

The unity of rationality: Kant and today

Thomas Sturm (Barcelona)

1. *Philosophical Motivation* – 2. *Three Aspects of the Unity of Reason* – 3. *What Is a “Use of Reason”?* Four features – 4. *What Are the Uses of Reason?* – 5. *Unifying the Uses of Reason: Towards a Taxonomy*

1. Philosophical Motivation: The Fragmentation of Rationality

- Current fragmentation of rationality: subjective/objective; instrumental/noninstrumental, normative/descriptive, formal/bounded, substantive/procedural concepts and approaches...
- Acceptable pluralism about theories: e.g., different domains, different goals (*complementarity*); theories within the same domain as working hypotheses for the sake of scientific progress (*temporary competition*).
- The authority of reason requires that a unified account of rationality be possible.
- No one today has a clear approach for this task. Maybe Kant has one?

2. Three Aspects of the “Unity of Reason”

(1) Terminological/semantic ambiguities: (a) ‘reason’ as all three higher faculties: understanding, judgment, and reason in a narrow sense. (b) Reason as one of the higher theoretical faculties: (b-1) the faculty of inference (A303/B358; A306/B363), and (b-2) a faculty with its own a priori representations (“ideas”; A319/B376). Can a unified account of reason in its formal and non-formal aspects be given? (A299/B355)

(2) Theoretical versus practical reason: separated by Is-Ought gap (A319/B375, A633/B661). How deep is it? Also, how to explain Kant’s remarks concerning the primacy of practical over theoretical reason? (IV: 391; V: 50f, 118-121)

(3) We must unify as far as possible all our cognitions into bodies of scientific doctrines. From the perspective of systematicity, an issue for the unity of reason arises too. Consider Kant’s widespread talk of the “use” (*Gebrauch*) of reason:

logical, real, empirical, dogmatical, transcendental, hypothetical, regulative, technical, pragmatic, legal, private, public uses, etc. These need to be unified within a system, or else the unity of reason is again in doubt.

3 questions: What is a “use” of reason? How does Kant distinguish between different uses? How (far) can we reconstruct a taxonomy of uses of reason?

3. What is a “Use of Reason”?

(1) Any use of reason requires *inferences* – exemplified by formal logic.

Many do not distinguish between reason and inference. German does not even have a verb for the former. Maybe Kant’s *vernünfteln*? But that word has negative connotations: the defensive making up of reasons. Perhaps “Gebrauch der Vernunft” is another way of getting around this: “use of reason” might point to a verb that doesn’t exist in Kant’s own language.

(2) Uses of reason are (i) *spontaneous*, (ii) *self-conscious*, (iii) *goal-directed* (Schafer, forthcoming) and (iv) *norm-guided*.

The expressions “the so-and-so use of reason” or “reason in its so-and-so use” become abbreviated into “so-and-so reason”. A term such as “practical reason” is elliptical for the “practical use of reason”. Vs. hypostatizing reason. Kant refers to an *activity*, that of reasoning.

The necessity of self-consciousness in reasoning means that the subject isn’t detached from this activity; it’s her own. Similarly, we have the *power* of reason that makes it possible that we reason in this or that kind of way, or *control* our reasoning; reasoning is spontaneous. When a subject or agent reasons, she does so in order to solve a problem; reasoning is goal-directed. Because reasoning can have many forms, we ought to reflect on which use we are making of it, with what potential and limits for solving a problem at hand. Reason can go wrong (e.g. VIII: 123). Therefore, uses of reason are *normative* (Kant: “rules” and “principles”). Norms are also not something just given to us. The human being is not yet an *animal rationale*; it is an *animal rationabile* (VII: 321).

Not an anthropocentric or psychologistic account. Intelligent inhabitants of Jupiter, or horses that can say “I” to themselves would have to be treated as our “companions” (I: 359; XXV: 859). Reasoning can be instantiated in different organisms or systems.

This not a trivial concept of reasoning: (i) Some cognitive scientists deny that reasoning is inferential (Mercier & Sperber 2017). (ii) Others claim that it need not be always (self-)conscious, spontaneous, and goal-directed: cf. implicit or automatic inferences. (iii) Some describe behaviors as rational because they conform simply to an *external* standard (e.g. markets).

Kantian responses: (i*) We cannot make sense of the notion of reasoning without the idea that there are formal connections between premises and conclusions. (ii*) Kant does not require that instances of reasoning are always actually self-conscious, spontaneous, purposive, and guided by norms; only that they are potentially so. (iii*) Outcomes that look rational relative to an external standard are not thereby outcomes of *reasoning* – or what Kant calls the “use of reason”.

4. What Are the “Uses of Reason”?

Even if Kant’s concept of the use of reason, or of reasoning, is plausible, we need more to develop a unified *theory* of reasoning. The conceptual analysis does not tell us anything about specific forms and types of reasoning.

CPR: Uses of Reason

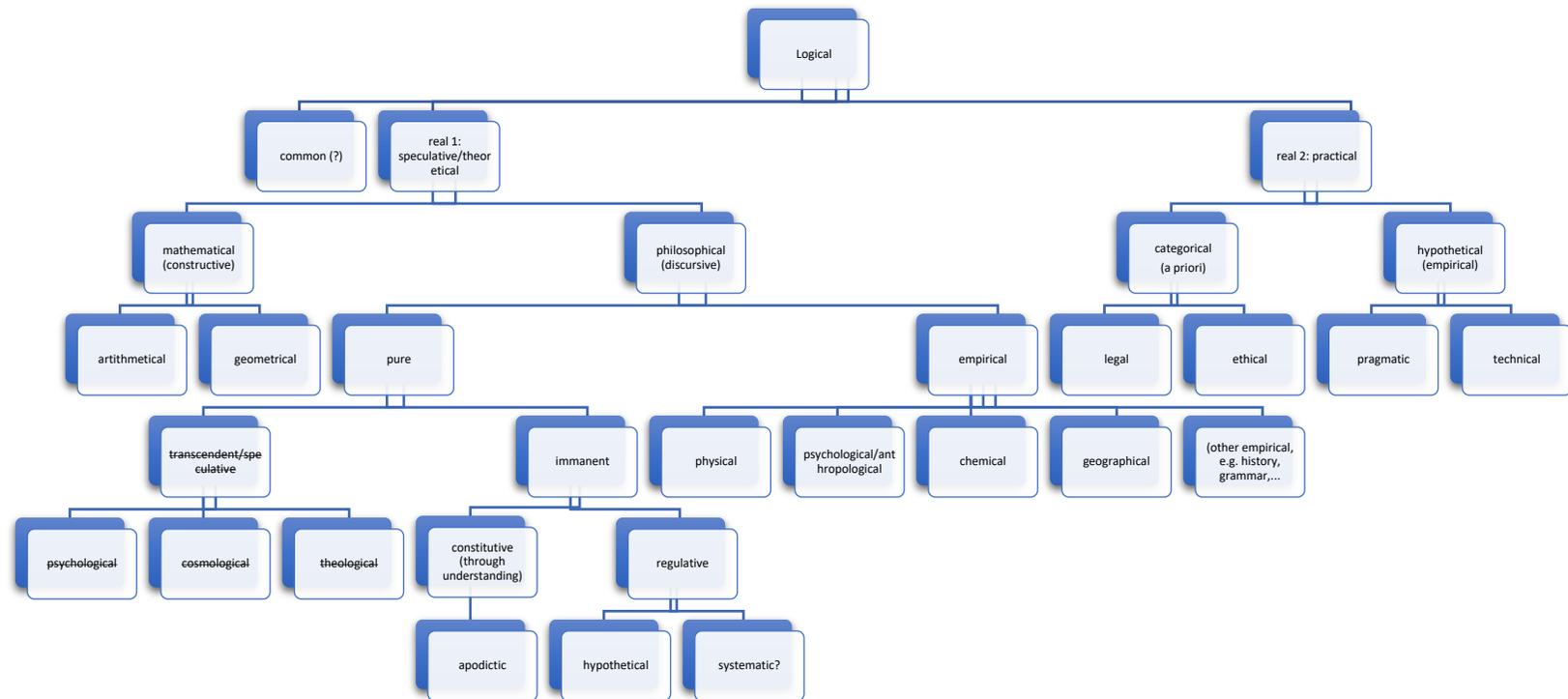
1. “**Logical** use” (A303/B359; A334f/B391f; A650/B678-A652/B680) versus “**real** use” (A305/B362). The latter is a species of the former. Sometimes, Kant says that the “real use” involves only one “supreme principle of pure reason” (A308/B365). Sometimes, a broader class of ideas and principles of pure reason seem to characterize the real use.
2. “**Speculative** use of reason” versus “**practical** use of reason” (A327f/B384f; B424; A641/B670; A773f/B801f; esp. A798f/B827f). The speculative use is also opposed to “reason’s **natural** use” (A635/B663-A637/B665); and to **mathematical** and **empirical** uses of reason (A841/B869). **Both the “speculative” and the “practical” uses seem to be subsumed under the “real” use of reason.** -- Some passages contrast not a “**theoretical**” to the “practical use of reason” (A633f/B661f; V:55f). It is not 100% clear that “speculative” is a synonym for “theoretical”.
3. Kant calls the “**real**” also sometimes the “**pure**” use of reason (e.g. A305/B362; A796f/B824f) or the “**transcendent(al)**” use. The latter seems identical with the “speculative” use of reasoning. His moral writings show that there is “**pure practical**” reasoning too. - He speaks of a “pure use” in a yet different sense at the start of the B-edition, referring to “the grounding and execution of all sciences that contain a theoretical a priori cognition of objects” (B20-22).
4. The **speculative/theoretical** use is divided into an “**intuitive**” and a “**discursive** use of reason” (A719/B747; A723f/B751f). These are distinguished by the types of representations (intuitions v concepts) employed. The former is the “**mathematical**”,

the latter a “**philosophical**” use of reason in a broad sense: it covers Kant’s critical philosophy, but also the metaphysics that he destroys, and the use of concepts in the empirical sciences (cf. VIII: 96; VII: 120f).

5. Next, a “**transcendental** use of (pure) reason” (A131/B170; A319/B376) in a more specific sense is often characterized as employing a “transcendental use of pure concepts of understanding” on the one side, and “of concepts of reason” on the other side (A515f/B543f). Here, “reason” is used in a narrow & negative sense, referring to activities using the ideas and principles of pure reason only in a “**transcendent**” rather than “**immanent**” way. This use of reason is the target of Kant’s critique of rationalist metaphysics. Not every use of reason is legitimate.
6. Conversely, an “**empirical** use of reason” is opposed to a “transcendent use”: the latter is based upon the “supreme principle of pure reason” (A308/B365; cf. A564f/B592f; A619f/B647f); the former, however, uses “ideas” of reason as rules “of possible experience” (A663f/B691f; cf. A670f/B698f; cf. A675/B703; A678/B706; A680/B708; A690/B718-A692/B720).
7. The “**regulative** use of reason” (cf. A693/B721), which consists in the use of ideas and principles of reason for unifying empirical cognitions (A334f/B391f) is sometimes related to the “**hypothetical** use of reason” (A646f/B674f). This is invoked especially for scientific explanation of phenomena. Characterized not only by the premises being used (involving hypothetical entities) but also by its logical form and status: while formally syllogistic in a deductive way, the reasoning is rarely certain.
8. A “**systematic** use of reason” is mentioned without a contrastive concept (A683f/B711f; cf. A685/B713; A685/B723 fn.; A697f/B725f).
9. An “**apodictic** use of reason” is contrasted with a “**hypothetical** use of reason” (A646f/B674f). This distinction picks up point #8 and contrasts the different epistemic states of certain inferences.
10. “Reason in its **dogmatic** use” is introduced (A712f/B740f), in opposition to Kant’s own critical method.
11. A “**moral** use of reason” (A815f/B843f) is introduced, without here making clear how it is related to the talk of a “practical use” (see above, Nr. 2-3). This becomes discussed in Kant’s ethical works, leading to distinctions between types of practical reasoning based on different kinds of principles and different forms of deontic judgments with different epistemic status.
12. ... (more in other Kantian works)

What determines a use of reason? Kant provides only hints. Sometimes it is the “form” of the inference, sometimes its “matter” – i.e. the typical rules, maxims, or principles that show up in an inference – and ends or “interests” of reason also play a role. That Kant does not distinguish all uses of reason by the same criteria might create problems.

5. Towards a Taxonomy of Uses of Reason



Selected problems:

(1) Kant uses the term “pure use of reason” ambiguously, sometimes referring to “the grounding and execution of all sciences that contain a theoretical a priori cognition of objects” (B20-22); sometimes referring only to one “supreme principle of pure reason” (A308/B365); and sometimes to a broader class of ideas and principles. How to locate them all in such a taxonomy?

(2) Similar unclarity concerning Kant’s use of ideas and principles of reason under the notion of a “regulative use”. How exactly is this related to the “hypothetical” and the “systematic” uses of reason? Both are sometimes identified with the regulative use. Even if one subsumes both under “regulative”, it is unclear what the distinguishing mark would be here.

(3) Illegitimate uses of ideas and principles (striked through in the table above) versus legitimate ones: the ideas and principles that characterize “transcendent” uses of become recycled as “immanent” uses, specifically on the hypothetical-regulative end of the branches. The tree diagram must somehow represent that not all distinctions (or levels) are created equal. Since both the form and the matter can vary, and since sometimes ends or even “interests” or reason play a role in the division, one would need a more than two-dimensional representation of the taxonomy.

Interpreters have to straighten out textual inconsistencies and other problems to create a good Kantian taxonomy.

A positive note: Nowadays, authors typically distinguish between deductive, inductive, and abductive forms of reasoning in the theoretical realm, and perhaps between instrumental and non-instrumental reasoning in the practical realm; and some deny that non-instrumental reasoning exists at all whereas others think it even rules in theory. But that’s pretty much it. What other functions reasoning serves is less often analyzed, certainly not in a systematic manner.

In addition, current cognitive and social scientists fail to develop clear concepts of the types of reasoning they acknowledge and disagree about the general concept of reason. Kant shows a strenuous attempt to clean up the landscape and to achieve a higher degree of the unity of reason.

Also, Kant’s attempt at a unification of the uses of reason is *reflexive* in an important way: the plurality of activities of reasoning and their relation to one another is understood by principles of reason itself. This is not viciously circular. It is “self-knowledge” of reason.

But we must also consider what Kant developed his account for and what we need a theory of rationality for today.