

Kant on Consciousness of Logical Laws

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§1 - Introduction

(Pure general) logic: studies the most general, necessary rules of thinking. We seem to already imperfectly follow these, even with no explicit grasp of them. But we can formulate these rules by reflecting on our thinking.

Natural logic (*logica naturalis*): the collection of logical rules that implicitly govern our common, everyday thinking and reasoning.

Artificial logic (*logica artificialis*): the presentation of these same rules in a systematic science—pure general logic (or what I will call just ‘logic’).

What is the relationship between these? A two-part proposal:

(1st) Our **natural** assessments of thinking and reasoning exhibit **clear** consciousness of our concepts of <concept>, <judgment>, and <inference>.

(2nd) the task of artificial (pure general) logic is to make these **clear** concepts **distinct**.

Although I’ll spend most of my time on why this proposal is promising, in closing I will briefly touch on why I suspect that it is ultimately incorrect.

§3 – Clarity and distinctness

Comparing a copper pot, a bronze statue, and an iron beam, I notice their metalness. Because I am aware of the metalness they share, my **concept** <metal> is **clear**.

With such **clear** concepts, I can go on and recognize more instances, and through this concrete **ability** I manifest my clear consciousness of the concept.

My concept is **distinct** if I am also conscious of the other features in the concept.

E.g., <metal> is more distinct when in it I think: <solidity>, <opaqueness>, etc.

So a concept is distinct, when I can use it to pick out the things that fall under it, and also when I know *why* I use it to pick out those things and not others.

§4 – The analogy: artificial logic and making concepts distinct

One aspect of our everyday natural reasoning is recognizing and assessing concepts, judgments, and inferences, merely as the kinds of thoughts that they are.

This assessment exhibits logical know how, but we may not be aware of its rules.

E.g., we might recognize that a conclusion doesn’t follow, while not knowing why.

So just as how with **clear** concepts we can assess whether something falls under it or not, in everyday natural reasoning we can assess the logicity of thoughts.

And just as <metal> is **distinct** when we know why something is a metal, logic is artificial when we know the rules for assessing the logicity of thoughts.

§5 – The proposal

(1st) we exhibit a clear consciousness of our concepts of <concept>, <judgment> and <inference> in our natural assessments of thinking and reasoning, and

(2nd) pure general (i.e., artificial) logic makes these clear concepts distinct.

There are some reasons to think Kant held something like this view:
In everyday reasoning, we seem to exhibit a **clear** consciousness of <concept>, <judgment>, and <inference>, since we know how to use concepts, etc.
E.g., take the concept <metal>. We know how to use it and other concepts in judgments and inferences. So have a clear grasp of it, and others, as concepts.
So our concept <concept> seems to be clear.
That is, just as we have a clear concept of <metal> when we can use it to distinguish metals from other things, it seems <concept> will be clear when we can use it to distinguish concepts from other thoughts.
Similarly, just as we make <metal> more **distinct** when we judge that ‘metals are opaque,’ we seem to make <concept> more **distinct** when we judge that ‘concepts can serve as predicates for possible judgments.’
In each we make **explicit** the rules governing <metal> or <concept> respectively.

§6 – The disanalogy: logic is formal

I think, however, that we should reject the proposal because of logic’s formality. Cognition or knowledge is in the first instance **material**: it is about an object. Its matter is this object; its form is “the way in which we cognize the object” (9:33). **Formal** cognition—logic—abstracts away from all objects of cognition (4:387). It studies only cognition’s form: “the formal rules of all thinking” (Bix).

On the proposal logic is not formal cognition, but material cognition of formality. It treats purported concepts of kinds of thoughts as having both a form and a matter. Just as the objects of <metal> are metals, or of <virtue> are virtuous actions, the purported concept <concept> would have concepts, like <metal>, as objects.

This, however, is not how Kant describes the topic of general logic. E.g., he says:

General logic abstracts, as we have shown, from all content of cognition, i.e., from any relation of it to the object, and considers only the logical form in the relations of cognitions to one another, i.e., the form of thinking in general. (A55/B79)

Logic begins with a body of cognitions that are related to one another. It then studies the relations between these cognitions. But it does not study their material relations—the relations they stand in because of their objects. Rather, it studies the relations that these cognitions stand in because of the kinds of cognitions that they are—as concepts, judgments, and inferences. These are their formal relations. They are the formal relations of material cognitions.

This is very different than the proposed interpretation. On the proposed interpretation, logic has its own special objects of study—concepts, judgments, and inferences—and we have material cognition of these. According to this passage, however, our representations of the kinds of thoughts are merely representations of the forms of material cognition. Logic does not have its own special objects of study; it is not the ‘formal’ branch of material cognition. Rather, it is formal cognition because it studies only the form of material cognitions, the rules that govern material cognition, merely in virtue of their form.