

## The Logic of Illusion: Kant on the Reasons of Error

by

JÖRG NOLLER 

Lehrstuhl I für Philosophie, Ludwig-Maximilians Universität München

*Abstract:* In this paper, I reconstruct Immanuel Kant’s theory of theoretical and practical error, and I situate it within the broader context of his transcendental philosophy. I thereby refer to his conception of dialectic as the *logic of illusion* (CpR, B 86) and to his concept of *rationalizing*. By referring to Donald Davidson’s conception of irrationality, I argue that Kant’s theory of error allows us to keep the erring person responsible both in theoretical and practical regards.

*Keywords:* Kant, error, illusion, self-deception, reason

### 1. Introduction

The aim of this paper is to reconstruct Immanuel Kant’s theory of error from the broader perspective of his transcendental philosophy. For it is Kant’s theory of dialectic as the *logic of illusion* (CpR, B 86) that deals with the reasons that concern theoretical error as well as moral misconduct and that lead theoretical and practical error back to a common root: the phenomenon of rational self-deception and rationalizing (*Vernünfteln*). Kant did not develop an explicit theory of theoretical and practical self-deception. However, we can reconstruct it following his conception of rationalizing with regard to theoretical and practical reason because Kant here repeatedly refers back to a common basic structure of error, which consists in our tendency to justify and immunize ourselves against external critique by means of a logic of illusion — be it in epistemological or moral–philosophical terms. This allows us to refer to various works of Kant’s philosophy and to identify a general structure of error that can be explicated in different perspectives — be they epistemological, ethical, logical, or political.

Up to now, such a reconstruction of Kant’s theory of error has been a desideratum in research because only either the theoretical or the practical self-deception has been discussed but not its common root.<sup>1</sup> In her recent study *Kant on Evil, Self-Deception, and Moral Reform*, Laura Papish has argued that Kant’s philosophy provides a “highly attractive view about the cognitive dimensions of evil”

1 For the moral philosophical perspective see Green (1992), Madore (2011), Papish (2018), and Noller (2021b). For the theoretical perspective see Grier (2004). For the theoretical and practical perspective of error, see Noller (2021a).

(Papish, 2018, p. 3). However, Papish does not sufficiently relate these rational and cognitive dimensions of immoral action to Kant's conception of theoretical error, although she stresses the importance of Kant's notion of the dialectic of reason for understanding Kant's theory of immoral action and self-deception (Papish, 2018, p. 51). Also, Papish does not consider the unity of theoretical and practical fallacies in the phenomenon of the dialectic of reason. The phenomenon of rationalizing is rarely directly related to the problem of the imputability of error but rather to the problem of moral (over)demandingness.<sup>2</sup> In what follows, I shall argue that the concept of rationalizing is crucial for both Kant's theory of the imputability of practical *and* theoretical error.

## 2. The Guilt of Error

Kant argues against a privative conception of moral and theoretical error. According to Kant, error cannot be traced back to a limitation or lack of our rational capacities: "In the restrictions of the understanding [...] lies only the responsibility for ignorance; the responsibility for error we have to assign to ourselves" (Jaesche Logic, 9: 54). However, we never err intentionally but always in the mode of self-incurred illusion so that the subject "confuses the illusion of truth with truth itself" (Jaesche Logic, 9: 53). Here, the question arises of how we can err for reasons that can be imputed to us, and what reasons we should have to deceive and lie to ourselves.

This question leads us to the problem of irrationality. Donald Davidson has pointed out that "the possibility of irrationality depends on a large degree of rationality." Irrationality is not simply "a lack of reason" but a "perturbation of reason"; thus, it cannot be understood in a merely privative way (Davidson, 2001, p. 99). Davidson speaks in this context of the "paradox of irrationality": "The idea of an irrational action, belief, intention, inference, or emotion is paradoxical. For the irrational is not merely the non-rational, which lies outside the ambit of the rational; irrationality is a failure within the house of reason" (Davidson, 2004b, p. 169). Irrational actions can be made more comprehensible from the reasons-perspective of the agent, which Davidson calls *rationalizing* (Davidson, 2004b, p. 169). According to Davidson, rationalizing means that the reasons for understanding an irrational action carry with them an "aura of rationality"; that is, they always claim justification and are related in a coherent way by "fitting into a rational pattern" (Davidson, 2004b, pp. 169–170). This can be described as a kind of rational self-deception, as Davidson puts it: "when we try

<sup>2</sup> Van Ackeren and Sticker (2015, p. 77) argue that "when Kant discusses *rationalizing*, he addresses aspects of what we today discuss as the problem of (over-)demandingness."

to explain in any detail how the agent can have come to be in this state [scil. of self-deception], we find ourselves inventing some form of rationalization that we can attribute to the self-deceiver, thus diluting the imputed inconsistency” (Davidson, 2004a, p. 199). In this context, Davidson stresses the importance of *reasons* for irrationality:

[I]rrationality appears only when rationality is evidently appropriate: where both cause and effect have contents that have the sort of logical relations that make for reason or its failure. Events conceived solely in terms of their physical or physiological properties cannot be judged as reasons, or as in conflict, or as concerned with a subject matter. (Davidson, 2004b, p. 180)

As Davidson puts it, mere (natural) causes or “[b]lind forces are in the category of the non-rational, not the irrational” (Davidson, 2004b, p. 180). Hence, rationality and irrationality are more closely related than usually thought.<sup>3</sup> This conception of irrationality allows us to find a middle ground between fatalism and arbitrariness concerning error: neither does error consist in unavoidable influences that are not to be imputed to us, nor can we arbitrarily decide to err.

Kant was aware of the problem of how we can intentionally will the morally wrong by reference to our reason:

The human being must make or have made *himself* into whatever he is or should become in a moral sense, good or evil. These two [characters] must be an effect of his free power of choice, for otherwise they could not be imputed to him and, consequently, he could be neither *morally* good nor evil. (RBMR, 6: 45)

At this point, we need to further determine what Kant generally understands of an evil action. In its general structure, an evil action follows from a person’s maxim, which contains a relationship between the moral law and one’s own individual interests that are grounded in self-love: “he [scil. man] is aware of the moral law and yet has incorporated the (occasional) deviation from the same into his maxim” (RBMR, 6:32).<sup>4</sup> However, why should a person act immorally if she is “aware of the moral law,” as Kant puts it? It is, according to Kant, “hard to comprehend [...] how any power should deviate from its own essential laws” (Jaesche Logic, 9:53), so that the same rational capacity that gives the moral law could be the reason for its contravention. Therefore, Kant needs to develop an account of practical error and self-deception that explains our propensity to deviate from the moral law. This raises the more general question of the reasons for error — be they theoretical or practical. In what follows, I shall explore this question by further analysing the practical dialectic as an abuse of reason consisting

3 See Papish (2018), p. 79: “[S]elf-deception is not merely a form of willful irrationality, but more a sophisticated and rationally mindful form of irrationality.” Rüdiger Bittner also stresses that “unreasonable acting on reasons will have to be admitted on any account of reasons” (Bittner, 2001, p. 57).

4 Henry Allison (1990, p. 40) has called this the *Incorporation Thesis*.

in practical self-deception. Kant's concept of practical self-deception will open a way to take a third path beyond voluntarism and intellectualism: Mere voluntarism lacks a justification for our error (we would just act arbitrarily), whereas intellectualism cannot explain how we should err at all once we know what is (morally) right and wrong. Special reference will be made to Kant's concept of *dialectic* as a *logic of illusion* and to his concept of *rationalizing*. Finally, I examine which maxims Kant develops in order to escape the dialectic of reason in theoretical and practical terms.

### 3. Rationalizing

Kant understands error as being imputable insofar because the will uses reason to construct an illusory but nonetheless rational order. Sensibility alone cannot be the source of error because, according to Kant, it has no propositional structure: "Inclination is blind and servile, whether it is kindly or not; and when morality is in question, reason must not play the part of mere guardian to inclination but, disregarding it altogether, must attend solely to its own interest as pure practical reason" (CprR, 5:118). Hence, error must have its origin in the *relationship* between sensibility and reason:

The ground for the origin of all error will therefore have to be sought simply and solely in the *unnoticed influence of sensibility upon the understanding*, or to speak more exactly, upon *judgment*. This influence, namely, brings it about that in judgment we take merely *subjective* grounds to be *objective*, and consequently confuse *the mere illusion of truth with truth itself*. For it is just in this that the essence of illusion consists, which on this account is to be regarded as a ground for holding a false cognition to be true. What makes error possible, then, is *illusion*, in accordance with which the merely *subjective* is confused in judgment with the *objective*. (Jaesche Logic, 9:54)

In error, we are not simply passively subject to the heteronomous influences of sensibility and inclination but refer to them by *judging*. However, here the question arises as to what extent reason itself can be the reason for error. In order to answer this question, Kant refers to a lack of concentration of our understanding:

[O]ne can make the understanding the author of errors, namely, insofar as it allows itself, due to a lack of requisite attention to that influence of sensibility, to be misled by the illusion arising therefrom into holding merely subjective determining grounds of judgment to be objective ones, or into letting that which is true only according to the laws of sensibility hold as true in accordance with its own laws. (Jaesche Logic, 9: 54)

However, the ultimate responsibility for error is to be attributed to the free subject that uses her understanding in the wrong way due to her propensity to transcend her epistemic limits:

In the restrictions of the understanding, then, lies only the responsibility for ignorance; the responsibility for error we have to assign to ourselves. Nature has denied us many cognitions, to be sure, it leaves us in unavoidable ignorance concerning so much, but still it does not cause error. We are misled into this by our own inclination to judge and to decide even where, on account of our limitedness, we are not able to judge and to decide. (Jaesche Logic, 9: 54)

Kant argues against a merely privative conception of error. Rather, in every false judgement there must always be something true and positive, for “a total error would be a complete opposition against the laws of the understanding and of reason” (Jaesche Logic, 9: 54). The structure of judgement, which consists in synthesizing subject and predicate by our understanding, is already a logical achievement that bears traces of truth insofar as it is formally intended as an — albeit illusory — correspondence relation. Joëlle Proust has pointed to the importance of the phenomenon of error from the perspective of the philosophy of mind and animal intelligence. The possibility of error does not describe a mere defect but rather represents a “significant step in evolution,”<sup>5</sup> as she puts it.

In his *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant speaks of “logic of illusion” which he calls “a sophistical art for giving to its ignorance, indeed even to its intentional tricks, the air of truth, by imitating the method of thoroughness, which logic prescribes in general, and using its topics for the embellishment of every empty pretension” (CpR, B 86). Kant describes this active production of an “air of truth,” which can be traced back to the individual use of reason by the concept of “rationalizing” (*Vernünffteln*).<sup>6</sup> This concept can be found equally in Kant’s theoretical and practical philosophy. Kant uses different expressions for rationalizing (*Vernünffteln*) in his entire philosophical work. In his *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason*, Kant speaks of “sophistry”<sup>7</sup> (*Vernünfftellei*) (6:71n.) when we transcend our epistemic limits and refer to constitutive principles for the supersensible objects instead of regulative ones. Also in his *Critique of the Power of Judgement*, Kant speaks of “sophistry”<sup>8</sup> (*Vernünfftellei*) that takes place if we project the concept of purposiveness into nature for subjective instead of objective reasons (CPJ, 5:359–60). In his *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant distinguishes between “rational” (*Vernunftschlüsse*) and “rationalizing” or “sophistical interferences” (*vernünfftelnde Schlüsse*) (CpR, B 397).<sup>9</sup> The latter represent a rational hybrid, “because they are not thought up, nor do they arise contingently, but have

5 Proust (2005), p. 226.

6 For a characterization of practical rationalizing in Kant, see van Ackeren and Sticker (2015), p. 77, p. 85; Sticker (2017a), Sticker (2017b); however, without reference to the more general problem of a dialectic of reason and of the problem of irrationality. For this problem, see Noller (2021a).

7 Transl. Paul Guyer and Allen Wood.

8 Transl. Paul Guyer and Eric Matthews.

9 Transl. Paul Guyer and Allen Wood.

sprung from the nature of reason” (CpR, B 397). Such sophistical conclusions or “sophistries” (*Sophisticationen*) are, as Kant further explains, “not of human beings but of pure reason itself, and even the wisest of all human beings cannot get free of them; perhaps after much effort he may guard himself from error, but he can never be wholly rid of the illusion, which ceaselessly teases and mocks him” (CpR, B 397).

According to Kant, “rationalizing” (*Vernünfteln*) means a propensity of reason to generate a false and illusory order that transcends the critical limits of our knowledge and immunizes itself by a coherent order — be it theoretical or practical. In theoretical terms, we are transcending the limits of possible experience; in practical terms, we are transcending the moral law. By rationalizing, reason generates a transcendental illusion that is indeed coherent but not real and therefore requires a critique, which is predetermined by the constitution of the transcendental conditions of cognition of the finite subject. As Kant further explains in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, the logical illusion consists “in the mere imitation of the form of reason.” Reason is thereby “subjectively regarded as a human cognitive faculty” so that here only an illusion of objectivity is produced (CpR, B 353). Kant characterizes this phenomenon as a “*natural* and unavoidable *illusion* which itself rests on subjective principles and passes them off as objective” (CpR, B 354). At the same time, he emphasizes that the disposition of this illusion is *structurally immanent* to reason and does not only consist in an individual incapacity. In this respect, the dialectic of reason and its tendency to create illusions affects all finite subjects of cognition, understood as mental operations, just as the propensity to evil affects all subjects of freedom and morality.

The phenomenon of rationalizing thus occurs precisely where the general capacity of pure reason conflicts with the finiteness of the subject of knowledge and its transcendental limitations. Thereby, reason’s inner tendency to the unconditional is illusorily compensated by the subject’s finiteness and individuality that contrasts it. This compensation stems from the fact that the finitely conditioned moral subject is confronted with *unconditional* commandments of the moral law.<sup>10</sup> The finite subject therefore attempts to systematically weaken them through the strategy of rationalizing. It wants to allow itself exceptions that are to be justified,<sup>11</sup> for which a certain form of rationality is necessary. Papish interprets the roots of rationalizing as our propensity to *overdetermine* our maxims: “A human being wants to not sacrifice either of the two incentives that are constitutive of human life, and in holding

10 In the more recent literature, this problem is dealt with under the term (*over*)*demandingness*. See Marcel van Ackeren and Martin Sticker (2015) and Papish (2018), p. 51.

11 See for the issue of moral exceptions in Kant: Buchheim (2019), pp. 306–307, however without a deeper analysis of the problem of rationalizing.

on to both of them, she will often end up with either nothing or, more precisely, with a set of actions that secure neither of her interests. [...] This desire to strive for more than one can have, ought to have, or needs to have is implicit within the Dialectic. Reason [...] is characterized by a certain hunger or conative energy that can feel irresistible, even though it often works against human interests” (Papish, 2018, p. 51). However, reason according to Kant does not only transcend its theoretical and practical limits. Rather, it thereby generates the illusion of being *justified* in transcending them. Therefore, we always find a kind of rationality involved in the dialectic of theoretical and practical reason. As I shall argue, this propensity of reason to overdetermine our maxims can be understood as a strategy to escape the demandingness of pure practical reason by immunizing oneself against external critique.

Rationalizing is not a kind of moral weakness or a privation of a human capacity but, as a propensity, a *real* opposite of duty. Rationalizing as a form of self-deception is closely connected with what Kant calls an “inner lie” (MM 6:430f.).<sup>12</sup> We lie usually to *other* people who do not know of our intention. Their ignorance of our intent to deceive them seems to be the very condition for a successful lie. But how can we lie to ourselves if the liar and the one who is lied to coincide in us? In his *Metaphysics of Morals*, Kant speaks of a “dual personality,” which the person who accuses and judges herself in conscience must think of. This “doubled self” stands “trembling at the bar of a court that is yet entrusted to him,” but “on the other hand, itself administers the office of judge that it holds by innate authority,” in such a way that “reason is not to fall into self-contradiction” (MM, 6:439 n.). The inner lie consists in sophisticatedly obscuring one’s conscience by providing reasons to transcend the limits of reason.

#### 4. Practical Self-Deception

Complementary to the theoretical dialectic, in his *Critique of Practical Reason* and his *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason* Kant deals with the practical dialectic. Although scholars have argued that Kant has changed his mind during writing his major philosophical works, we can interpret the *Religion* as further explaining the general notion of practical rationalizing in terms of individual choice.<sup>13</sup> Here, the question arises of how we can imputably commit a practical fallacy and thus act immorally. As in his theoretical philosophy, Kant also

12 For a discussion of the relationship between *rationalizing*, *inner lie*, and *self-knowledge*, see Noller (2021b), pp. 10–11.

13 I argue against the thesis according to which Kant here is practicing a kind of self-criticism, as Prauss (1983), p. 93, has argued.

argues in his moral philosophy that a practical fallacy is not a purely privative phenomenon but a specific form of free imputable activity. According to Kant, the empirical constitution of man cannot provide a reason for the freedom of evil because it only provides facts about his natural condition through desires and inclinations. But the root of evil cannot lie in reason itself either. Kant writes in this regard: “[A] reason exonerated from the moral law, an *evil reason* as it were (an absolutely evil will), would on the contrary contain too much, because resistance to the law would itself be thereby elevated to incentive (for without any incentive the power of choice cannot be determined), and so the subject would be made a *diabolical being*” (Rel. 6:35). This raises the question of how to understand the reasons of immoral action.

It is Kant’s concept of *rationalizing* that provides an answer to the question of how evil actions can be committed for imputable reasons that constitute an order of illusion. In his *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View*, Kant defines *rationalizing* as “a use of reason that misses its final end, partly from inability, partly from an inappropriate viewpoint” (APPV, 7:200). Kant then directly adds the following definition: “*To rave with reason* means to proceed according to principles in the form of one’s thoughts / but in the matter or end to use means that are directly contrary to it.” Kant’s distinction between form and matter can be understood in the following way: by rationalizing, a formal coherence of maxims is generated, which, however, only suggests the illusion of morality and conformity to the moral law but in reality follows material and individual motives.

From a practical point of view, rationalizing consists in putting forward reasons against the absolute demand of the moral law and thus constructing one’s own moral order within which one’s action finally *appears* to be good. Thus, in the phenomenon of rationalizing, transcendental dialectics and the propensity to evil prove to be structurally identical because they concern a tendency inherent in human reason to disregard and transcend its finite epistemic or moral boundaries. In the *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, Kant speaks of a “powerful counterweight to all the commands of duty,” which man “feels” in himself. Pure practical reason, by its universal and categorical commandment, sets back individual needs; and a “natural dialectic” arises from this opposition that Kant defines as a “propensity to rationalize (*vernünfteln*) against those strict laws of duty” (GMM, 4:405). This propensity itself bears rational traits, that is, as in the case of theoretical dialectic, it is a form of perverted reason. Likewise, it does not concern individual agents but humanity in general. This shows that pure reason, insofar as it is confronted with the finitude of human existence — whether in cognition or action — can be the cause of an imputable error by transcending its limits.

In general, the dialectic of pure reason consists in the fact that it demands “the absolute totality of conditions for a given conditioned” (CprR, 5:107) and falsely



thinks that it finds it in the finite — be it in phenomena or in one's own individuality. As in the case of theoretical reason, the confrontation of absolutely commanding moral reason with human finiteness evokes a tendency to circumvent this demand and to seemingly fulfil it in an irregular manner, just as the dialectic of theoretical reason “consists in the mere imitation of the form of reason (the illusion of fallacious inferences)” (CpR, B 353). But this practical production of illusion, which takes its form from reason and thus possesses a rational structure, is now deliberately brought about, from which the moral evil ultimately arises.

The concept of rationalizing as a *propensity* of reason returns prominently in Kant's practical philosophy.<sup>14</sup> What is the activity of this “propensity”? It consists in the attempt to argue by means of reason against the demand of the moral law, that is, to *abuse* reason. Rationalizers attempt to find reasons to justify their individual interests as being exempt from the demand of the moral law, that is, “to cast doubt upon their validity, or at least upon their purity and strictness, and, where possible, to make them better suited to our wishes and inclinations, that is, to corrupt them” (GMM, 4:407).<sup>15</sup> Such a construction of reasons, however, which makes one's own actions appear in a morally good light, is nothing more than a practical self-deception — of course a self-deception which must be traced back to one's own will — and is thus imputable. A further central concept besides that of *rationalizing* is the concept of *self-conceit*. It means the deliberate superordination of the individual interests over the moral law, which concerns *the dear self* (GMM, 4:407) in contrast to the generality of pure practical reason. Rationalizers “rationalize against those strict laws of duty and to cast doubt on their validity” (GMM, 4:405). This propensity of rationalizing consists in “making oneself, according to the subjective determinants of one's arbitrariness, the objective determinant of the will in general” and “the supreme practical condition” (CpR, 5:74). According to Kant, we are not passive spectators of an inner-psychic conflict of forces; rather, the propensity for self-conceit must be understood as wilfully structured — not as a mere defect, but as something active that is itself morally imputable to the agent. Rationalizers are fully responsible for their actions although or just because they misuse their faculty of reason.

## 5. Conclusion

How can we escape the dialectic of reason — be it in theoretical or practical regard by mastering our propensity to rationalize?<sup>16</sup> It is significant that Kant has

14 For a discussion of practical rationalizing, see Noller (2021b), pp. 7–8.

15 See for the issue of moral exceptions in Kant: Buchheim (2019), pp. 306–307.

16 For a discussion of this question, see Noller (2021b), pp. 12–13.

dealt with this question, which concerns his first and second *Critique* in his *Critique of the Power of Judgement*, which is supposed to conclude his critical philosophy. If we understand the propensity of rationalizing as a strategy to escape the demandingness of pure practical reason, and to immunize ourselves against moral demands, we can interpret Kant's concept of critique as a corrective to this propensity. In order to escape the theoretical and practical dialectic, Kant develops in his third *Critique* three rules of "common sense" (*sensus communis*), which are intended to prevent us from self-deception in our use of reason<sup>17</sup>:

- (1) To think for oneself,
- (2) To think in the position of everyone else,
- (3) Always to think in accord with oneself (CPJ 5: 294).

Kant relates each of the maxims to a human faculty at the centre of his three critiques: "One can say that the first of these maxims is that maxim of the understanding, the second that of the power of judgment, the third that of reason" (CPJ, 5:295). He describes the first rule as the "maxim of self-thinking" or "the enlightened mode of thought" (Jaesche Logic, 9:57). It is "the maxim of a reason that is never passive" (CPJ, 5: 294). It refers directly to Kant's "An Answer to the Question: What Is Enlightenment?" from 1784, in which he had already described the immaturity of man as "self-incurred" (WIE, 8:35) and had explicitly ascribed it "not in lack of understanding" but to the individual free decision of the subject. The "self-incurred minority" that Kant diagnoses can be interpreted in terms of our propensity to rationalize. Therefore, the merely individual use of reason, which misuses it by rationalizing, must be extended to a general, and that means, *public* use, which prevents the tendency to self-immunization.

In order to emerge from self-incurred minority, the mere *individual* use of reason must be extended to a general, that is, *public* use. Kant thus defines the second maxim as "*broad minded*" and as "the extended mode of thought," as "the maxim of putting oneself in the viewpoint of others in thought" (Jaesche Logic, 9:57). This maxim is intended to break through the immanence of reason insofar as the mere monological coherence of the dialectical illusion can now be questioned in intersubjective *dialogue*. The person "sets himself apart from the subjective private conditions of the judgment, within which so many others are as if bracketed, and reflects on his own judgment from a *universal standpoint*" (CPJ, 5:295).

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17 Onora O'Neill has interpreted Kant's notion of *sensus communis* in terms of a "worldly character of a vindication of reason" (O'Neill, 1989, p. 26) and called it a *politics of reason* (O'Neill, 1989, p. 25), however, without relating it to the problem of rationalizing and without interpreting it as a solution to it. For a discussion of the concept of *sensus communis* in light of the problem of rationalizing, see Noller (2021a), pp. 47–50; and Noller (2021b), pp. 12–13.

Finally, Kant refers to the last of the three maxims cited as the “*consistent* way of thinking,” and as the maxim “of reason” (CPJ, 5:295). Thereby, the person enters into an inner dialogue with herself and questions her judgements sincerely and critically. It is about being coherent in one’s judgement as well as entering into an inner-subjective conversation, reflecting critically on oneself from the outside like “at the bar of a court” (MM, 6:439 n.) Kant argues that the third maxim can be understood as the unity of the first and second maxim because it “is the most difficult to achieve, and can only be achieved through the combination of the first two and after frequent observance of them has made them automatic” (CPJ, 5:295).

By their interaction and unity, these three maxims constitute the common sense (*sensus communis*), which Kant calls the “idea of a *communal* sense, i.e. a faculty for judging” (CPJ, 5:293). Thus, it is guaranteed that the rationalizing subject sees itself in a position “as it were to hold its judgment up to human reason as a whole and thereby avoid the illusion which, from subjective private conditions that could easily be held to be objective, would have a detrimental influence on the judgment” (CPJ, 5:293). Kant describes the *sensus communis* in his essay on “Answering the Question: What Is Enlightenment?” as the freedom “to make public use of one’s reason in all respects” (8: 36). Its mode of operation can be realized “by one holding his judgment up not so much to the actual as to the merely possible judgments of others, and putting himself into the position of everyone else, merely by abstracting from the limitations that contingently attach to our own judging” (CPJ, 5:294). This abstraction by common sense means that “the formal peculiarities of his representation or his representational state” are to be taken into account so that “one is seeking a judgment that is to serve as a universal rule.” This corresponds to the demand of the categorical imperative in its anti-dialectic dimension — be it in the theoretical or practical use of reason.

Kant further argues that our common sense allows us “*to orient* oneself *in thought* or in the speculative use of reason by means of the common understanding, when one uses the *common* understanding as a test for passing judgment on the correctness of the *speculative* use” (Jaesche Logic, 9:57). This refers to Kant’s essay on “What Does It Mean to Orient Oneself in Thinking?” from 1786, where he speaks of common sense in terms of “the maxim that it is necessary to orient oneself in the speculative use of reason [...] by means of a certain guideline” (WOT, 8:133).

The public use of reason in terms of common sense ultimately implies a political dimension and the perspective of avoiding the dialectic of reason through a social (re)form by transcending the self-referential individuality towards a free society of giving and taking of reasons, which can also manifest itself medially

and institutionally. The unity of Kant's critique of the human faculties becomes clear not in their success but where they are in danger of error.

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