1 of GMS III; however, it appears time and again in GMS III, and it deserves special attention (part 1). Part 2, then, offers a close reading and analysis of Kant's deduction.

The purpose of this paper is not to criticize or make philosophical use of Kant's deduction. As I have argued elsewhere, one of the major obstacles of serious (i. e. historical) Kant-research is the inability (and unwillingness) to distinguish between the question of what a text *means* and the question of whether what it manifests is *true*.<sup>2</sup>

### 1. Structure and task of GMS III: What does Kant want to achieve?

In the preface of the GMS, Kant claims that his *Groundwork* is "nothing more than the search for and establishment of the supreme princi-

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<sup>1</sup> For a detailed analysis of *Groundwork III*, cf. Schönecker (1999); this article is based upon that book. Here I will not address the secondary literature (I did so extensively in Schönecker, 1999); as far as I can tell, little has been published since that pays close attention to the text. However, I will make some brief comments on Steigleder's interpretation of what I call the thesis of analyticity. – Many thanks to Richard Capobianco and Alexander Cotter for checking my English.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Schönecker (2001); cf. also Damschen / Schönecker (2006).

*ple of morality*” (GMS, 392). This ‘supreme principle’ is the categorical imperative (CI). It is generally agreed upon that the ‘search for’ the CI, i. e. its conceptual analysis, takes place in GMS I/II, whereas its ‘establishment’ is to be found in GMS III. To be more precise, this ‘establishment’ is in the answer that Kant provides to the question of ‘how is a categorical imperative possible?’ This question is first raised in GMS I (GMS, 417 ff.), and then again in GMS II, 425; its answer, however, is postponed to Sec. 4 of GMS III, the heading of which is again that question of how a categorical imperative is possible. There is no doubt that the answer to this question is what Kant himself calls a “deduction” (GMS, 447,22; 454,21; 463,21); the second paragraph of Sec. 4 begins with the formulation “And thus categorical imperatives are possible ...” (GMS, 454,6, m. e.).

Before we move on, it is important to realize two crucial structural elements of the text. First, Kant clearly states at the end of Sec. 1 that he *cannot* yet or immediately provide an answer to the question of how a categorical imperative is possible; rather, he says, this “still needs some preparation” (GMS, 447,25). Since the central question “How is a categorical imperative possible?” is indeed the heading of Sec. 4, it is only natural to assume that Sec. 2 and Sec. 3 provide that ‘preparation’, whereas the actual answer, then, is given in Sec. 4. (As we will see, this also fits very well with what really happens in those sections.)

The second structural element relates to what I call Kant’s *thesis of analyticity*. In Sec. 1, Kant puts it as follows:

a free will and a will under moral laws are the same. [paragraph] Thus if freedom of the will is presupposed, then morality follows together with its principle from mere analysis of its concept (GMS, 447,6–10).

This thesis has been widely misunderstood; as a result, Kant’s overall argument (deduction) in GMS III has been misunderstood too (often not recognized at all, as a matter of fact). His overall argument in GMS III always has been reconstructed as follows: A free will is a will under the moral law; freedom must be presupposed as a quality of the will of all rational beings; human beings are rational beings; therefore, the human will as a free will is under the moral law, which is to say the categorical imperative is valid.<sup>3</sup> Since premise 1 *is* proven in Sec. 1, premise 2 *is* argued for in Sec. 2 and premise 3 in Sec. 3,<sup>4</sup> the answer

<sup>3</sup> Cf. for instance Wood (1999, pp. 171–176).

<sup>4</sup> As a matter of fact, the claim that ‘freedom must be presupposed as a quality of the will of all rational beings’ is the heading of Sec. 2; Sec. 3 relates this to human beings in particular.

to the question of “how is a categorical imperative possible?” and thus the deduction would already be given in Sec. 3. However, we already noticed that there is a fourth section the very heading of which is “how is a categorical imperative possible?”, and it is only in this section that Kant provides the deduction. If the standard interpretation of the thesis of analyticity and the deduction were correct, then the deduction would be completed by the end of Sec. 3.

Clearly, Kant’s thesis of analyticity cannot mean that sensuous-rational beings (beings, like human beings, that are both sensuous and rational), who have a free will, always act morally; for that is obviously not the case. However, it also *cannot* mean that the free will of such a sensuous-rational being is “under” (GMS, 447,7) the moral law if this is taken to mean that sensuous-rational beings are obligated by the categorical imperative. They are indeed, but that they are obligated is something that Kant after Sec. 1 and 2 has yet to demonstrate. After all, this is why he still raises the following question *after* he has argued for his thesis of analyticity (Sec. 1) and the claim that freedom must be presupposed as a quality of the will of all rational beings (Sec. 2): “But why ought I to subject myself to this [moral] principle ...?” (GMS, 449,11). In Sec. 3, Kant still asks “*from whence the moral law obligates*” (450,16), a question to which “no satisfactory answer” (GMS, 450,2) has been given yet (i.e. up to Sec. 3). This second structural observation also implies that a free will and a will under moral laws (under the CI) are *not* ‘the same’; that they *ought* to be is what the deduction has to prove, and that is why the deduction is yet to come after Sec. 2/3. What exactly this question (‘from whence does the moral law obligate?’) means, is hard to say and indeed a source of confusion for Kant himself. In any event, it is a question that Kant holds to be unanswered, and this along with the first observation that Sec. 2 and 3 are only a ‘preparation’ for the answer to the question of how a categorical imperative is possible renders the standard interpretation of the thesis of analyticity untenable.

So how *are* we to understand Kant’s thesis of analyticity? Throughout GMS I/II, Kant repeatedly argues that for a perfectly rational and free being the moral law is *not* an imperative. Rather, the moral law must be understood as a rule that these beings necessarily follow. Or as Kant puts it: With regard to perfectly rational and free beings the moral law is not a synthetic, but an *analytic* proposition. Analyzing the very concept of a free and rational being yields the insight that the (concept of the) moral law is included in it. One could also say that the moral law *describes* what these beings do: By their very nature

perfectly rational beings always act morally. There are many passages that prove this point (some of which can actually be found in GMS III). A famous one in GMS II reads as follows:

If reason determines the will without exception [unausbleiblich], then the actions of such a being, which are recognized as objectively necessary, are also subjectively necessary, i. e. the will is a faculty of choosing *only that* which reason, independently of inclination, recognizes as practically necessary, i. e., as good (GMS, 412,30–35).

Since human beings don't have such a perfectly rational being, to them the moral law is a categorical imperative or, as Kant puts it, a synthetic proposition a priori. The categorical imperative is

a practical proposition that does *not* derive the volition of an action *analytically* from any other volition already presupposed (*for we have no such perfect will*), but is immediately connected with the concept of the will of a rational being, as something *not contained in it* (GMS, 420,32–35, Fn., m. e.).

Willing the good action is *not* necessarily 'contained' in the volition of a sensuous-rational being, i. e. it cannot be 'analytically derived' from the volition of such a being. That is why, in contrast to a pure will, the CI does *not* follow by 'mere analysis' (GMS, 447,9) of the concept of freedom of such a sensuous-rational being. So when Kant in his thesis of analyticity states that 'a free will and a will under moral laws are the same' and that 'morality follows together with its principle from mere analysis of the concept of the freedom of the will' (GMS, 447,6–10), all he really says is this: A perfectly rational and free will always wills morally. Such a will must be understood as the will of an actually holy being; or (as we will see) it must be understood as the intelligible will of a being that is both a member of the empirical and intelligible world.

The argumentative structure of GMS III strongly supports this reading. After Kant has presented his solution to the notorious circle in Sec. 3, he concludes:

For now we see that if we think of ourselves as free, then we transport ourselves as members into the world of understanding and cognize the autonomy of the will, together with its consequence, morality; but if we think of ourselves as obligated by duty, then we consider ourselves as belonging to the world of sense and yet at the same time to the world of understanding (GMS, 453,11–15).

It is highly remarkable that Kant does *not* contrast the formulation 'if we think of ourselves as *free*' with 'if we think of ourselves as *not free*.' Rather, he contrasts it with 'if we think of ourselves as *obligated by*

*duty.*' The counterpoint to freedom is not the absence or lack of freedom, but duty. Since morality without freedom is not thinkable for Kant, freedom understood as a counterpoint to duty cannot be identical with the freedom presupposed by morality for beings that are both sensuous and rational. Freedom as the counterpoint to duty must be understood as the quality of a will that is completely rational and free. However, a being that is 'obligated by duty' must be free, too. Therefore, to think of oneself as 'obligated by duty' implies to consider oneself 'as belonging to the world of sense', but it also means to consider oneself 'at the same time' ("zugleich", GMS, 453,15) as belonging to the world of understanding.<sup>5</sup> Hence the first part of the passage quoted above (GMS, 453,11–13) really is nothing but a reformulation of the thesis of analyticity. The second part after the semi-colon, however, makes clear why for sensuous-rational beings the moral law is an imperative and hence duty.<sup>6</sup>

The thesis of analyticity also shows up in the deduction found in Sec. 4 which we will address in great detail later: "As a mere member of the world of understanding, all my actions *would* be perfectly in accord with the principle of the autonomy of the pure will" (GMS, 453,25–27, m. e.). A bit later it says: "And thus categorical imperatives are possible through the fact that the idea of freedom makes me into a member of an intelligible world, through which, *if I were that alone*, all my actions *would always* be in accord with the autonomy of the will" (GMS, 454,6–9, m. e.). Again, at the end of the Sec. 4 Kant concludes: "The moral 'ought' is thus his own necessary volition as a member of

<sup>5</sup> On the "zugleich" cf. also GMS, 454,9 and 462,31.

<sup>6</sup> The passage just quoted ('For now we see ... world of understanding', GMS, 453,11–15) is Kant's final answer to the problem of the notorious "circle" (GMS 450,18; 453,4) in Sec. 3. This 'circle' is yet another issue I cannot address here (cf. Schönecker, 1999, pp. 317–358). However, let me state that its correct understanding must begin with the insight that for Kant there is a difference between a *petitio principii* and a *circulus in probando*, and that the aforementioned 'circle' is an "Erbitung eines Prinzips" (GMS 453,9), not a vicious circle ('Erbitung eines Prinzips' is Kant's translation of the Latin phrase 'petitio principii, i. e. 'begging the question'). What is still missing in Sec. 3 (just begged for) is the rationale for the human being's belief in the idea of freedom *as well as* the justification for the categorical imperative. So what Kant actually does to remove the suspicion of the *petitio* is, first, to show how and why the human being can understand himself as a member of the intelligible world and therefore as free. Second, Kant's discussion of the *petitio* – and his final solution of it at the end of Sec. 3 – also draws our attention to a problem which is equally important, to wit, that by the thesis of analyticity the validity of the categorical imperative has *not* been demonstrated; as a matter of fact, the common misunderstanding of Kant's overall argument in GMS III is exactly what Kant warns his readers against. – On the 'circle' also cf. Quarfood's paper in this volume.

an intelligible world and is thought of by him as an ‘ought’ *only insofar* as he at the same time considers himself as a member of the sensible world” (GMS, 455,7–9, m. e.). And to quote yet another passage: “Under the presupposition of freedom of the will of an intelligence, its *autonomy*, as the formal condition under which alone it can be determined, is a necessary consequence” (GMS, 461,14–17).

Kant describes an ‘intelligence’ as a rational being that considers itself solely as a member of the world of understanding. Thus, the ‘will’ in the context of the thesis of analyticity cannot simply be understood as the will of a sensuous-rational being. It must be understood either as the will of a perfectly rational being, whose free will always is a good will; or, with an eye on human beings, it must be understood as the will of a sensuous-rational being, whose will is both part of the ‘world of sense’ (“Sinnenwelt”) and of the ‘world of understanding’ (“Verstandeswelt”), whose will, however, as part of the latter world, is “the idea of reason, which *would* have full control over all subjective motivations” (GMS, 420,31, m. e.). It is exactly in this sense that in the context of the deduction proper (Sec. 4), Kant writes that the categorical ‘ought’ “represents a synthetic proposition *a priori* by the fact that my to will affected through sensible desires there is also added the idea of precisely the same will, but one *belonging to the world of understanding, a pure will*, practical for itself” (GMS, 454,11, second emphasis mine). In this perspective the human being, too, considers his will as free, and such a free will always wills the good (“all actions *would* be perfectly in accord with the principle of the autonomy of the pure will’). *This* is the meaning of Kant’s thesis of analyticity.<sup>7</sup>

Thus Kant writes right after stating the thesis of analyticity:

Nonetheless, the latter is always a synthetic proposition: an absolutely good will is that whose maxim can always contain itself considered as universal law, for through analysis of the concept of an absolutely good will that quality of the maxim cannot be found. (GMS, 447,10–14)

With the ‘nonetheless’ (“Indessen”) Kant sets off the syntheticity of the CI from the analyticity of the “principle of morality” (GMS, 447,6) just mentioned in the sentence before. Whereas this ‘principle’ “*follows* [...] from *mere analysis*” (GMS, 447,8–9) of the concept of freedom, from the analysis of the concept ‘of an absolutely good will’ it does *not* follow (‘cannot be found’) that ‘its maxim can always con-

<sup>7</sup> I cannot discuss here Kant’s repeated claim that the categorical imperative is a synthetic proposition; in any event, I would hold that, strictly speaking, it does not make sense.

tain itself considered as universal law', i. e. that such a will is always good. And this means, first, that in the last passage quoted above the sentence after the colon ('an absolutely good will ...') is a synthetic proposition; for after the colon the reason is given for why the 'analysis' *cannot* take place which implies that we are, indeed, dealing with a synthetical proposition rather than an analytic one. Second, one has to behold that the 'concept of an absolutely good will' here does *not* refer to the will of a perfectly rational being; for if one analyzes such a concept, it *does* follow that 'its maxim can always contain itself considered as universal law'.<sup>8</sup>

In light of these considerations, what then does the question of how a categorical imperative is possible really mean? Lack of space does not allow to go into any analysis of the quite obvious parallel that Kant likes to draw between the famous theoretical question of how synthetic propositions a priori are possible. In any event, a closer look reveals that the parallel question "How is a categorical imperative possible?" actually includes three questions or aspects:

1. Why is the CI valid (binding, obligatory)?
2. How can freedom be understood, and why may we consider ourselves to be free?
3. How can pure practical reason bring about an interest in the moral law?

The third question cannot be answered.<sup>9</sup> The second question is answered in Sec. 2 and Sec. 3 of GMS III: In Sec. 1, Kant first argues that a perfectly rational and free will always wills (acts) morally. Sec. 2 demonstrates that because of its ability to think spontaneously (freely), a rational being must also consider itself practically free; Sec. 3 then refers to the difference between the world of understanding and

<sup>8</sup> From early on this passage and especially the (formulation of the) 'concept of an absolutely good will' has tremendously contributed to the misunderstandings of the thesis of analyticity (cf. the report on the secondary literature in Schönecker, 1999, 168–171). For Kant does indeed avail himself of this 'concept of an absolutely good will' to refer to a perfectly rational ('holy') will (cf. GMS, 439,29–34). However, he also refers to an *imperfect* will as 'absolutely good': "That will is *absolutely good* which cannot be evil, hence whose maxim, if it is made into a universal law, can never conflict with itself" (GMS, 437,6). In this passage and context Kant clearly does not talk about perfectly rational (holy) beings. He refers to the will as 'absolutely good' only *insasmuch* its (particular) *maxim* can be universalized; cf. GMS, 426,10; 437,24; 437,32; 444,28.

<sup>9</sup> In Sec. 5 Kant provides a lengthy justification for his claim that the question of how a categorical imperative is possible can only be answered partially: "Thus the question, 'How is a categorical imperative possible?' can be answered to *this extent*: ...: (GMS, 461,7, m. e.); what cannot be answered is the question of *how* pure practical reason indeed *can* be practical (cf. GMS 458,37; 459,34; 460,10; 461,25, 461,32).

the world of sense in order to argue that the human being also must understand himself as practically free. But then, it seems, Kant still thinks that the answer to that crucial question is still not answered; recall that Kant in Sec. 3 still asks “*from whence the moral law obligates*” (GMS, 450,16), a question that is not answered in Sec. 3 itself. For now, I will leave it open what exactly it is that question is asking for; as we will see later, Kant himself seems not to be entirely clear about its meaning. In any event, what is needed is somehow the proof that the CI is *really* valid, i. e. really binding on us. As long as this has not been shown, morality could very well be a “figment of the mind” (GMS, 407,17, 445,8); I will come back to this later.

## 2. *The deduction of the categorical imperative*

Sec. 4, then, raises our crucial question again and finally answers it. This section is broken down into three paragraphs. In the first paragraph, Kant offers the argument proper. In the second paragraph, Kant provides the final answer to the question of how categorical imperatives are possible (“And thus categorical imperatives are possible ...” GMS, 454,6). Paragraph three comes back to ‘common rational moral cognition’ (something mentioned at the end of the preface); I will not discuss it here.

### 2.1 Presuppositions of the deduction

Let me now quote the first four sentences of Sec. 4:

The rational being counts himself as intelligence in the world of understanding, and merely as an efficient cause belonging to this world does it call its causality a *will*. From the other side, however, it is conscious of itself also as a piece of the world of sense, in which its actions, as mere appearances of that causality are encountered, but whose possibility from the latter, with which we have no acquaintance, is something into which we can have no insight, but rather in place of that we have to have insight into those actions as determined through other appearances, namely desires and inclinations as belonging to the world of sense. As a mere member of the world of understanding, all my actions would be perfectly in accord with the principle of the autonomy of the pure will; as a mere piece of the sensible world, they would have to be taken as entirely in accord with the natural law of desires and inclinations, hence with the heteronomy of nature. (The former would rest on the supreme principle of morality, the second on that of happiness.) (GMS, 453, 17)



These lines are basically a summary of what Kant has said about freedom and morality in Sec. 1–3, and so they are also a summary of his thesis of analyticity. Using Kant's own words of paragraphs 9–12 (GMS, 452,7–453,15), the gist of it is this: 'Now the human being actually finds in himself a faculty, and this faculty is reason as a faculty of pure spontaneity (self-activity). On account of this, a rational being has to regard itself *as an intelligence* (thus not from the side of its lower powers), as belonging not to the world of sense but to the world of understanding. As a rational being, hence one belonging to the intelligible world, the human being can never think of the causality of his own will otherwise than under the idea of freedom. Now, with the idea of freedom the concept of *autonomy* is inseparably bound up, and with the latter the universal principle of morality. If we think of ourselves as free, then we transport ourselves as members into the world of understanding and cognize the autonomy of the will, together with its consequence, morality; but if we think of ourselves as obligated by duty, then we consider ourselves as belonging to the world of sense and yet at the same time to the world of understanding.' – Again, paragraph 1 of Sec. 4 is nothing but a recapitulation of these basic ideas. I will now present them in several theses (D1–4).

Thesis 1 states that every human being must understand itself as a rational being:

**(D1)** *The human being finds in itself the faculty of reason, which, as an epistemic faculty, is a faculty of pure spontaneity.*

It is important to see that Kant's argument both in Sec. 3 and Sec. 4 begins with reason as a *theoretical* (epistemic) faculty. Only on pain of self-contradiction, he argues, one can deny that one has reason, for *denying* that one does *presupposes* that one does.<sup>10</sup> The activity of reason is self-activity, spontaneity, freedom, and these qualities justify the human being to understand himself 'as an intelligence.' And as an intelligence, the human being must understand himself as a member of the world of understanding.

**(D2)** *As a rational being, a human being must understand himself as an intelligence and, in this perspective, as a member of the world of understanding.*

It is important to say 'in this perspective' because only *as an intelligence*, and *inasmuch* a human being is an intelligence, he may con-

<sup>10</sup> Cf. Schönecker (1999, pp. 196–316); here it is important to take into account Kant's *Review of Schulz's Attempt at Introduction to a Doctrine of Morals* (1783).

sider himself as a member of the world of understanding. Once the human being understands himself as a member of the world of understanding because of his theoretical faculty, he also may understand his reason as a practical faculty, i. e. he may understand his will to be a member of the world of understanding and hence to be free.<sup>11</sup>

**(D3)** *As a rational being, hence as a being belonging to the world of understanding, the human being must understand the causality of his will under the idea of freedom.*

Here it shows how important a proper understanding of the thesis of analyticity is. For what that thesis claims is exactly that the principle of morality is ‘inseparably bound up’ with freedom.

**(D4)** *Since the moral law is analytically bound up with freedom as a property of the will of a rational being that is a member of the world of understanding, the human being also may understand his autonomy and the moral law as the law of his rational volition, inasmuch as he understands himself as such a rational being that is a member of the world of understanding.*

Again, it is of utmost importance to realize that with this move the validity of the moral law as a categorical *imperative* has *not* been demonstrated. All that has been shown so far is that the will of a human

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<sup>11</sup> Cf. *GMS*, 448,13–22.: “Now one cannot possibly think a reason that, in its own consciousness, would receive steering from elsewhere in regard to its judgments; for then the subject would ascribe the determination of its power of judgment not to its reason but to an impulse. It must regard itself as the author of its principles independently of alien influences, *consequently* it must, *as practical reason* or as the will of a rational being, be regarded by itself as free, i. e. the will of a rational being can be a will of its own only under the idea of freedom and must therefore with a practical aim be attributed to all rational beings” (m. e.). How are we to read ‘consequently’? The transition from the thinking I to the willing (acting) I only appears plausible if the reason, the freedom of which cannot be denied without a performative contradiction, is the very same reason that also is practical. That Kant actually has something like this in mind shows in a thought of his from the preface. There he says that “it can in the end be only *one and the same reason* that is distinguished merely in its application” (*GMS*, 391,27, m. e.). Kant calls this a “unity” (*GMS*, 391,25) between theoretical and practical reason “in a common principle” (*GMS*, 391,26). Only if this unity is comprehensively exhibited, Kant continues, a ‘critique of pure practical reason’ can be ventured and this is something, he says, he could not do in the *Groundwork*. However, the truth of the matter is that in chapter three a transition to such a ‘critique of pure practical reason’ does take place, if only its “main feature” (*GMS*, 445,15) is exhibited. But there is no argument whatsoever for that alleged unity or identity of theoretical and practical reason. How this unity is to be understood, how Kant moves from the freedom to think to the freedom to will, and how from the concept of an intelligence to the concept of an intelligence with a will – we are left in the dark.

being, considered merely as a member of the world of understanding, is analytically bound up with the moral law. This is why Kant writes in Sec. 4 of GMS III (453 f.) that all actions of a human being, if he were *only* a member of the world of understanding, ‘*would* be perfectly in accord with the principle of the autonomy of the pure will’; if a human being were ‘alone’ a member of the world of understanding, all his actions ‘*would* always be in accord with the autonomy of the will’. That autonomy and hence morality is a ‘consequence’, as Kant puts it several times, is only true “under the presupposition of freedom of the will *of an intelligence*” (GMS, 461,14, m. e.).<sup>12</sup> For only “*as intelligence*” (GMS, 453,17, m. e.) does a human being understand himself as a member of the world of understanding. In Sec. 5 Kant argues that the human being must “think of him[self] as intelligence, also as thing in itself” (GMS, 459,22) and hence of himself as the “*authentic self*” (“*eigentliches Selbst*”, GMS, 457,34, m. e.). As an ‘authentic self’, a human being gives himself the law. And so morality is that which the human being, in some sense and respect, ‘authentically wills’. That’s why the moral ought is “*eigentlich ein Wollen*” (*really* a volition’, GMS, 449,16, m. e.); and that’s why it is “his *own* necessary volition as a member of an intelligible world” (GMS, 455,7, m. e.); I will come back to this latter thought momentarily.

## 2.2 The ontoethical principle

Let me now quote the passage (both in German and in English) that is at the center of the deduction:

Weil aber *die Verstandeswelt den Grund der Sinnenwelt, mithin auch der Gesetze derselben, enthält*, also in Ansehung meines Willens (der ganz zur Verstandeswelt gehört) unmittelbar gesetzgebend ist, und also auch als solche gedacht werden muß, so werde ich mich als Intelligenz, obgleich andererseits wie ein zur Sinnenwelt gehöriges Wesen, dennoch dem Gesetze der ersteren, d. i. der Vernunft, die in der Idee der Freiheit das Gesetz derselben enthält, und also der Autonomie des Willens unterworfen erkennen, folglich die Gesetze der Verstandeswelt für mich als Imperative und die diesem Prinzip gemäßen Handlungen als Pflichten ansehen müssen. (GMS, 453,31–454,5)

But because *the world of understanding contains the ground of the world of sense, hence also of its laws*, hence is immediately legislative in regard to my will (which belongs wholly to the world of understanding), and hence must also be thought of wholly as such, therefore as intelli-

<sup>12</sup> The words “of an intelligence” are missing in Wood’s translation.

gence I will cognize myself, though on the other side as a being belonging to the world of sense, as nevertheless subject to the laws of the first, i. e., to reason, which in the idea of freedom contains the law of the understanding's world, and thus to autonomy of the will; consequently I must regard the laws of the world of understanding for myself as imperatives and the actions that accord with this principle as duties. (GMS, 453,31–454,5)

An analysis of this sentence is quite tiresome; it is most important, however, because it contains what I call the *ontoethical principle* (OP). So please bear with me; also, keep in mind that we have to do this referring to the English translation.

Let's first understand the grammatical structure of this elusive sentence. The elements 'because-therefore' break down the sentence into two parts, the first of which obviously provides a reason ('because') for a conclusion drawn in the second ('therefore').<sup>13</sup> Abstracting as much as we can from the actual content of what is being said, the first passage of the first part says, grammatically speaking, this:

**(OP1)** *The world of understanding contains the ground of the world of sense.*

Grammatically speaking, there is no problem with this part. Reconstructing the next element of the sentence is also rather compelling (although the 'hence' will deserve more attention later):

**(OP2)** *Hence the world of understanding also contains the ground of the laws of the world of sense.*

Now, one might think that *because* of the relationship between the world of understanding and the world of sense laid out in OP1 and OP2, the world of understanding is also 'immediately legislative in regard to my will' and 'hence must also be thought of wholly as such' (i. e. as 'immediately legislative'). As we will see, that cannot be true. Rather, a correct understanding is as follows:

**(OP3)** *In regard to my will, which belongs wholly to the world of understanding, the world of understanding is immediately legislative and must also, in regard to my will, be thought of such that it (the world of understanding) contains the ground of the world of sense and its laws.*

Already for grammatical reasons, the first part of this reconstruction cannot be disputed: 'In regard to my will, which belongs wholly to

<sup>13</sup> The translation of the German "folglich" (GMS, 454,4) with "consequently" (and the preceding colon) can be misleading. The "folglich" functions as an explanation or elucidation rather than a 'consequence' in any stricter sense; I'll come back to this later.

the world of understanding, the world of understanding is immediately legislative'. What is problematic here is the relation of this part of OP3 to OP1 and OP2, or to be more precise, problematic is both the function of the conjunction 'because' at the beginning of OP1 ('But because ...') as well as the function of the adverb 'hence' at the beginning of what we have reconstructed as OP3 ('*hence* is immediately legislative ...'). Clearly, it would make no sense to interpret Kant as arguing that the world of understanding contains the ground of the world of sense and the ground of its laws and *therefore* ('hence') were immediately legislative for the will; it would not, because this very will already 'belongs *wholly* to the world of understanding' *anyway* and not to the world of sense. However, this problem of interpretation can be solved by pointing out that the 'because' at the beginning of the whole sentence must be put (and read) also at the beginning of OP3, such that one must read: 'Because the world of understanding also in regard to my will, which belongs wholly to the world of understanding, is immediately legislative ...'. The will is part of the world of understanding, and for this world of understanding it is true (according to OP1 and OP2), that it contains the ground of the world of sense and the ground of its laws. In what follows, Kant again avails himself (as he did with the 'because') of an ellipsis; what is left out is 'in regard to my will'. The alleged fact that the will 'belongs wholly to the world of understanding' entails that the world of understanding 'must also be thought of wholly as such'; that is, however, *not* as a world which is immediately legislative – for this is clear anyway since the will belongs to the world of understanding – but as a world for which it is '*also*' true in regard to the will as *part* of it, that it contains the ground of the world of sense and its laws. Thus we get: 'It is also true in regard to the will as part of the world of understanding that this will contains the ground of the world of sense and its laws'. As we will see later, it is indeed the crux of Kant's deduction that the pure will as a member of the world of understanding contains the moral law as an imperative for this very will as a member of the world of sense.

So we must reconstruct the first part of that sentence as follows:

**(OP1–3)** *Because the world of understanding contains the ground of the world of sense; and because hence the world of understanding also contains the ground of the laws of the world of sense; and because hence the world of understanding also in regard to my will, which belongs wholly to the world of understanding, is immediately legislative and must also, in regard to my will, be thought of such that it (the world of understanding) contains the ground of the world of sense and its laws ...*

The second part of the crucial sentence (GMS, 453,35–454,5) is easier to digest, yet still not a piece of cake. Let's look at it again: '...therefore as intelligence I will cognize myself, although on the other side as a being belonging to the world of sense, as nevertheless subject to the laws of the first, i. e. to reason, which in the idea of freedom contains the law of the understanding's world, and thus to autonomy of the will; consequently I must regard the laws of the world of understanding for myself as imperatives and the actions that accord with this principle as duties.' It is broken down into two parts: The first part (in its English translation, of course) runs from 'therefore as' to 'autonomy of the will;' the second from 'consequently' to the end ('as duties'). One might think that Kant in the first part Kant says mainly something like this: 'therefore as intelligence I will cognize myself [...] as [...] subject to the laws of the first, i. e. to reason, which in the idea of freedom contains the law of the understanding's world, and thus to autonomy of the will'. Thus one might think that what is stated in the omitted part ('although on the other side as a being belonging to the world of sense, as nevertheless ...') only becomes relevant in the later second part, because the human being as such a being (that belongs to the world of sense) regards the laws as imperatives. However, I submit that the human being in the *entire* second part of the ontoethical principle (sentence) must be understood as a being that does not 'as intelligence' cognize himself 'subject' to the law of the world of understanding and the autonomy of the will; rather it does so 'as intelligence, although *on the other side* as a being belonging to the world of sense.' Three reasons speak in favor of this reading: First, that's what it says – why put that insertion at the end of the sentence? In a number of parallel passages Kant also emphasizes the 'simultaneity' of both perspectives with regard to the imperative character of the moral law. Secondly, inasmuch as the human being considers himself merely as intelligence, he does *not* cognize himself as 'subject to' the moral law; that's part of the meaning of the thesis of analyticity. This concept of a being that is subject to the moral law is, strictly speaking, reserved for sensual-rational beings; inasmuch as the human being considers himself as intelligence, he considers oneself 'merely as a member of the world of understanding'. Thirdly (and related to the last point), it is striking that Kant says that the human being cognizes himself 'as *nevertheless* ('obgleich') subject to' the moral law. For a being that considers itself only as intelligence, there is no need to consider itself as 'nevertheless' subject to the moral law – for what kind of difference could the 'nevertheless' indicate if not the difference between being a member of the world of understanding and the world

of sense?<sup>14</sup> Also, the ‘consequently’ (‘*folglich*’) only makes sense if it is related to that insertion.

With regard to the first part of the ‘consequently’-sentence, I’d like to emphasize this. The ‘first’ (‘*ersteren*’) can only refer to the world of understanding at the beginning of the sentence; in the later part of the sentence the ‘laws’ of that ‘world of understanding’ are mentioned again. However, Kant connects the ‘first’ with the concept of ‘reason’ (‘*Vernunft*’) by means of an ‘i. e.’, and since the German ‘*derselben*’ cannot refer back to this very ‘reason’, one must read: ‘... to the law of reason, which in the idea of freedom contains the law of the understanding’s world.’ Kant then also mentions the ‘autonomy of the will’, and from all of this it follows that I cognize myself as subject to (1.) the law of the world of understanding, (2.) to reason which contains in the idea of freedom the law of the world of understanding, and (3.) to the autonomy of the will. Thus we can reconstruct the first part of the ‘therefore’-sentence as follows:

**(OP4)** *Understanding myself as a being belonging both to the world of understanding (intelligence) and to the world of sense, I cognize myself as subject to the law of the world of understanding, i. e. to reason, which in the idea of freedom contains the law of the world of understanding, and thus as subject to the autonomy of the will.*

The rest of the sentence is easy. It, too, makes clear that the moral law, which describes the *volition* of perfectly rational beings, is an *imperative* for sensuous-rational beings:

**(OP5)** *I must regard the laws of the world of understanding for myself as imperatives and the actions that accord with this principle as duties.*

Connecting these elements and adding the conjunctive particles, we thus get the *ontoethical principle*:

**(OP)** *Because the world of understanding contains the ground of the world of sense; and because hence the world of understanding also contains the ground of the laws of the world of sense; and because hence the world of understanding also in regard to my will, which belongs wholly to the world of understanding, is immediately legislative and must also, in regard to my will, be thought of such that it (the world of understanding) contains the ground of the world of sense and its laws, I cognize myself – understanding myself as a being belonging both to the world of understanding (intelligence) and to the world of sense – as subject to the law of*

<sup>14</sup> Cf. the elucidating parallel in GMS, 450,12–13 (“... consider ourselves as free in acting and thus *nevertheless* take ourselves to be subject to certain laws ...”, m. e.).

*the world of understanding, i. e. to reason, which in the idea of freedom contains the law of the world of understanding, and thus as subject to the autonomy of the will. Consequently, I must regard the laws of the world of understanding for myself as imperatives and the actions that accord with this principle as duties.*<sup>15</sup>

Thus the deduction of the categorical imperative is completed in just one sentence. This deduction is Kant's answer to the question of how a categorical imperative is possible. Therefore, it is no surprise that right after stating OP, Kant officially gives the answer to that question as well:

*And thus categorical imperatives are possible* through the fact that the idea of freedom makes me into a member of an intelligible world, through which, if I were that alone, all my actions *would* always be in accord with the autonomy of the will; but since I intuit myself at the same time as member of the world of sense, they *ought* to be in accord with it, which *categorical* 'ought' represents a synthetic proposition *a priori* by the fact that to my will affected through sensible desires there is also added the idea of precisely the same will, but one belonging to the world of understanding, a pure will, practical for itself, that contains the supreme condition of the first in accordance with reason (GMS, 454,6–15, m. e.).

Clearly, the deduction is not a deduction in any strict (deductive) sense (at least not as long as the reconstruction sticks to the original text). What then, exactly, is the key idea in Kant's argument? The human being is aware of himself as an intelligence due to the spontaneous epistemic activities of his reason and understanding; as such an intelligence, the human being is the 'eigentliche Selbst' ('authentic self'; GMS, 457,34; 458,2; 461,4). From there, Kant goes on ("folglich"; GMS, 448,18) to the 'intelligence *with a will*'. Considering himself as an intelligence, the human being understands himself as a member of the world of understanding and thus as a thing in itself; its rational will, then, constitutes the 'eigentliche Selbst' as a practical being. This idea – again, that the will as an intelligible faculty is the 'eigentliche Selbst' of the human being, as opposed to the human being inasmuch as he is "*only appearance of himself*" (GMS, 457,35, m. e.), i. e. only a "phenomenon in the world of sense" (GMS, 457,13) – is the core of OP. Kant argues for the validity of the categorical imperative as a moral

<sup>15</sup> Cf. R 5086: „In der Verstandeswelt ist das substratum: *intelligentz*, die Handlung und Ursache: Freyheit, die Gemeinschaft: Glückseligkeit aus Freyheit, das Urwesen: eine Intelligentz durch idee; die form: moralitaet, der nexus: ein nexus der Zweke. *Diese Verstandeswelt liegt schon itzt der Sinnenwelt zum Grunde* und ist das wahre selbständige“ (m. e., andere Hervorhebungen getilgt).



law for sensual-rational beings with the *superiority of the ontic status of the world of understanding*. The human being as a thing in itself and hence the ‘eigentliche Selbst’ and its law is of higher ontic value than the human being as an appearance; and this is why the law of the world of understanding (the moral law) is binding upon the human being (as a categorical imperative) who is a member both of the world of understanding and the world of sense. That’s the basic idea behind OP.

That this is, indeed, the basic idea behind OP can hardly be seen just by reading OP itself (that sentence in GMS, 453). We have to look at other passages. An external characteristic may lead the way: In that passage in GMS, 453, OP1 and OP2 are emphasized, an emphasis that at this length, as far as I know, hardly ever can be found in Kant’s writings (if at all). Exactly parallel to this, Kant again provides the answer to the question of how a categorical imperative is possible in GMS, 461. And just as in GMS, 453f., he again avails himself of a lengthy emphasis to stress that the moral law

is valid [!] for us as [!] human beings, since [!] it has arisen from our will as intelligence, hence from our authentic self; *but what belongs to the mere appearance is necessarily subordinated by reason to the constitution of the thing in itself* (GMS, 461,2–6).

The law of the world of appearances is the “natural law of desires and inclinations” (GMS, 453,28); these ‘desires and inclinations’, as “*appearances*” (GMS, 453,24, m. e.), determine human actions. However, this law just belongs ‘to the *mere appearance*’ and therefore ‘is necessarily *subordinated* by reason to the constitution of the thing in itself’. Here again it becomes clear that the whole force of Kant’s argument depends on the ontic superiority of the ‘authentic self’.

And there is yet another passage that provides textual evidence for this interpretation. The human being, Kant says, as a rational being is a member of the world of understanding, and

*since* in that world he himself only as intelligence is the *authentic self* (as human being, by contrast, only appearance of himself), those laws [of the world of understanding] apply to him immediately and categorically (GMS, 457,33–36, m. e.)

In other words, the moral law is binding upon the human being because it stems from the pure will as the authentic self, which, as such, is of higher ontic value (not ‘only appearance of himself’). Even in the *Critique of Practical Reason*, in which Kant denies the possibility of a deduction of the categorical imperative, he says that it is the status

as a member of the world of understanding which “*elevates* a human being above himself (as a part of the sensible world)“ (KpV, 86, m. e.); hence “it is not to be wondered at that a human being, as *belonging to both worlds*, must regard his own nature in reference to his second and *highest* vocation only with reference, and its laws with the highest respect” (KpV, 87, m. e.). This, Kant says, is the “origin” (KpV, 86) of duty. This axiological position is also reflected in the last paragraph of Sec. 4 of the GMS, where Kant writes that “even the most wicked scoundrel [...] transports himself in thoughts into entirely another order of things” (GMS, 454,21–31) in which he finds “a greater inner worth of his person” (GMS, 454,37): “This better person, however, he believes himself to be when he transports himself into the standpoint of a member of the world of understanding” (GMS, 454,37–455,2)

Thus we can reconstruct the ontoethical principle as follows:

**(OP\*)** *The world of understanding and thus the pure will as a member of this world of understanding are ontically superior to the world of sense, and therefore the law of this world and will (the moral law) is binding as a categorial imperative for beings that are both members of the world of understanding and the world of sense.*<sup>16</sup>

<sup>16</sup> Steigleder (2006, this volume, pp. 225–246) rejects my interpretation of Kant’s thesis of analyticity and therefore also my interpretation of Sec. 4. Although it would be most interesting to have a detailed discussion, it is simply impossible to have it here for lack of space. Hence just three brief comments: First, no interpretation can be satisfying that is not *comprehensive*; it’s always easy, *too* easy indeed, to make claims about what a text means by ignoring those passages that don’t fit. (Thus, Steigleder is right to point out that there are elements in Sec. 1 that pose a problem for my interpretation; I have addressed these elements in Schönecker, 1999.) This being said, I’d like to reply, second, that Steigleder correctly points out that my interpretation is partly based on the overall structure of GMS III (that at least part of GMS II and GMS III are ‘preparation’ and that there *is* a Sec. 4 – to say the very least). However, it is certainly not sufficient to reply to this crucial element of my interpretation by just asserting that there “*may* conceivably be other readings” (Steigleder 2006, 242, m. e.) without *actually* providing an alternative reading that is also in a position to account for the overall structure of GMS III. As did many before him, Steigleder still argues that it is only Kant’s intention that we “*must necessarily see* ourselves as ‘rational beings, which have a will’” (Steigleder, 2006, p. 243). Clearly, however, this has been demonstrated no later than in Sec. 3. But what then is the purpose of Sec. 4 and that long and complicated sentence that is (or includes) what I call the ontoethical principle? Steigleder provides no answer, and it is therefore no surprise that in his book (2002, 67–96), Steigleder shows no interest whatsoever in that sentence either (he does, however, very briefly mention that the “Gesetz unserer Vernunft und das Verlangen unserer Bedürfnisse [...] *nicht auf gleicher Stufe stehen*”, p. 89, m. e.). There may very well be other readings of it; but whether there are any, we will not figure out by ignoring it. Leaving aside that Steigleder, as I see it, pays no sufficient attention to Kant’s repeated claim that there is no categorical imperative for perfectly rational beings and does not sufficiently distinguish between the moral law as an ‘synthetic’ imperative and as an ‘analytical’

### 2.3 Validity and Motivation

I already pointed out that, according to Kant, the good is something which the human being, in some sense and respect, ‘authentically wills’. I would now like to come back to this idea. Recall that the deduction of the categorical imperative is the answer to the question of how a categorical imperative is possible. This question, we said, must be understood as the question of why the categorical imperative is valid (binding, obligatory), or more simply: Is the CI valid? Is there a good reason to abide by it? Kant himself asks ‘from whence the moral law obligates’.<sup>17</sup> Traditionally, this question has often been formulated as the question ‘Why be moral?’, and this so-called Moral Question, I submit, can have only two possible answers: Either the answer refers to self-interest, such that the reason why one ought to act morally is that doing so serves one’s self-interest, at least in the long run; or the answer is that *indeed* there *is* a moral law, or, in a rather axiological language, that goodness *does* exist and makes demands on us, and that the moral law (or goodness) itself *is* the always overriding reason to act morally.<sup>18</sup>

Clearly, the first answer is unacceptable to Kant. It is one of Kant’s fundamental claims that the CI “does not have validity for us *because it interests us*” (GMS, 460,24), and given Kant’s overall understand-

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law (though this distinction is, obviously, at the very heart of Kant’s question of how a categorical imperative is possible), I’d like to note, third, that Steigleder does not have an explanation for Kant’s repeatedly posed question ‘from whence the moral law obligates’. I do, by the way, agree that it is certainly worthwhile to consider the option that Kant in the *Groundwork* already distinguishes, as Steigleder suggests, between ‘Wille’ and ‘Willkür’; but again, this issue I cannot possibly address here.

<sup>17</sup> In the preface Kant already mentions the *Grund der Verbindlichkeit* of the CI (‘ground of an obligation’; cf. GMS, 389,12; 389,16; 391,11; 432,31; 439,31; 439,33; 448,34). He also speaks of the *Realität* of the CI (reality; GMS, 425,14; 449,26), of its *Wirklichkeit* (‘reality’; cf. vgl. 420,1; vgl. 406,15), *Geltung* (‘validity’; cf. GMS, 389,12; 389,14; 403,7; 408,18; 412,3; 424,35; 425,18; 442,8; 447,32; 448,6; 448,32; 449,29; 460,25; 461,3; 461,12), *Richtigkeit* (‘correctness’; cf. GMS, 392,13), *objektiven Notwendigkeit* (‘objective necessity’; cf. GMS 442,9; 449,26; 449,30); Kant says that the CI *gibt* (is; cf. 419,18), that it *wirklich stattfindet* (‘is’; cf. GMS, 425,9) and that the human being ought to *unterwerfen* himself to it (‘subject himself to it’; cf. GMS, 449,12). All these concepts and formulations are probably best subsumed under the idea of the *Gültigkeit dieses Imperativs* (‘validity of this imperative’; cf. GMS 461,12). Also note that Kant not only speaks of the deduction of the CI, but also of its ‘Beweis’ etc. (‘proof’; cf. GMS, 392,4; 392,13; 403,27; 412,2–8; 425,8; 425,15; 427,17; 431,33; 440,20–28; 445,1; 447,30–448,4; 449,27).

<sup>18</sup> For our context, I assume that answers which could be classified as ‘formalistic’ (such as Karl-Otto Apel’s or Habermas’) fail from the word go; but they would classify as a third possible answer. On the Moral Question, cf. Schönecker (2006).

ing of morality developed in *GMS I/II*, this question, if understood as ‘Why be moral?’, obviously cannot be asking for the *utility* of the CI; it cannot ask for how the CI might serve one’s interests. It is important to see, though, that although Kant goes out of his way to argue that the question of how pure practical reason can be practical cannot be answered, he is not only interested in the validity of the CI, but also in its power to motivate. In this respect, he points out that pure practical reason (the pure will) is still one’s *own* will. Kant argues that, if this will and its law were not one’s own will, and hence the law were not one’s own law, one still were to find a nonmoral motive to actually comply with this law, i. e. a motive to want (or to do, respectively) what one would not want to do: “For if one thought of him only as subject to a law (whatever it might be), then this would have to bring with it some interest as a stimulus or coercion, because as a law it did not arise from *his* will, but rather this will was necessitated by *something else* to act in a certain way in conformity with the law” (*GMS*, 432,32–433,3). In the ‘metaphysics of morals’ as part of *GMS II*, Kant had already asked for the “possibility” (*GMS*, 427,17) of a will that is merely determined by reason and thus asked for the “ground of a possible categorical imperative, i. e. of a practical law” (*GMS*, 428,5). This ‘ground’, he says, can only be “something *whose existence in itself* has an absolute worth” (*GMS*, 428,3) – a rational and free being as an end in itself. Since the absolute worth of rational beings as ends in themselves is grounded in their autonomy,<sup>19</sup> Kant then – in order not to beg the question (for the law of this autonomy *is* the CI the very validity of which is suspicious) – argues in *GMS III* with the ontoethical principle and the ontic superiority of the pure will of the ‘*eigentliche Selbst*’. In the context of *GMS II*, Kant sets forth the “postulate” (*GMS*, 429,35) that every rational being must understand his or her own being as such an ‘end in itself’ (a postulate that is then demonstrated in sections 2 and 3 of *GMS III*). He already provides arguments that this status justifies why one must, and how one can, subject oneself to the moral law as a categorical imperative: “The will is thus not solely subject to the law, but is subject in such a way that it must be regarded also *as legislating to itself*, and *precisely for this reason* as subject to the law (of which it can consider itself as the author)” (*GMS*, 431,21, second emphasis D.S.). It is because the human being gives *himself* the universal law

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<sup>19</sup> Cf. Kant’s lecture *Feyerabend* (1319ff.). I cannot get into this but one should not forget that an important variant of the CI is based on the idea of the human being as an *end in itself*; cf. Schönecker / Wood (?2004, 140–153).

that this law can motivate us: “The moral ‘ought’ is thus his own necessary volition as a member of an intelligible world and is thought by him as an ‘ought’ only insofar as he at the same time considers himself as a member of the sensible world” (GMS, 455,7, m.e.); this is why Kant so often emphasizes that “this ‘ought’ is *really a volition*” (GMS, 449,16, m.e.). Thus Kant not only attempts to demonstrate that there is a good reason to be moral, but at the same time – and this is partly responsible for the confusion GMS can easily cause – the deduction of the moral law provides an incentive to be moral: „Das Gute ist immer das, was ieder Mensch will, und er würde es auch immer thun, wenn es ihm nur nicht schwer würde, es auszuüben, und wenn unsere Natur so beschaffen wäre, daß wir immer nach dem Begriff des guten handelten, so wären wir recht frei“.<sup>20</sup> The moral insight that Kant wants to induce with the addressee of the moral law is that he, the addressee himself, in some sense already wants what he ought to do.

## 2.4 Some brief critical points

As mentioned before, it is not the purpose of this paper to criticize (or further develop) Kant’s deduction. However, let us briefly look at some critical points which will also help us to better understand Kant’s argument. I don’t find it convincing at all, neither from an external nor from an internal point of view. Externally speaking, I would criticize Kant’s axiology as much too narrow because it allows only rational beings to have worth; but that’s a long story and, in any case, not the issue here.

Internally speaking (i.e. presuming Kant’s own critical philosophy), it is quite obvious that Kant avails himself of an ontological interpretation of his own distinction between thing in itself and appearance that otherwise is merely an epistemological distinction. Let’s have a look at OP one more time. The first part of the ontoethical principle (OP1–3), we said, must be reconstructed as follows: ‘Because the world of understanding contains the ground of the world of sense; and because hence the world of understanding also contains the ground of the laws of the world of sense; and because hence the world of understanding also in regard to my will, which belongs wholly to the world of understanding, is immediately legislative and must also, in regard to my will, be thought of such that it (the world of understanding) contains the ground of the world of sense and its laws ...’. As seen earlier in our detailed analysis, it seems that Kant has a *general* principle in

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<sup>20</sup> *MM*, 903.

mind according to which the world of understanding is the ground of the laws of the world of sense which is only applied to the *special* case of the will; hence what Kant would be saying is that the pure will, which is a member of the world of understanding, contains the ground for the laws of the will as a member of the world of sense. And as a matter of fact, right after the deduction in Sec. 4, Kant says that the good will of an evil man “constitutes by his own admission the law for his evil will as a member of the sensible world” (GMS, 455,4–6).

But how are we to understand this ‘general principle’? Kant himself suggests in Sec. 4 reading it in light of his epistemological assertion that the logical subject is the ground for the laws of nature. However, that the world of understanding is the ground of the laws of the world of sense does not follow, as suggested by the ‘hence’ in OP2, from Kant’s own fundamental claim, that one must “assume behind the appearances something else that is not appearance, namely the things in themselves” (GMS, 451,12–14). On the other hand, even if one accepted that somehow the logical subject is the ground of the laws of the world of sense in terms of that epistemological assertion of Kant’s, how are we to understand the *application* of that ‘general principle’ on the will? At best, it seems, there is some kind of resemblance between the legislation of the logical subject and the legislation of the practical subject. And yet it is this resemblance that Kant seems to have in mind. For he closes his official answer to the question of how a categorical imperative is possible by drawing a parallel between OP1–3 and the aforementioned epistemological claim, saying that “it is *approximately* in this way that concepts of the understanding, which for themselves signify nothing but lawful form in general, are added to intuitions of the world of sense and through that make possible synthetic propositions *a priori* on which rests all cognition of a nature” (GMS, 454,15–19, m. e.). Well, Kant himself admits that this parallel is only *ungefähr* (approximately).

All the more we have to rely in our interpretation of OP on later passages in which Kant emphasizes the ontic superiority of the world of understanding (GMS, 457; 461). However, not only is this alleged superiority in itself dubious, but it is also not in harmony with Kant’s overall understanding of the distinction between things in themselves and appearances. According to this understanding, there is, in itself, one world. This world (of things in themselves) is what it is; this very world as understood (interpreted) by us, is called the world of sense. The latter is not, however, in any sense inferior to the former unless one understands the fact that appearances, except from being appear-

ances, do not exist as establishing their inferiority; if so, one would need to draw the awkward conclusion that inclinations (as appearances) are not only inferior but not even real. Yet on Kant's epistemological distinction between things in themselves and appearances, practical reason and its law (autonomy) is just as real as inclinations and their law (heteronomy). It could very well be that, axiologically speaking, practical reason is an end in itself and thus of absolute value (as Kant postulates in *GMS II*). To argue, however, that, indeed, it *is* (as Kant does in *GMS III*), based on the alleged ontic superiority of things in themselves in contrast with appearances, not only makes little sense on its own, but also cannot be reconciled with Kant's own fundamental epistemology.

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Feyerabend *Naturrecht Feyerabend*, AA 27

GMS *Grundlegung zur Metaphysik der Sitten*, AA, IV

KpV *Kritik der praktischen Vernunft*, AA, V

MM *Metaphysik Mrongovius*, AA 29

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