

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 it, thereby helping 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 that. It identifies and names thoughts, but only their structure, not their content. It does so with the help of interlocutors/listeners who know its dialectical moments and their associated thought forms (TFs). They are the new lovers of wisdom.

The news that thinking can, after all, be revealed (but, as we will see, only in terms of ‘cognition’) both points to a revolution and is thus uncomfortable for 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, or else on account of too much effort.

However, to make the structure of thinking ‘appear’, or become manifest, 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.

To highlight this paradox, an important distinction, emphasized by Hannah Arendt based on her insight into Kant’s work (*The Life of the Mind*, 1971), should be introduced: the need to distinguish between ‘thinking’ and ‘cognition’. 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 to become manifest, in text or speech, because 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.

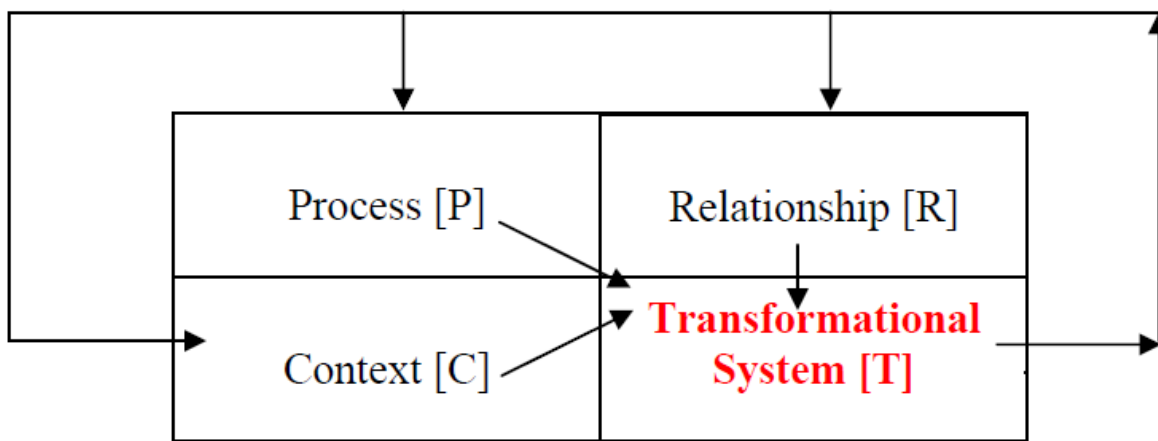


Fig. 1 The Twofold Movement-in-Thought in DTF

In terms of Fig. 1, *cognition* becomes manifest because, in terms of DTF, it moves from the dialectical moments C, P, and R (context, process, relationship) toward 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 since the ‘thinking ego’ itself never becomes manifest except through cognition striving to ‘reach’ it. The ‘thinking ego’, that is, *the experience of thinking as pure activity*, ‘itself’ 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 making itself “appear” in cognition.

In short, thinking never appears by itself. It only appears indirectly, leaving traces in the form of cognition which it “structures” by providing the three moments of dialectic referred to as C (context), P (process), and R (relationship).

There is not a single 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 could be ‘located’ in C or P or R, depending on what the cognizer chooses to place himself into. Thinking as pure activity delegates cognition to a mechanism that comprises the dialectical moments referred to as C, P, and R.

The first movement, from T to CPR, has a 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 its traces manifest in C→P→R, but not T itself.

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

For instance, in thinking about a “house”, we start with an intuitive and vague holistic image (almost a platonic idea of something ‘housing’ 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) collaborate.

In cognition (CPR) by itself, without thinking, there would be nothing to concretize; 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 -- did not intervene.

This bifurcation of human thinking into ‘thinking itself’ and ‘cognition’ has huge consequences for teaching or training 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

already moved out of it, into C, or P, or T. Hegel called this double movement “the effort of the concept”, seeing it as ‘dialectical’. (He went too far, thinking that that is how the real world works.) In DTF, with great thanks to Hegel, the Frankfurt School, and Bhaskar, we have a tool for making this effort more effectively.

I have tried to show how, on account of the bifurcation into thinking and cognition, one can ‘teach’ dialectical thinking, in <https://interdevelopmentals.org/?p=6829>, but also in <https://interdevelopmentals.org/?p=6819>. In these blogs, I am ‘thinking through’ the dilemma of how to provoke the ‘thinking ego’ itself to appear for the learner who needs to experience for him- or herself what it means to ‘think’.

I have suggested two modes of teaching, one supportive of the other: the analysis of transcribed speech from ‘interviews’ in terms of DTF thought forms, balanced with a real-time dialogue, first in the interview itself, and then in a cohort of DTF learners who initially stay focused on the TF structure of an interview (for the sake of ‘scoring’), and then, by continued practiced, expand their dialogue with others to anything they wish or care for ‘thinking about’.

What does the distinction between thinking and cognition, outlined above, adds to this finding, if anything?

Immediately, what comes to mind are these issues:

1. Teaching dialectical thinking is not about teaching thought forms (TFs) but is about evoking in the learner the movement-in-thought between and in-and-out-of the moments of dialectic (C, P, R; T).
2. Of these moments, T, although itself associated with TFs, never really appears in full, but can only be approximated by the fusion of C, P, and R, as occurs in complex thinking.
3. Even when this movement CPR → T ‘reaches’ T, the step from there into the thinking ego ‘itself’ always fails.
4. However, the more emphatically T is reached (and reaching T is practiced), the more the experience of ‘thinking’ is communicated to the learner.
5. This experience, then, informs all further communications of the learner, whether with him- or herself, or with others.

In terms of Greek philosophy, especially Plato’s Socrates, in this way the learner can “remain friends with himself”, and thus also with his or her ‘thinking ego’.