

## On the Difficulty of Letting ‘Thinking’ Appear: How to Teach the Experience of ‘Thinking’

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There is presently no theory of the *experience of thinking*, the never-ending and lightning-fast experience we make when we ‘think’. (The Greeks considered it as the highest bliss humans could achieve since it reflected for them the ‘unmoved mover’ himself, God.) Nor have people shown a lot of effectiveness in teaching an awareness of it in order to help adult cognitive development along.

In a world of appearances (which include you yourself), *thinking* itself never appears. The ‘thinking ego’ hides (like a god); it has no intention to reveal itself.

DTF, the *Dialectical Thought Form Framework*, sheds light on this absence. It identifies and names thoughts, but only their formal structure, not their content. It does so with the help of interlocutors and listeners who know about moments of dialectic and their associated thought forms (TFs). Such people are the new lovers of wisdom.

The news that thinking can, after all, be revealed (but, as we will see, only partially) both points to a revolution and is thus unwelcome to most: people do not care to have the complexity of their thinking revealed in public, or even in intimate circumstances. For many, whether in dialogue or in composing texts, DTF reveals too much, as well as on account of ‘too much effort’ in assessing cognitive profiles.

However, to make the structure of thinking ‘appear’, thereby un-hiding the ‘thinking ego’, is vital to many pursuits, such as collaboration in organizations, striving for political consensus, reducing suffering from undeveloped thinking, fostering cognitive development, etc.

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Indebted in this to Hannah Arendt’s insight into Kant’s work, I here introduce an important distinction: that between ‘thinking’ and ‘cognition’. As she lucidly points out in ‘The Life of the Mind’ (1971), thinking is “about” something, while cognition is an exploration of the “what” that is ‘thought about’. Thinking itself never appears; its process remains hidden. However, cognition has no choice but to become manifest, in text or speech; it confronts the human mind with ‘objects’ by way of the five senses that it cannot refuse to concern itself with.

A diagram will make this clearer.

It depicts the ‘four moments of dialectic’ – often logically reduced to ‘classes of thought forms’, thereby bereaving them of their ontological meaning as well as an ability to trace epistemic processes from a ‘thinking’ point of view.

As shown, these moments are not independent of each other. In fact, once isolated from each other they lose their ability structurally to trace a train of thought.

The diagram comprises 2 sets of arrows, one internal and one external. The internal leads to T (transformational systems), the external one leads into the three moments of dialectic that needs to be fused to understand such systems.

The inner arrows (CPR→T) trace the movement of *cognition*; the outer ones (T=>CPR) that of *thinking*.

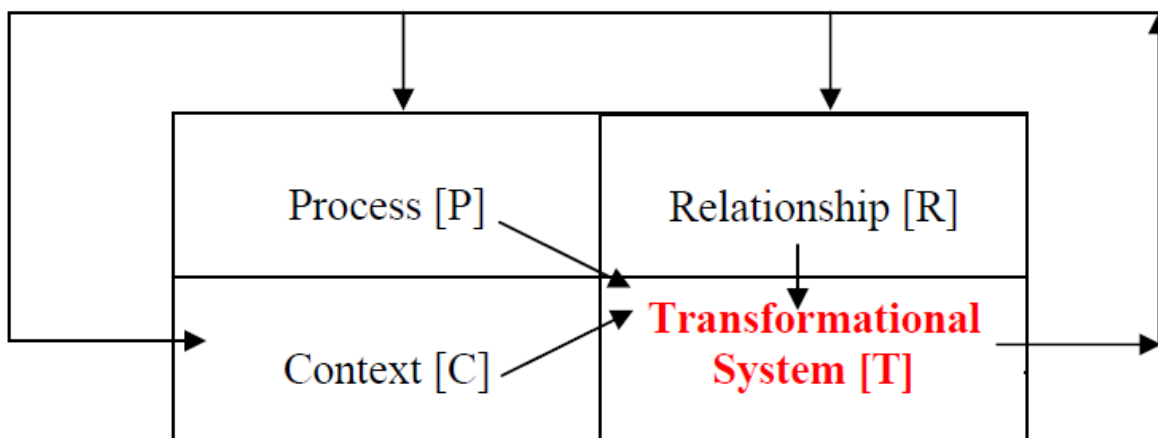


Fig. 1 The Twofold Movement-in-Thought in DTF

In terms of Fig. 1, *cognition* becomes manifest because it moves from the dialectical moments C, P, and R (context, process, relationship) toward and into T (transformation), as shown by the internal arrows in the figure pointing to T. Here, T describes unceasing activity, thus the ‘thinking ego’ itself (CPR→T). The thinking ‘behind’ cognitive activity, however, has no way to appear “by itself”. The ‘thinking ego’ itself never becomes manifest except through the cognition striving to ‘reach’ it. The ‘thinking ego’, that is, *the experience of thinking as pure activity*, never appears, as much as the thinker may be aware of it. Rather, it informs the three dimensions of cognition here indicated as *moments of dialectic* (T→CPR), thus appearing as thinking focused on objects, thus cognition.

**There is not a single human thought that does not comprise both movements, the one “out of T” which is thinking, and the one (deeper) “into T”, which is cognition.** Cognition has objects, thinking does not. Thinking is intuitive and “about” something, which means it can have many objects, and these can be associated with moments C or P or R, depending on what the cognizer chooses to place himself into when speaking or writing.

The first movement, from T to CPR, has holistic and systemic directionality; it forms the horizon which the countermovement, of CPR→T, is always trying to reach, but never quite reaches. Try what it may, cognition, in unfolding the complexities of the real world, always fails to make the ‘thinking ego’ itself appear. Rather, this ego “underlies” cognition which makes only traces of it manifest in CPR.

This is what Socrates meant when he said that “thinking is very, very fast, and you can never catch up with it”.

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For instance, in thinking about a ‘house’, we start with an intuitive and vague holistic *image* (almost a platonic idea of something that ‘houses’ people or animals). When speaking of, or writing about, ‘house’, we aim to concretize this fuzzy image by providing details, using first Context, and then Process and Relationship TFs to make it concrete. In this process, ‘thinking’ (out of T) and cognition (into T) dovetail.

In cognition (CPR) by itself, there would be nothing to concretize of not sustained by thinking. In thinking (T) without cognition, what there is to concretize would never “appear”; it would be kept hidden in pure thinking, and that thinking would potentially never end, or would unravel into nothingness if cognition – a messenger of the real world (sent to us by Kant) -- would not intervene.

### Conclusions

The bifurcation of human thinking into ‘thinking itself’ and ‘cognition’ has important consequences for teaching people to “think better” and get to “see” more of their own and the real world’s complexity.

Obviously, the teacher needs work in both directions, thinking and cognizing, at the same time, moving into T as much as out of it. The trouble is: **one can move into T, thus into thinking, only as far as one has moved out of it, into C, or P, or R.** That is the catch both in learning to think dialectically and to teach such thinking. Hegel called this double movement “the effort of the concept”, and became its first master.

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In previous blogs, I have suggested that the double movement of thinking can best be supported by two modes of teaching, one supportive of the other: the analysis of transcribed interview text fragments in terms of DTF thought forms, balanced with a real-time dialogue, first in the interview itself when focusing on moments of dialectic (CPRT), then in and by oneself when evaluating TFs associated with these moments in interview texts, and finally in practicing one’s internal, thought-form structured, dialogue in a cohort of DTF learners committed to support each other’s work.

As this blog has shown, thinking and cognizing are not the same, but nevertheless inextricably related: one cannot cognize without thinking but can be thinking without cognizing, that is, without making an ‘object’ of the appearances one is part of in the real world.

While the ‘thinking ego’ is “nowhere”, never fixated on any kind of object, the cognizing ego, its brother in consciousness, is always directed to specific appearances whose different ways of being as “objects” it is set to explore. For this reason, the thinking ego can be captured to the extent that it is ‘cognizing’, but never by itself. So, while DTF has brought us closer to gaining insight into the cognizing ego, we have essentially not come any closer to the thinking ego itself that is hiding in a “nowhere”. Nevertheless, we have gained a better appreciation of what is routinely referred to as thinking but never in a way thoroughly ‘thought through’.

I have suggested that since the thinking ego is ceaseless and pure activity simulating ‘life’, we can view it as the essence of transformation that is life (T). Left to itself, without deciding to cognize, it would forever stay within itself as Aristotle assumed of the *Nous* that Christian thinkers interpreted as *God*.

In a countermovement to this outflow from T, the ‘cognitive ego’ works in the opposite direction, namely CPR → T, pulling together the multi-dimensional aspects of appearances as objects, for the sake of understanding their coming and going by differentiating them in terms of CPR.

It is based on, and in, this countermovement of thinking and cognition, “out of” and “into” T, that DTF allows us to explore not only the internal dialogue of individuals, but the dynamic collaboration of groups and teams. The revolution that occurs in DTF is that it “makes thinking appear”, if only in the

form of cognition. However limited, that is nevertheless a revolution in approaching oneself and the world.

In my view, 'teaching dialectical thinking' is misconstrued if equated it with "learning to use TFs", since TFs are only the means to an end, tools for carrying out the double movement-in-thought *through all four moments of dialectic*.

Summary:

1. Teaching dialectical thinking is not about teaching thought forms (TFs) but evoking in the learner the double movement-in-thought 'out-of' and 'into' transformation, T, as the essence of the 'thinking ego'.
2. When this double movement succeeds, it gives rise to the lived EXPERIENCE, and not only of thinking, but of living, while in cognition experience always fails because attention is absorbed by the objects of cognition, the 'what' of thinking, rather than the process of thinking and living itself.
3. The moment of dialectic, T, although itself associated with TFs, never really appears in full, but can only be approximated, as happens in complex thinking.
4. The more emphatically T is reached by the teacher moving through C, P, and R, the more the experience of 'thinking' is communicated to the learner and can be replicated by him or her in circumstances far removed from the original set of objects it was trained on.
5. This experience then informs all further communications of the learner, whether with him- or herself, in internal dialogue, or with others.