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General Practical Philosophy in Kant's *Groundwork*

In a little discussed passage of the *Groundwork*, Kant distinguishes his own metaphysics of morals (the topic of the *Groundwork* itself) from Wolff's 'general (*allgemeinen*) practical philosophy' (*G*: 390).ⁱ In the paragraph that follows, he offers a brief explanation of the difference by introducing a fascinating, if cryptic, proportion: the relationship between general practical philosophy and the metaphysics of morals is just like the relationship between general logic and transcendental philosophy. Having introduced this proportion, he never explicitly discusses 'general practical philosophy' in his written works again.ⁱⁱ There are reasons for this. According to Kant, the *Groundwork's* task ('the search for and establishment of the supreme principle of morality' (*G*: 392)) and the *Critique of Practical Reason's* task ('to show that there is pure practical reason' (*KPV*: 3)) are both properly the object of a metaphysics of morals, and general practical philosophy falls outside this stated task. But just because it falls beyond Kant's task, general practical philosophy may be illuminating as a point of contrast. Transcendental logic, for example, not general logic is the topic of much of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, but few would doubt the importance of understanding the powers and limits of general logic in understanding both the general project of the *Critique* and specific arguments within it. This paper proposes, therefore, to place general practical philosophy in the foreground in the belief that the *Groundwork* itself will be illuminated.

Taking the suggested proportion as my guide, I will argue that the distinction between general practical philosophy and the metaphysics of morals is like the distinction between general logic and transcendental logic in two respects. First of all, both general practical philosophy and general logic provide the constitutive norms for their respective faculties,

whereas neither transcendental logic nor a metaphysics of morals do. Just as general logic provides the rules constitutive of thinking as such so too general practical philosophy provides the rules constitutive of willing as such. I will call this feature of both general practical philosophy and general logic, their *constitutive generality*. The second point of comparison is that both general logic and general practical philosophy have only to do with the form of our subjectivity, whereas both transcendental logic and a metaphysics of morals have to do both with the form of our subjectivity *and* the objects about which we think or will. I will call this feature of both general practical philosophy and general logic, their *formal emptiness*. It is important to see that although there are only two points of comparison, four claims are being made about general practical philosophy and a metaphysics of morals: 1) general practical philosophy is constitutively general; 2) general practical philosophy is formally empty; 3) a metaphysics of morals is not constitutively general; 4) a metaphysics of morals is not formally empty.

Not much will be said in this paper in support of claims 1 and 4. In the final section, I will argue that hypothetical imperatives are the objects of general practical philosophy largely assuming that the capacity to take the means to our ends is constitutive of our agency. Similarly, I will largely assume that a metaphysics of morals is not formally empty, although I will have more to say, in section 3 about what exactly this means. Claims 2 and 3, however, are quite substantive, and in the field of Kant scholarship, even radical. What is at stake can be seen through an analogy to the theoretical sphere. A neo-Leibnizian or a modern day logicist contend that the rules constitutive of thinking are capable of arriving at substantive truths. To insist, in the theoretical sphere, that these rules do not determine content amounts to a rejection of rationalist or logicist ambitions. So too a *practical logicist* or *practical rationalist* might contend that rules constitutive of rational willing are capable of determining practical objects. Claims 2) and 3)

together amount to a rejection of this possibility, and if I am right to attribute them to Kant, then he rejects *practical logicism*.

This goes against a trend in contemporary understandings of Kant. When, for example, Korsgaard argues that ‘the categorical imperative...is part of the structure or *logic* of practical reason’ (2009: 48) or when Herman says, ‘the moral law is the constitutive principle or law of the rational will’s activity’ (2011: 52, see also 2006: 45-46), they are claiming that the validity of the categorical imperative follows (by means of logical argument) from considerations about our rational agency. Since the categorical imperative has substantive practical implications, these claims amount to an insistence that the rules constitutive of rational agency do not merely concern the form of *our* agency, but have substantive practical implications that may be spelled out by the categorical imperative. According to my taxonomy, Korsgaard and Herman are each practical logicians. If my thesis here is correct, the ‘structure or logic of practical reason’ and the ‘most basic principle of practical inference’ belong to general practical philosophy and cannot have the substantive practical implications that Korsgaard and Herman hope.

The distinction between general practical philosophy and a metaphysics of morals will be explicated in three sections. In the first section, I lay out the essentials of my interpretation of this distinction through a close reading of the *Groundwork* passage. This will involve a discussion of the relationship between transcendental philosophy and general logic which is meant to model the relationship between general practical philosophy and a metaphysics of morals. In the second section, I will discuss Kant’s distinction between general practical philosophy and practical logic. In the third section, I give substance to Kant’s account by arguing that hypothetical imperatives are the objects of general practical philosophy while the

Categorical Imperative is the object of a metaphysics of morals. This will involve providing an interpretation of what it means for a principle of practical reason to determine, or fail to determine, a practical object.

Section 1—General Practical Philosophy and General Practical Logic

The text that serves as the point of departure for my interpretation occurs in the preface to the *Groundwork* in which Kant sets forth a proportion between general logic and transcendental philosophy on the one hand and general practical philosophy and a metaphysics of morals on the other (G: 309). The first task of this paper will be to shed light on the practical side of this proportion by solving, as it were, the theoretical side. Anticipating the terms in which I will state my practical conclusions, I will argue that general logic contrasts with transcendental philosophy in two important respects: its *constitutive generality* and its *formal emptiness*.ⁱⁱⁱ

The distinction between general logic and transcendental philosophy echoes Kant's famous distinction between general logic and transcendental logic, and it is to the latter distinction that we must first turn.^{iv} In the *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant defines logic to be the 'the science of the rules of understanding in general' (A52/B76) and then immediately divides logic into two kinds: general [*allgemeinen*] and special [*besondern*] logic. While special logic concerns the rules for 'correctly thinking about a certain kind of objects' (A52/B76) – objects which may be the proper study of 'this or that science' – general logic concerns the rules for correct thinking as such 'without regard to the difference of the objects to which it may be directed' (A52/B76). According to this division, Euclid's 4th postulate that 'all right angles are equal to one another' would be part of the special logic that governs correct thinking about Euclidean objects,^v while modus ponens would be part of the general logic that governs thinking correctly about anything

at all. While both types of logic are normative (they are supposed to guide *correct* thinking), Kant also claims that these rules of thinking are also constitutive. Thought that fails to respect the right angle postulate fails to be thinking about Euclidean objects and thought that fails to respect modus ponens fails to be thinking at all.^{vi} This characterization of general logic, I call its *constitutive generality*.

There is, however, another characterizations of general logic which Kant himself believed followed from the previous two. General logic is concerned merely with the form of thinking when it arbitrarily relates representations to each other,^{vii} and when it abstracts from any relation to an object:

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 relation of cognitions to one another, i.e. the form of thinking in general. (A55/B79)

The previous characterizations emphasized that general logic applies to all thinking. Here Kant explains the reason for this universal application. One might be tempted to think that these rules reflect the nature of the objects towards which we apply our thinking. We cannot *think* $A \ \& \ \sim A$ because no object could *be* both $A \ \& \ \sim A$. On this view, the rules of general logic are metaphysical as well as epistemological—they give features (albeit minimal features) for all objects. To say, as Kant does here, that general logic concerns merely the form of thinking and abstracts from all relation to an object, is to reject this metaphysical understanding. General logic concerns only the form of *our* thinking about objects and says nothing about the content of the objects of our thought. In fact, since general logic completely abstracts from the relation that our cognition has to its objects, it is possible that the rules of general logic apply even to thinking that is related to no object whatsoever. The rules of general logic are, in an important sense, about us and how we must think – in a word, they are subjective. I call this characterization of

general logic its *formal emptiness*.

These two conditions may come apart. In particular, the rules of logic could have constitutive generality without having formal emptiness. MacFarlane 2002: 38-39 provides an example, drawn from Frege, of what this might look like. Consider the domain of numbers. The restrictions imposed on our thinking in virtue of the fact that we are thinking about the numerable might impose no further constraints than are already involved in the activity of thinking. It is plausible, surely, to believe that thinking that does not respect basic number properties is no thinking at all. On this view, the norms governing thought about the numerable have constitutive generality. On the other hand, it is also plausible that numbers are determinate objects capable of bearing predicates like ‘is prime’ and ‘is even’.^{viii} This would mean that the rules governing thought about numbers have implications about these kinds of properties. These rules would be both constitutive and objective. MacFarlane is not claiming, of course, that Kant would have accepted either of these claims (Kant held that mathematical judgements are synthetic and hence not constitutive of thinking, and he believed that mathematical judgement, like all judgements, had to be connected to intuition). Rather, his point is that Kant’s belief that the two characterizations of logic amount to the same thing, and therefore his rejection of logicism, does not follow from the characterizations themselves.^{ix}

At first glance, transcendental logic is also characterized in two separate ways depending on whether it is distinguished from general logic by its domain of application or distinguished from general logic because it lifts the formal-emptiness constraint. This initial impression, however, will turn out to be deceptive since these characterizations cannot come apart. First, let us consider the characterization in terms of domain of application. Kant tells us that transcendental logic is ‘limited to a certain content, namely that of pure a priori cognitions alone’

(A131/B170; c.f. A57/B81-82). In another place, Kant clarifies that this is meant to govern only thinking that applies to *all* objects and not thinking that is subject to any restrictions from sensibility. Thus, at A56/B81, Kant points out that while thinking about spatial objects in general is transcendental, if we further restrict our thinking to spatial objects of our senses, then the further restrictions are empirical and are no longer transcendental. From these passages, we conclude that that transcendental logic has possible objects of experience as its domain of application. One could think of transcendental logic, therefore, as the special logic that has all possible objects as its domain of application.^x

Often, however, what is important for Kant is not that transcendental logic contrasts with general logic in its domain of application but in its ability to secure reference to objects and say something about their properties. Transcendental logic, in other words, is not subject to the formal emptiness constraint. Thus, Kant introduces transcendental logic by asking the reader to consider rules that ‘did not abstract from all content of cognition’ (A55/B80) but rather apply to cognitions ‘solely insofar as they are related to objects a priori’ (A57/B82). The formal emptiness of general logic means that there is no guarantee that thinking that is in conformity to it would relate to an object. Transcendental logic, on the other hand, as the rules for thinking in so far as it relates to objects, is guaranteed such a relation.

Unlike with the characterizations of general logic, however, the two characterizations of transcendental logic cannot come apart. The rules for thinking about any possible object are the very same rules that provide the minimum condition necessary for relation to an object. The domain-of-application characterization restricts our attention to thinking about a priori cognitions. But such a restriction necessarily has implications on content. Consider again the special rules for Euclidean objects. In virtue of the fact that Euclidean objects but not other sorts

of objects obey these rules, we can think of these rules as saying something about what it is to be a Euclidean object. That all objects of actual experience have additional properties besides their Euclidean ones does not change the fact that the rules for thinking about Euclidian objects determine ordinary objects insofar as they are Euclidean. Similarly, in virtue of the fact that transcendental logic concerns a priori cognitions it determines the a priori conditions of objects. If there are such a priori conditions, then these laws say something about objects—they do not merely say something about the form of our thinking about these objects. That all objects of actual experience have further, empirical determinations does not detract from the fact that the formal emptiness constraint is lifted once we restrict our attention to any sort of determinate content—even a priori determinate content. Hence the domain-of-application characterization implies the relation-to-objects characterization. But the converse of this entailment is also true. The rules that are necessary for the determination of content, i.e. the minimum rules necessary to secure content to a cognition, will apply to any possible object of thought. In other words, these rules will not apply to this or that object but all objects so long as these objects can be the *relata* of thinking. In Kant's terms, these rules will apply to pure a priori cognitions. It follows that the domain-of-application characterization and the relation-to-objects characterization are inseparable.^{xi}

The inseparability of these two characterizations implies that a logicist cannot accept the transcendental/non-transcendental distinction.^{xii} Logicism claims that formality and generality can come apart—that questions about the domain of application of rules must be kept separate from questions about whether the emptiness or contentfulness of the rules. Transcendental logic merges these two ideas by taking as its domain of application all possibly determinate objects and insisting on a contrast between this kind of logic and general logic. To say that

transcendental logic is a special logic that does not have constitutive generality would be to say that there is a domain of all possibly determinate objects that excludes the domain governed by general logic. An example is again helpful here. Consider the logicist's star example—arithmetical numbers understood as determinate objects whose properties can be discerned by general logic. On the one hand, since numbers are determinate objects they belong to transcendental logic which governs thinking that has to do with possibly determinate objects. On the other hand, however, since their properties are determined by general logic, they belong to general logic. These objects would be governed by the norms of both general and transcendental logic, thus undermining the strict distinction between the two. A logicist, therefore, may accept one of Kant's characterizations of general logic and deny the other, but a logicist cannot go on to accept Kant's distinction between transcendental and general logic. ^{xiii}

We are finally in a position to use the theoretical side of the proportion in order to interpret the practical side. Here is the passage:

Let it not be thought, however, that what is here called for already exists in the celebrated Wolff's propaedeutic to his moral philosophy, namely in what he called general practical philosophy. Just because it was to be a general practical philosophy it took into consideration, not the will of any special (*besondern*) kind, such as one that would be completely determined from *a priori* principles without any empirical motives and that could be called a pure (*reinen*) will, but rather volition generally, with all the actions and conditions that belong to it in this general sense; and by this it differs from a metaphysics of morals in the same way that general logic, which sets forth the actions and rules of thinking in general, differs from transcendental philosophy, which sets forth the special (*besondern*) actions and rules of pure (*reinen*) thinking, that is, of thinking by which objects are cognized completely *a priori*. (*G*: 390)

Above I have established that general logic, according to Kant, differs from transcendental philosophy in the universality of its domain of application and its formal emptiness. By the logic of the proportion, it follows that general practical philosophy too should differ from a

metaphysics of morals in the universality of application and in its formal emptiness. In the passages leading up to the proportion, Kant confirms and explains this. General practical philosophy, because it applies to ‘volition generally’ is constitutive of willing as such whereas the metaphysics of morals applies to a will that has been ‘completely determined from a priori principles.’ This mirrors Kant’s belief that general logic has a domain of application that applies to thinking about empirical and a priori objects whereas transcendental logic only applies to thinking about a priori objects. But, the passage also reflects Kant’s belief in the formal emptiness of general practical philosophy. Since a metaphysics of morals contrasts with general practical philosophy in its ability to determine the will, general practical philosophy can be said to be formally empty—its rules do not by themselves determine practical content. In a later section, I will explain what it means for rules to fail to determine practical content. For now however, I merely wish to insist that on the basis of Kant’s texts there are rules constitutive of willing which are formally empty with respect to the determination of our will and that the branch of philosophy concerned with these rules is contained in general practical philosophy.

Kant points out a further similarity between a metaphysics of morals and transcendental logic—a metaphysics of morals concerns the rules governing a pure (*reinen*) will and transcendental philosophy concerns the rules that govern pure (*reinen*) thinking. Presumably, general logic and general practical philosophy are not in this sense pure. This use of ‘pure’ as a point of contrast with constitutive generality requires explanation. Often, Kant uses ‘pure’ to contrast with empirical. A pure (*reine*) a priori cognition, for example, is one ‘with which nothing empirical is intermixed’ (B3). However, although this usage is frequent (A20/B34, A29, B41, A42/B60, etc.), it is not the only way in which Kant uses the term ‘pure’. Sometimes Kant contrasts pure not with empirical but with formal emptiness. At one point in the *Critique*, for

example, Kant makes clear that the pure part of cognition is ‘the part in which reason *determines* its object wholly *a priori*’ (emphasis mine, Bx), and he contrasts this with logic which ‘has to do with nothing further than itself and its own form’ (Bix). While both purity and formality are independent of experience, purity differs from formality in that it *determines* an object, either practical or actual. Purity, as an a priori determination, opposes both merely formal non-determination and empirical determination. It opposes, therefore general logic on the one hand and empirical cognition on the other. It is Kant’s way of talking about what I have been calling the ‘relation-to-objects’ characterization. It is surely this use of ‘pure’ that is in play in the above passage. A pure will is one that determines its objects a priori and the rules of pure thinking are the rules that govern the determination of theoretical content completely a priori. In short, Wolff’s *General Practical Philosophy* expresses the rules constitutive of willing as such but does not express the rules constitutive of *pure* willing—that is those rules that could determine a priori content.^{xiv}

Section 2 – General Practical Logic vs. General Practical Philosophy

If what is important about general logic is that it both provides the constitutive laws of its faculty and that it is constrained by formal emptiness, and if general practical philosophy shares both of these features, why not think of general practical philosophy as a kind of logic? Why not say that there are two kinds of general logic: general theoretical logic which gives the constitutive rules of thinking and general practical logic which gives the constitutive rules of willing. ‘Logic’ in this sense is just the constitutive and formally empty rules that govern a certain faculty. While Kant comes close to using ‘logic’ in this way in the *Critique of Practical Reason*, he ultimately qualifies this manner of expression—saying that he uses it ‘merely by

analogy' and that they are 'not altogether suitable' (*KPV*: 90). Instead, Kant chooses to restrict the term 'logic' to the domain of thinking (*JL*: 13-14, Bix, Bxxiii, A52/B76, A54/B78, etc), and to simply emphasize the analogy between a merely formal science concerning the rules for willing as such (i.e. general practical philosophy) and general logic.^{xv}

Kant's decision to reserve the term 'logic' for laws of thought is in large part due to the fact that the term 'practical logic' is already reserved for something quite different. Just as thinking can be directed at Euclidian objects or a priori cognitions, it can also be directed at practical objects. Moreover, just as the laws concerning Euclidian objects and a priori cognitions each form a special branch of theoretical logic, so too, it is natural to suppose that there is a special branch of theoretical logic that concerns thinking about practical objects. Kant reserves the term 'practical object' to refer to a special theoretical logic concerning practical objects:

Another division of logic is that into theoretical and practical logic. But this division is also incorrect. General (*allgemeine*) logic, which as a mere canon abstracts from all objects, cannot have a practical part. This would be a *contradictio in adjecto*, because a practical logic presupposes acquaintance with a certain kind of object, to which it is applied. (translation altered, *JL*: 17)

There can be no general practical logic because a practical logic is already a special logic that concerns a 'certain kind of object'. Although Kant does not tell us what these practical objects are, we can speculate that anything that has to do with practice but is itself an object of belief rather than an object of willing would be the domain of practical logic.^{xvi}

Kant was especially vigilant about keeping these terms distinct because he felt that the two disciplines of general practical philosophy and practical philosophy were dangerously confounded. In an interesting passage recorded from his lectures on logic, Kant criticizes Meier, the author of the textbook from which he is lecturing, for failing to make this distinction:

The whole doctrine of practical use, with which the author [Meier] deals, simply does not belong to logic. For nothing belongs to logic except the logical form of all cognitions, i.e. the form of thought, without regard to the content...Practical

cognition is distinct from speculative cognition as to content, however. Hence logic can have to do with practical cognition—the author deals with desires and abhorrence. But in logic one must think as if one had no will, otherwise it would become a practical science; thus we have the science of thinking and not of willing. (VL: 903)^{xvii}

Kant here distinguishes between a doctrine of practical use and a logic that has to do with practical cognition. The latter subject, what Kant has been calling practical logic, does indeed belong in a textbook on logic. It treats of thinking that has to do with practical objects such as desires and abhorrence, and it differs from other theoretical logics only in its domain of application. We should understand such a logic as the special logic concerned with practical objects which Kant himself calls practical logic.

But, Kant insists, Meier sometimes includes under the term ‘practical logic’ reflections that are more appropriate in a ‘science not of thinking but of willing’.^{xviii} This is the science that does not act ‘as if one had no will’ but rather assumes the presence of a will and tries to reflect on its laws. The rules for this science of willing will not be just one more special logic, and it is a mistake to treat these rules as a kind of special theoretical logic. While Kant does not use the term ‘general practical philosophy’, it is clear, from the sharp contrasts he draws, that something like this is what he has in mind. If my thesis is correct, Kant settles upon calling the former ‘general practical philosophy’ and the latter ‘practical logic’.

Kant is surely right to draw this distinction. A logic that governs reasoning about practical objects governs how we think. Its inferences result in further beliefs, even if those beliefs are about practical objects. Practical reasoning, on the other hand, is supposed to result in an action. (G: 412; c.f. MM: 213, KPV: 57).^{xix} It is in this way that reason, in its practical dimension, *derives* an action from laws. Suppose, for example, that I have set as my end the purchase of a new couch, and I believe that the only way to get a new couch is to save money. If practical

reason is effective then this belief and desire are somehow combined and the result is that I start to save money. It is the action of saving money that is warranted by the practical premises. It is in this sense that the action of saving money is the result or in Kant's terminology 'made actual' by the practical reasoning.^{xx}

Now compare this to the following case which is intended to mimic as far as possible the above reasoning but issue in a belief rather than an action: suppose that I believe that it is true of me that I want a new couch. (I can recognize the telltale restlessness that indicates my desires.) Moreover, I believe that the only way that this desire is going to be satisfied is if I start saving money. Now, what, at the level of belief, is supposed to follow from these two beliefs? It certainly doesn't follow that I will, in fact, start saving. Instances of *akrasia* are common, even if I know myself to be a relatively stable fellow. But this means that I am not warranted in *believing* that I will start saving. Practical reasoning does not justify predictions about my actions.

Perhaps, what is warranted is only the belief that 'I ought to start saving'. But even on this assumption, there is still a gap between believing that I ought to start saving and starting to save. There is surely no *logical* connection between people who sincerely believe that they ought to save and the actual practice of saving. It follows that someone may correctly reason that they ought to save without actually saving. The problem here is not that there might be people who fail to act as reason demands. The problem is that reason is not demanding enough. If the conclusion of 'practical reasoning' ends up in belief rather than an action, then the only thing that is warranted is the belief and something else must be used to explain how we go from belief to action. Put another way, on the account being here considered, there is nothing wrong with the *akratic's* reasoning faculty if they conclude that they ought to save but fail to save—they may be

motivationally deficient but not deficient as far as their reasoning goes. To really believe in the possibility of practical reason, however, is to think that action itself can be warranted by reasoning, and the *akratic's* failure is a failure of reason. If the conclusion of practical reasoning must be an action, then Kant is right to insist that practical reasoning is different from reasoning about practical objects.

A logic of practical reasoning might be thought of in two different senses: either as the formally empty and constitutively general rules of willing or as a special theoretical logic which has practical objects as its domain. Kant, himself, I submit avoided confusion on this point by calling the former 'general practical philosophy' and the latter 'practical logic'. It is the former and not the latter that is the subject of this investigation.

Section 3 – Imperatives and the General Practical Philosophy/Metaphysics of Morals Distinction

I have argued, by way of analogy to general logic, that the norms governing practical reason can be divided into two sorts: those constitutive rules of practical reason that are formally empty and those non-constitutive, but necessary, rules that are capable of determining objects. The first sort of norms is the proper object of general practical philosophy and the second sort is the proper object of a metaphysics of morals. But I have not specified what these formally empty rules of practical reason are nor what it means for a practical rule to be formally empty. In the theoretical sphere, there was no analogous problem. The rules constitutive of thinking are naturally just the ordinary rules of formal logic like modus ponens and the law of excluded middle. To say of these rules that they cannot determine content is simply to say that the rules of logic, unlike the categories cannot be said to be *about* objects. In this section, I will argue that hypothetical imperatives are the proper objects of general practical philosophy whereas the

Categorical Imperative is the proper object of a metaphysics of morals. I will then explain what it means to say that hypothetical imperatives cannot determine practical content.

That the Categorical Imperative is the proper object of a metaphysics of morals can be established directly. Kant says that a metaphysics of morals ‘has to examine the idea and the principles of a possible pure will...’ (G: 390), but at many points in the *Groundwork* and the *Critique of Practical Reason*, Kant identifies a pure will with the moral law (KPV: 30, 56, 74..., G: 393, 454). Since the *Groundwork* itself is supposed to ground a metaphysics of morals, it is surely decisive that the purpose of the *Groundwork* is to search for and establish the supreme principle of *morality* (G: 393).

On the other hand, that general practical philosophy sets forth the rules of hypothetical reasoning cannot be directly established since, as we have seen, Kant never uses this phrase again in his published works. In place of a textual demonstration, I will show that the norm governing hypothetical imperatives, (call it the Hypothetical Imperative^{xxi}), satisfies both constitutive generality and formal emptiness.

What it means to identify hypothetical reasoning with the norms constitutive of practical reason is straightforward enough – it is to claim that taking the means to our willed ends is a necessary requirement for being counted as a practical reasoner at all. While it is possible to fail to obey this norm, just as it is possible to fail to obey the norms of general logic, universal failure, or the refusal to have one's practical reasoning assessed by these norms disqualifies the subject from rational agency altogether. Practical reasoning that is constrained by the Hypothetical Imperative is thus, in an important sense, not constrained at all– to reason practically is already to have one's reasoning assessable in terms of means/ends coherence. When Kant claims that ‘whoever wills the end also wills (insofar as reason has decisive

influence on his actions) the indispensably necessary means to it' (*G*: 417), he voices his assent. Someone who fails to undertake the means to their willed ends is simply not reasoning practically.

The Hypothetical Imperative is also formally empty. We have been understanding formal emptiness to consist in a failure to determine a domain of objects. In this case, this amounts to the claim that the Hypothetical Imperative fails to determine a domain of practical objects. This naturally depends upon understanding what a practical object is.

In the *Critique of Practical Reason*, Kant defines a practical object as follows:

By a concept of an object of practical reason I understand the representation of an object as an effect possible through freedom. To be an object of practical cognition as such signifies, therefore, only the relation of the will to the action by which it or its opposite would be made real... (*KPV*:57, translation altered)

A practical object is therefore an action or state of affairs the willing of which could bring about this action or state of affairs. Thus, 'Nicholas fleeing for his young, happy life' is a practical object for Nicholas because if he determines his will to bring it about that Nicholas flees, he will indeed flee. Similarly, 'the delicious taste of victory' is a practical object because I can, by willing it, (provided I have enough skill), bring this state of affairs about. According to Beck's helpful formulation, 'To say of an object that it is an object of practical reason is to envision it in the causal nexus of free action' (Beck 1960: 130). But to represent something as potentially brought about by my willing it is to represent it as something that is possibly to be realized or possibly to be avoided. Essentially, practical objects are divided into those things that are to be sought and those things that are to be avoided. For this reason, at *KPV*: 58, Kant says that there are only two practical objects: the good (representing an object as to be sought) and the evil (representing an object as to be avoided).

The Hypothetical Imperative fails to determine a practical object, then, if it does not determine properties belonging to either of these two practical objects. In other words, the Hypothetical Imperative is formally empty if it cannot determine the good or the bad. But the failure of means/ends reason to determine the good in itself and the bad in itself is a frequent complaint of Kant's. Here is a clear example:

... for, appraisal of the relation of means to ends certainly belongs to reason. But, although reason alone is capable of discerning the connection of means with their purposes... the practical maxims that would follow from the above concept of the good merely as a means would never contain as the object of the will anything good in itself, but always only good *for something*; the good would always be merely the useful... then there would be nothing at all immediately good, and the good would have to be sought, instead, only in the means to something else, namely some agreeableness. (*KPV*: 59)

Kant points out here that 'the good' is a different concept from 'the good for', and it is impossible to go from the latter notion to the former. In particular, the most natural way of going from the latter to the former would be to trace the means to more and more ultimate ends until we arrive at something which is not the means to some further end. But without already having an idea of the good in itself, the best we can say about this ultimate end is that it is in fact desired. What we cannot say is that it is desirable in itself since that is precisely what we are trying to explain. But the desired, even the ultimately desired (a descriptive concept), is not the same thing as the good in itself (a normative concept). The Hypothetical Imperative and the means/ends reasoning that it governs divide the world into those objects that are agreeable to our natures and that which is a means towards the agreeable, but it is incapable of saying anything about what objects are to be sought in themselves and which to be avoided in themselves. In a word, it fails, by itself, to have substantive import on practical objects.

But it is not enough to simply cite Kant's definition of practical object and show that the Hypothetical Imperative fails to determine such a thing. To show that the Hypothetical Imperative is formally empty, we must explain how *practical* objectivity is a form of *objectivity*.

In other words, practical *objects*, i.e. the good and the bad, must be analogous to theoretical objects in order to justify Kant's decision to view each of them as a kind of *object*. According to the *Critique of Pure Reason*, objectivity is afforded to representations that hang together with a certain kind of necessity. What distinguishes an object from a mere association of ideas is the necessity with which the representations are held together in the object (B 137). Objectivity in the practical sphere ought to be understood in the same way – practical representations are objective if they are held together in a necessary unity. But Kant says that to desire something is to represent it practically, that is represent it with an eye towards bringing it about (*KPV*: 9, *MM*: 211). This would make desires a kind of practical representation. By analogy to theoretical reason, the concept of an object of these representations would be that which affords necessary unity to these desires. The good or the bad, therefore, confer objectivity on our practical representations provided that they organize and confer a necessary unity upon our desires.

Thus interpreted, everything depends upon whether the Hypothetical Imperative can confer a necessary unity upon our desires. If it can, then the restrictions that the Hypothetical Imperative imposes on our reasoning can be understood as objective restrictions – restrictions that can be viewed as determinations of the practical objects that we will. If it cannot, then these restrictions are simply subjective features of how we must reason. On this topic, however, Kant is quite clear. Happiness, and the means/end reason that it grounds, can confer no necessary unity upon our desires.

According to Kant, 'happiness is the state of a rational being ... in the whole of whose existence everything goes according to his wish and will' (*KPV*: 124). But the use of the phrase 'in the whole' shows that Kant acknowledges that happiness affords a kind of unity amongst our representations. He is more explicit about this elsewhere:

All the inclinations together (which can be brought into a tolerable system and the satisfaction of which is then called one's own happiness) constitute regard for oneself (*solipsismus*). (KPV: 73; see also KPV:22, G: 399, G: 405)

And

for the idea of happiness there is required an absolute whole, a maximum of well-being in my present condition and in every future condition. (G: 418)

Suppose that I have desires for such disparate things as blueberries, meaningful conversations, and minimalist furniture. I can effect a certain type of order by asking which of these desires would make me *most* happy (would give me a 'maximum of well-being'). In so doing, I come to see that minimalist furniture is my true heart's desire and the others can be done without. But, I can effect even more structure to my desires by seeing myself as a practical agent whose interests do not expire in the instant but extend to 'every future condition'. It is now possible to form a plan for the realization of all or many of these desires. Since $I_{\text{Tuesday}} = I_{\text{Wednesday}}$, if my plan defers blueberries until Wednesday in order to have meaningful conversation on Tuesday, it is superior to a plan that has blueberries on Tuesday but no meaningful conversation or blueberries on Wednesday. Thus, in coming to view my desires as things that can be satisfied through the course of a whole life, I bring my desires into a 'tolerable system' and effect a unity amongst all these desires.

Nevertheless, Kant is quite clear that the unity that happiness provides is not an *objective* unity. The problem is that in order for the unity to be considered objective, the unity must have 'objective necessity from a priori grounds' (KPV: 26). Even if we come up with a perfectly rational life plan that maximally satisfies each of our desires and by the light of which all of our actions are rationally necessary, the plan itself rests upon a fundamental contingency—viz. our desires themselves are contingent. Were we to have other desires, the plan itself would look radically different. Ultimately, it comes down to the empirical, and thus contingent, fact of

‘whether I am to expect satisfaction from following the law, and how much’ (*KPV*: 25). What we arrive at is not a genuine necessity, but only a necessity that is relative to a contingent fact about our desires. From the point of view of happiness, there is no way to ask of our ultimate desires whether they are good or bad – they just are and again we run into Kant’s complaint that ‘good’ cannot be derived from ‘good for’.

Although there are many places where Kant makes this point, perhaps the clearest is in a chapter of the *Critique of Practical Reason* called the Typic of Pure Practical Judgement. One of the goals of this chapter is to warn against what Kant calls the ‘empiricism of practical reason’ (*KPV*: 70)—the failure to distinguish the non-normative concepts involved in the explanation of normative terms from the normative terms themselves. Kant acknowledges that he himself has appealed to the non-normative idea of a ‘universal law of *nature*’ to explicate the first formulation of the categorical imperative (*KPV*: 70). However, it is a mistake to conflate the non-normative ideas that are used to explicate a normative concept with the normative concept itself. A similar kind of mistake arises with the concept of happiness:

This, then, as the typic of judgement, guards against *empiricism* of practical reason, which places the practical concepts of good and evil merely in experiential consequences (so-called happiness), although happiness and the endless useful consequences of a will determined by self-love, if this will at the same time made itself into a universal law of nature, can certainly serve as a quite suitable type for the morally good but is still not identical with it. (*KPV*: 70)

While we may have a practical use for the idea of happiness, this idea is not, strictly speaking a practical concept and should not be conflated with the genuinely practical concepts of good and evil.

This reasoning generalizes. Since the antecedent of any hypothetical imperative is a contingent fact, no concepts merely based on hypothetical reasoning can give the kind of unity to our practical representations that would merit calling it objective.

I conclude that the Hypothetical Imperative, being both constitutively general and formally empty, is the proper subject matter of general practical philosophy. This conclusion when taken with the results from Section 1 casts doubt upon the logicist attempt to Kant's sharp distinction between substantive claims about morality and the formally empty idea of rational agency.^{xxii} Since a practical logicist claims that constitutive norms of practical reasoning can determine practical content, and since the Hypothetical Imperative is clearly constitutive and the Categorical Imperative is clearly substantive, she must either say that the Hypothetical Imperative is capable of determining practical content or that the Categorical Imperative has constitutive generality. While the arguments of this section provide independent evidence against reading the Hypothetical Imperative as capable of determining practical content, it may still be thought that the Categorical Imperative is a constitutive feature of rational agency. The parallel between transcendental logic and general logic blocks this move. If the Categorical Imperative is indeed analogous to transcendental logic in both its domain of application and its formal non-emptiness, then the Categorical Imperative is not a formal feature of our rational agency.

Conclusion

One way of looking at the argument of this paper is that it has shown that the domain of practical reason must be sharply distinguished from the domain of morals. But what, then, happens to Kant's fundamental claim that morality is rationally required? Doesn't this fundamental claim imply that we should try to bring morality and rationality closer together rather than further apart? My reply to these concerns is to point out that concepts can be sharply distinguished and nonetheless necessarily connected with each other. Judgements that necessarily relate distinct concepts are, according to Kant, synthetic a priori judgements, and all

substantive truths of philosophy fall within this category. The proper conclusion of my argument, therefore, is not that rationality and morality cannot be connected by necessity, but rather that any such connection must be a synthetic a priori one. (see G: 445) What is required, in other words, is a transcendental deduction which explains how the two concepts can be distinct but necessarily related. In the *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant warns that before undertaking a transcendental deduction, ‘the reader must be convinced of the unavoidable necessity of such a transcendental deduction’ (A88/B121) and ‘understand from the outset its inevitable difficulty’ (A88/B121). By sharply distinguishing the moral from the rational, this paper appears to widen the gap between the two concepts, but, as Kant’s warnings remind us, being clear eyed about the existence of the gap is the first step to properly bridging it.

I would like to conclude by speculating about the impact that the results of this paper would have on the shape of such a deduction. If general practical philosophy is truly analogous to general logic, then a natural starting place for a practical deduction suggests itself. In the *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant claims that reflecting on the unity of general logic provides the ‘clue’ for the deduction of the categories. In fact, after strictly separating general from transcendental logic, Kant somewhat surprisingly then insists that there is an intimate connection between the two, and indeed that the very same action may underlie each of them. Kant is speaking proleptically: it will be one of the purposes of the transcendental deduction to justify this thought. A similar strategy might be used in the practical sphere. Hypothetical reasoning might also provide the ‘clue’ for the deduction of the moral law. Moreover, after such a deduction has been provided, one of the ways of expressing the conclusion of this deduction might be to say that hypothetical reasoning and categorical reasoning are, after all, intimately connected. Perhaps, after such a deduction, we might even be justified in saying ‘the same

function that gives unity to hypothetical reasoning also gives unity to categorical reasoning’.

But, if the thesis of this paper is correct, none of this can be seen without first keeping quite distinct the spheres of general practical philosophy from a metaphysics of morals.

ⁱ Except where noted, the translations are those given in the Cambridge Editions of the Works of Immanuel Kant. Abbreviations to these works are cited in the bibliography. The translation of ‘*allgemeinen*’ has been altered from Gregor’s ‘universal’ to ‘general’ to bring out the explicit analogy to general (*allgemeine*) logic. Abbreviations are as follows: *G* = *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals*, *KPV* = *Critique of Practical Reason*, *A??/B??* = *Critique of Pure Reason*, *JL* = *Jäsche Logic*, *KU* = *Critique of Judgement*, *ML* = *Ethics Mongrovius*, *MM* = *Metaphysics of Morals*, *VL* = *Vienna Logic*, *R??* = *Notes and Fragments*. Disc = ‘On a Discovery Whereby Any New Critique of Pure Reason is to be Superfluous by an Older One’, *P* = *Prolegomenon to Any Future Metaphysics that will be able to come forward as Science*. Editions references are included in bibliography.

ⁱⁱ As we shall see, he does discuss it again in the lectures that he was giving at the same time he was writing the *Groundwork*.

ⁱⁱⁱ My distinction between constitutive generality and formal emptiness is derived from and meant to reflect the distinction that MacFarlane draws between the generality and formality of logic (MacFarlane 2000; 2002) upon whose account this first section relies. I have found it necessary, however, to change the names of his terms. Although the first difference in terminology is merely cosmetic (there is an air of circularity in characterizing general logic through its generality), the second difference in terminology reflects a more serious issue. The word ‘form’ is a word that Kant himself uses in many different contexts. Although MacFarlane is certainly right that general logic’s concern with the form of thinking rather than the content of thought is one of the ways in which Kant characterizes general logic, Kant also says at several points that thinking that has to do with objects, i.e. transcendental logic has its own form (A94, A248/B305). It is misleading therefore to say that general logic is formal and transcendental logic is not; it is rather that the former concerns *merely* the form of thinking whereas the other involves relation to an object. I do not take myself to be departing in substance from MacFarlane, since he ultimately cashes formality out in terms of relation to objects (MacFarlane 2002: 38, 59), but I do believe that his terminology departs in a confusing way from Kant’s.

^{iv} I do not believe that much actually hangs on the difference between general logic/transcendental logic and general logic/transcendental philosophy. I will return to these distinctions in a footnote 13.

^v The example is suggested by Kant’s remarks at *JL*: 12 that mathematics is a special (*besondern*) use of the understanding. See also MacFarlane 2002: 48 for a similar example.

^{vi} The constitutive nature of the laws of logic might seem to be in tension with their normativity. If a law cannot be broken, how can it be guiding? Korsgaard (2009:30) and MacFarlane (2002: 37) offer thoughts on how to dissolve this tension.

^{vii} The ‘merely’ in this formulation is absolutely essential. Transcendental logic differs from general logic not because the latter has to do with form and the other does not, but because the latter has only to do with form and has no relation to content.

^{viii} MacFarlane 2002: 59 for an explanation of why Frege believes numbers are determinate objects.

^{ix} See MacFarlane 2000: 84-95, 2002: 43-49, 53-57 has persuasively argued that Kant was aware of the distinctions in these two characterizations. According to MacFarlane, Kant intentionally gave priority to the constitutive generality characterization because constitutive generality was part of the definition of logic whereas formal emptiness can be derived as consequences from the earlier definition in terms of generality. This claim is supported by the fact that in both the *Logic* and the *Critique*, the first characterization that Kant gives of general logic has to do with its constitutive generality whereas its

formal emptiness is introduced only afterwards and connected to its constitutive generality with some form of ‘therefore’. (*JL* 12, A52/B76ff. MacFarlane 2002: 46-48 also cites (to my mind less decisive) evidence from the *Reflexionen*: R 1620 and R 2162 16:256).

^x This assumption is confirmed later on in the *Critique*, when Kant contrasts general logic and transcendental logic by saying that ‘general logic is not limited to any special (*besondere*) kind of cognition of the understanding (e.g. not to the pure cognition of the understanding)’ (A708/B736). Since we have seen that the pure cognition of the understanding is the domain of application of transcendental logic, Kant seems to use transcendental logic as an example of a special (*besondere*) logic. This point is also confirmed in the *Groundwork* passage with which this section began. There, Kant says that transcendental logic ‘sets forth the *special* [*besondern*] actions and rules of pure thinking’ (G 390). For agreement that transcendental logic is a special logic see, de Jong 1995: 639, MacFarlane 2002: 48 and Rosenkoetter 2009: 204. Rosenkoetter also cites the *Groundwork* passage as evidence for this fact. For further evidence, see *JL*:12

^{xi} This conclusion can also be supported with textual considerations. Although I have separated out these two characterizations for the purposes of analysis, there is no such separation in Kant’s presentation of the material. In both the passages leading up to Kant’s formal definition of transcendental logic (A55/B79-80) and in the passage in which Kant officially introduces the term (A57/B81-82), Kant uses both characterizations simultaneously. Insofar as they are distinguished at all, the relation-to-objects characterization seems to precede and explain the domain-of-application characterization. In the case of general logic, we saw (following MacFarlane) that Kant intentionally introduced constitutive generality before mere formality because he believed the latter followed from the former. No such intention can be discerned in Kant’s two presentations of transcendental logic. This suggests that Kant believed the domain-of-application characterization to be the same thing as the relation-to-objects characterization.

^{xii} *Pace* MacFarlane 2002 who thinks that ‘this appeal to Formality does no independent taxonomic work, for transcendental logic is already sufficiently distinguished from general logic by its lack of Generality [MacFarlane’s term for constitutive generality]. Transcendental logic supplies norms for ‘the pure thinking of an object’ (A55/B80), emphasis added), not norms for thought as such’ (48). As I explain presently, I believe that the ‘taxonomic work’ that is done by the ‘pure thinking of an object’ is only possible against the background of a formal emptiness/non-formal emptiness distinction.

^{xiii} Before turning our attention to the practical side of the proportion, there is one loose end that should be dealt with. Recall that the proportion stated that general practical philosophy is to the metaphysics of morals as general logic is to transcendental *philosophy*. What has been discussed thus far, however, is the relationship of general logic to transcendental *logic*, not transcendental *philosophy*. But transcendental logic is not the whole of transcendental philosophy. Transcendental philosophy, Kant explains, is the science tasked to explain the possibility of a priori cognition, especially synthetic a priori cognition (A12/B26, A56/B80-81, *P*: 279, *KU*: 289). As such, it contains both the rules for the pure thinking of objects (the transcendental logic) as well as the rules for the pure intuiting of objects (the transcendental aesthetic) (A52/B76). Strictly speaking, therefore, transcendental philosophy should not be contrasted with general logic at all, but ‘general philosophy’ which concerns not just the rules for thinking as such (general logic) but the rules for intuiting as such (a ‘general aesthetic’). Neither ‘general philosophy’ nor a ‘general aesthetic’ are phrases that Kant uses, and the reason for this is evident. The rules for intuiting as such (a ‘general aesthetic’), since they are about intuitions, are necessarily related to an object and thus it is impossible to make a general/transcendental distinction in this domain. Since there is no such thing as a general aesthetic, ‘general philosophy’ is just the very same thing as general logic, and Kant has no need for such a term. When Kant uses the term ‘transcendental philosophy’ in its architectonic sense it must surely include both the transcendental logic and the transcendental aesthetic. However, when Kant contrasts ‘transcendental philosophy’ with general logic, he must be using the term synecdochally to refer to that part of transcendental philosophy which admits of such a contrast—viz. Transcendental logic.

Regardless of the truth of this synecdochal interpretation, what is important for the purposes of

understanding general practical philosophy is that general logic is distinguished from both transcendental logic and transcendental philosophy in terms both of its domain of application and its formal emptiness. This can be established directly by considering one of the rare places where Kant compares general logic to the whole of transcendental philosophy:

This was also inevitable, if it was regarded in the manner of Mr. Eberhard, who extracts from the predicates of judgements a mere distinction of attributes from the essence and essential parts of the subject, and was thus assigned to [general] logic; for the latter has nothing to do with the possibility of cognition in regard to its content, but merely with its form insofar as it is a discursive cognition, whereas investigation of the origin of a priori cognition of objects must be left exclusively to transcendental philosophy (*Disc*: 244).

Kant here rejects Eberhard's belief that the truth of all judgements rests upon general logic, on the grounds that synthetic a priori judgements are the proper domain of transcendental philosophy and that general logic, on account of its formal emptiness, can say nothing about any object whatsoever. (See (A154/B193) for a very similar point where the point is expressed in terms of general versus transcendental logic. The fact that Kant seems to use transcendental philosophy interchangeably with transcendental logic confirms the synecdochal interpretation.) General logic, therefore, when contrasted either with transcendental logic or transcendental philosophy as a whole concerns thinking in general rather than thinking about a priori cognitions and is formally empty since it says nothing about the objects but only the manner in which we must think about these objects.

^{xiv} The passage under discussion is importantly mirrored in student lecture notes:

Theoretical philosophy on a priori principles is metaphysics; practical philosophy on a priori principles is morality. All objective philosophy, that has to do with objects, consists of these two, metaphysics and morality. If the human will is free, then a priori laws can be prescribed to it. Practical philosophy and morals are not identical. General practical philosophy is related to morals as logic is to metaphysics. Logic abstracts from content, and treats of the laws whereby the understanding operates. Metaphysics deals with the pure use of reason. General practical philosophy exhibits the rules whereby I ought to determine the will. Like metaphysics, morals is a pure philosophy of objects. Of objects, we have merely a pure philosophy in regard to the objects of knowledge, and a pure philosophy in regard to objects of the will. . . Logic is not pure philosophy, for it is not knowledge of objects, but treats only of the form of knowledge alone. (*ML*: 597-598, This important passage was brought to my attention in Lee 2009: 299-300.)

The terms in which Kant is making his point have changed. 'Metaphysics' is now being used for what was 'transcendental philosophy' and it is being contrasted with 'morals' rather than a 'metaphysics of morals'. Kant also engages in his common practice of using 'logic' for 'general logic'. None of these usages are idiosyncratic to this passage, and they do not obscure the fact that Kant offers the very same proportion as he does in the *Groundwork*—only here it is helpfully elaborated upon. The three features of (general) logic that are identified as a source of comparison are that it 1) 'abstracts from content' and 2) 'treats of the laws whereby the understanding operates' and 3) does not 'deal with the pure use of reason'. The first feature expresses its formal emptiness, and the second expresses its constitutive generality. The third feature, as we have seen, combines the other two. Kant then explains that these very same features apply to general practical philosophy. Just as general logic concerns all the laws of the understanding, general practical philosophy concerns all the laws 'whereby I ought to determine the will'. Furthermore, neither general logic nor general practical philosophy provides the pure use of their respective faculty. By explicitly contrasting 'pure philosophy' with a discipline that 'treats only of the form of knowledge alone', Kant lets us know that purity is here being used in the relation-to-objects sense of the term.

^{xv} In early fragments, we find Kant wrestling with this question. At R 1579 (1760-64? 1764-68?), Kant poses the question of whether there is a practical logic? (16:20) and he concludes the note by speaking of ‘general practical logic’ (16: 23) and distinguishing it from a ‘special practical logic’ (16:28). In R 3118 (1776-1789), Kant says the form of practical propositions is treated in logic, where he makes clear that practical propositions are not theoretical propositions about practical objects, but actual practical propositions like hypothetic and categorical imperatives.

^{xvi} This sense of practical object must be kept distinct from the kind of practical object that Kant talks about in the *Critique of Practical Reason* which will be discussed in section 3. Here he is considering the theoretical knowledge that we can have about the objects involved in practical reasoning.

^{xvii} Kant repeats this complaint in other logic lectures as well. See Tolley 2006: 380-381 for a list of places in which Kant objects to Meier’s inclusion of practical philosophical cognition inside a text on logic.

^{xviii} See for example, Meier §233 ff, (in Kant: AK 16: 526), where Meier discusses how it is that a cognition can become practical.

^{xix} Sometimes Kant says that the conclusion of a practical syllogism is not an action but ‘a volition of an action’ (*G*: 420). I follow Korsgaard (2008: 228) in thinking that, for Kant, volition cannot be distinguished from action. See also Vogler (2002:133-146) for an argument that intention cannot be understood as a primitive but is itself dependent on an antecedent idea of intentional action.

^{xx} Kant often distinguishes theoretical cognition from practical cognition on the grounds that practical cognition makes its object actual (Bix-x; *KPV*: 9; *MM*: 211-213).

^{xxi} Kant himself never uses this term, and indeed there are reasons to be cautious about using it. See Schroeder 2005 and Schwartz 2010. But in the sense that I am using it here, the Hypothetical Imperative *governs* hypothetical reasoning but does not *figure* in hypothetical reasoning. As long as this caution is kept in mind, there is no problem using the term.

^{xxii} Thus, Korsgaard 1997 claims that her argument tends to ‘... breakdown the distinction between the different principles of practical reason described at the outset of this essay. If the argument of this essay is correct, moral or unconditional principles and the instrumental principle are both expressions of the basic requirement of giving oneself a law...’ (250).

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