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Kant, Frege, and the Normativity of Logic: a reply to MacFarlane
Savannah—Jan 3rd, 2018

§1 - Introduction

Standard view (Poincaré, Wang, etc.)—Although Frege endorsed & Kant denied that arithmetic is analytic, there is not a substantive disagreement, because their conceptions of logic are too different.

MacFarlane's aim—Establish Frege & Kant do share enough of a conception of logic for this to be a substantive, adjudicable dispute.

MacF's common ground—for both F&K "the fundamental defining characteristic of logic is its *Generality*: the fact that it provides norms for thought *as such*." (p.57)

I will defend the standard view from MacFarlane's argument.

We will see that MacF's characterization conflates two ways that Kant's pure general logic is normative, and that MacFarlane's main argument hinges on this conflation.

§2 - MacFarlane's normativity

Kant's pure general logic studies—not entailment relations, but rules governing the faculty for thinking, where thinking is conceiving, judging, and inferring.

Kant took PGL to be non-psychological, and distinguished logic from both the empirical psychology of Locke and the rational psychology of Descartes.

Still, very different than Frege—Frege banishes faculties from logic all together.

MacF begins developing his account of PGL's normativity by examining Frege.

MacF's Frege—logical (like physical) laws have the form 'such and such is the case.' But both have normative consequences for thought—particular and general

MacFarlane takes Kant to track the same normative distinction with his distinction between particular and general logics.

This looks plausible (setting aside differences b/t K&F over the faculty for thinking).

(More evidence for assimilating the normativity of PGL and Frege's logic can be found by examining Kant's distinction between pure and applied logic.)

§3 - Two kinds of normativity of pure general logic

Good evidence Kant thought pure general logic was normative: it is a "canon," a sum of *a priori* principles for the correct use of a cognitive faculty (A796/B824).

One of its most fundamental laws is the principle of contradiction: "the proposition that no predicate pertains to a thing that contradicts it" (A59/B84).

Thoughts are cognitions. Cognitions are related (i) to the thinking subject & (ii) to the object they represent. This is the source of PGL's dual normativity.

The two kinds of normativity:

Faculty-oriented—a canon for the understanding's agreement with itself—rules governing "what is formal" in its use—relation to the thinking subject.

Object-oriented—rules for thinking true thoughts, i.e. thoughts that agree with their objects—minimal necessary requirement on truth: cannot contradict itself.

Of these, the faculty-oriented normativity of PGL is more proper to it because this is what it means for it to be a canon for the correct use of a faculty.

Because thoughts are also cognitions, and the purpose of cognitions is to correctly represent objects, its laws are also normative in the object-oriented way.

§4 – Thought about objects

MacFarlane assimilates the subject matter of PGL to that of Frege's logic, because he is not attentive to the different role of singular judgments in each.

Frege: All thought is (ultimately) about discrete objects. Basic judgment form: *Fa*

Kant: PGL—laws of thinking in general—does not distinguish universal, $\forall xFx$, from singular judgment form, *Fa*—only does this when looking towards TL.

Transcendental logic (TL)—laws of thinking in general *about (discrete, countable) objects*—takes into account the way objects are sensibly given, *a priori*.

So the normativity of TL is fundamentally object-oriented.

The truths of PGL are analytic; but the truths of TL are synthetic (by and large).

Now, there is only a substantive dispute between K&F if the logics in question would both count their truths as analytic.

So a reduction of arithmetic to TL is insufficient for showing arithmetic is analytic.

§5 – The supposed common ground between Kant and Frege

How MacFarlane understands his own argument:

MacF's aim—show there is a substantive, adjudicable dispute over the plausibility of proving arithmetic analytic. ("logicism")

MacF's common ground: For K&F logic studies "norms for thought *as such."*

MacF's major obstacle: For Kant, but not for Frege, logic is 'Formal.'

MacF's Formality: Abstraction from the relation of representations to their objects.

So MacF needs to show that 'Formality' is a derivative feature of Kant's PGL.

To see this argument will not work, grant MacFarlane that the fundamental defining characteristic of PGL is that it provides norms for thinking *as such*.

Which kind of normativity is definitive of PGL?

Suppose it were the object-oriented normativity. This would be insufficient for distinguishing PGL from TL, because TL consists in the laws of thinking about objects in general. So this cannot be the criterion for a substantive dispute.

Suppose it were the faculty-oriented normativity. This is PGL's normativity as a canon for the operation of the understanding on its own, in isolation from sensibility and the objects thoughts are about. So if it is this normativity that is definitive of PGL, then its abstraction away from objects is not a derivative feature of it. But that is what MacFarlane's argument required.

So distinguishing these two ways PGL is normative blocks MacFarlane's argument.