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# TRANSCENDENTAL LOGIC AND THE LOGIC OF THOUGHT

DENNIS SCHULTING\*

ABSTRACT · In this paper, I reflect on the idea, hinted at by Kant in a footnote to §16 of the B-Deduction that is not often discussed (*KrV* B 134n.), that transcendental logic is the ground of logic as a whole. This has important repercussions for the way we should see the role of transcendental logic with respect to the question of truth as well as the nature and scope of transcendental logic in relation to cognition, and in relation to general or formal logic as such. To illustrate one of the ways in which transcendental logic is fundamental to our way of thinking, I address an issue that is brought up by Kant's counterfactual claim at B 132 that if a representation is not accompanied by an 'I' thought, it is 'either impossible' or at least 'nothing for me', suggesting to some recent commentators that by the former Kant means the impossibility of thinking contradictory thoughts. Unlike these commentators, I do not think Kant is saying here that we cannot think contradictory thoughts. To believe he is betrays a misunderstanding of the metaphysical nature of transcendental logic, or so I shall argue. It is because transcendental logic is a metaphysical logic that Kant can claim that transcendental logic grounds even the whole of logic, including the possibility of thinking contradictory thoughts.

KEYWORDS · Transcendental Logic; General Logic; Thought; Contradiction; Apperception.

## 1. THE HIGHEST POINT OF 'EVEN THE WHOLE OF LOGIC' AND CONTRADICTIONARY THOUGHTS

How is the logical content of an analytic truth, e.g. *a is not not-a*, explained? Or is an analytic truth an unexplainable basic fact? In a sense it is; there is no determining reason or ground for the truth expressed in the proposition *a is not not-a* other than the basic principle that simply states that a sentence of the form *a is not-a* contains a contradiction, together with the use of a two-valued logic. Why is this principle true? Well, it just is. And this holds in general for all logical truths: all logical truths are explainable from basic analytic truths, in particular the principle of non-contradiction,<sup>1</sup> but also the two other basic principles of logic, namely, the principle of identity<sup>2</sup> and the principle of excluded middle or *principium tertii exclusi*, namely the principle that says either *p* or  $\neg p$  is true.<sup>3</sup> Logical truths cannot be explained other than by means of pure analysis, reductively down to these basic principles of logic. But there is no further basic fact from which these principles can in turn be deductively derived.

However, it is striking that Kant suggests, in an oft-noted but almost-never-discussed passage in a footnote in §16 of the B-Deduction, that there is a way in which logic as a whole is grounded in a more fundamental ground than the principles of logic. He writes:

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. *KrV*, B 189-191.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. *PND*, AA 1 389.

<sup>3</sup> See *Log*, AA IX 52-53.

And thus the synthetic unity of apperception is the highest point to which one must affix all use of the understanding, *even the whole of logic* and, after it, transcendental philosophy.

(*KrV*, B 134n., emphasis added)

The claim suggested here is that thought, or more precisely, the principle (*Grundsatz*) that constrains thought, namely the original synthetic unity of apperception, is the a priori ground of logical and conceptual truths as well as non-logical truths, the latter of which are about objects in the world or anything that is not logically or merely conceptually analysable.

That this is so can be demonstrated with the help of the very first lines of §16 of the B-Deduction, where Kant advances the well-known principle of apperception, namely «the *I think*, which must *be able* to accompany all my representations». Kant adds right after stating this principle that if this were not a necessary possibility,

something would be represented in me that could not be thought at all, which is as much as to say that the representation would either be impossible or else at least would be nothing for me.

(*KrV*, B 132)

The phrase ‘...which is as much as to say that the representation would [...] be impossible’ (*IMP*) is sometimes taken to refer to a contradictory representation, i.e. an incongruous idea composed of contradictory concepts or a typically logically contradictory proposition of the form *a is not-a*. For example, Dietmar Heidemann reads *IMP* this way.<sup>1</sup> In the case of a contradictory idea or statement, Heidemann argues, the ‘*I think*’ is «unable to accompany representations contentswise [*sic*]». He continues:

Here representations are ‘impossible’ if they are contradictory or illogical like the idea of a ‘round circle’ [I suppose he means the idea of ‘squaring the circle’ or ‘round square’, D.S.],<sup>2</sup> the mathematical equation ‘ $5 + 7 = 13$ ’, or the thought that the reader of this article does not exist.

Heidemann says that

I might be able to somehow mentally generate such contradictory ideas yet I am not able to make them intelligible, i.e. to accompany them with the ‘*I think*’, since they are logically ‘impossible’.<sup>3</sup>

This does not make sense. How can I ‘mentally generate’ contradictory ideas yet not ‘make them intelligible’ to myself by accompanying them with an ‘*I*’-thought, that is, while not thinking them? It seems to me that if I cannot make thoughts intelligible to myself, I’m not able to think them in the first place. For Kant, the whole point is to make it clear that thinking a thought *eo ipso* means to accompany that thought by an

<sup>1</sup> D. HEIDEMANN, *The “I think” Must Be Able to Accompany All My Representations. Kant’s Theory of Apperception and the Unconscious*, in *Kant’s Philosophy of the Unconscious*, ed. by P. Giordanetti et alii, Berlin, De Gruyter, 2012, pp. 37-59.

<sup>2</sup> Perhaps Heidemann implicitly refers to a passage in the *Prolegomena*, AA IV 341 (I. KANT, *Theoretical Philosophy after 1781*, ed. by H. Allison et alii, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2002, p. 132), where Kant mentions the propositions «a square circle is round» and «a square circle is not round», both of which are false, the first because «it is false that the aforementioned circle is round, since it is square», «but it is also false that it is not round, i.e., has corners, since it is a circle».

<sup>3</sup> HEIDEMANN, *The “I think” Must Be Able to Accompany All My Representations*, pp. 51-52.

'I', that is, to make that thought intelligible or transparent to that 'I'. (The modal construction of the proposition shouldn't confuse one into believing that it only refers to a potentiality; it rather signals the modal structure of a conditional: *I think a representation, a thought, if and only if I accompany it*. I come back to this further below.)

So it depends on what Heidemann means by 'mentally generating'. There is of course nothing stopping one from simply jotting down *p* and *not-p*. But what could this mean? If I could 'mentally generate' a contradictory proposition such as:

CON: Fire and non-fire are identical

but not make the contradictory nature of CON intelligible to myself by effectively thinking it since I do not occurrently accompany the representations 'fire', 'non-fire' and 'identical' and combine them, through synthesis, by virtue of the copula 'are', how could I ever know that the proposition is contradictory? It seems that Heidemann's belief here is itself a contradiction of sorts, i.e. a transcendental-logical impossibility: I cannot generate a contradiction and understand it *as* a contradiction whilst *not* thinking the representations that putatively amount to the contradiction. Well, of course I could accidentally let out two or more representations that just happen to be contradictory, by calling them out or silently imagining them: 'fire!', 'non-fire!', 'identical!' – though I would also then have to *combine* them *accidentally* by involuntarily letting out a copula ('are' in this case), otherwise my calling them out is just a random concatenation of representations, not even an accidental contradiction. Clearly, this is a tall order. (The words 'combine' and 'accidentally' are significant here. I come back to this in Section II.)

But I could never do so with a logical contradiction of which I know that it is a logical contradiction. A logical contradiction, if I think or 'mentally generate' it, is not an impossible thought, as Heidemann suggests, rather, it is a necessarily possible thought which has a semantic content that expresses a conceptual contradiction between two representations or concepts (or between two statements). The only impossible thoughts are thoughts that are not my (actual or possible) thoughts (in which case they are impossible *for me*), or more radically, thoughts that do not belong to any possible thinker. Impossible thoughts therefore cannot exist, either 'for me', as Kant says (*KrV*, B 132), or at all.<sup>1</sup> If contradictions were indeed literally impossible thoughts, nobody could think, and understand, contradictions.

Therefore, I believe Kant is here, at the start of the B-Deduction, not alluding to logical contradictions or impossibilities, but rather to a *metaphysical* impossibility which concerns the identity of the self and the unity of all of her own possible representations – but let's bracket that issue here (I say more on this further below).

At any rate – and here I differ fundamentally from Heidemann and others who espouse similar views (see below) – logically contradictory thoughts, ideas or propositions have phenomenally positive semantic content. They are phenomenally present to one, when they are thought, so must be thoughts that are accompanied by the 'I

<sup>1</sup> There could of course be subcognitive *representations* going on in my head without these being thoughts, and which are thus by definition not accompanied by my thinking them. In this way, such subcognitive representations are *eo ipso* impossible thoughts *for me*. But illogical or contradictory thoughts are not such subcognitive representations. They are still thoughts, however illogical or contradictory.

think' for any case of the selfsame 'I' having such thoughts.<sup>1</sup> When the analysis is focused on the principle of apperception governing our thoughts, we are operating at the transcendental level of the analysis of the faculty of the understanding, of thought itself. Logic strictly speaking, 'sheer logic',<sup>2</sup> which studies or determines the validity of relations between concepts and propositions, does not operate on that level. Logical thoughts – propositions, statements, truths, theorems, principles or what have you – have semantic content just as much as non-sheerly-logical, conceptual thoughts about objects. When I think, utter or more precisely think *about* a contradictory proposition such as the proposition *CON* my thought has positive semantic content, namely the logical content that says that this proposition is contradictory and violates the principle of non-contradiction. My *thought* of *CON* is *itself* not contradictory and therefore impossible.<sup>3</sup> Rather my *thought* of *CON* itself is *necessarily* possible if I were indeed to utter, contemplate, or reflect on *CON*, it being the positive content of my occurrent thinking. The possibility of thought itself is a transcendental condition of the possibility of having a logical idea (or any idea, any semantic content), formulating a sheerly logical proposition exhibiting some logically valid or invalid relation between concepts that expresses (the violation of) a logical principle such as the principle of non-contradiction, as much as it is a necessary condition of any non-sheerly logical *objectively valid* contentual idea, proposition, judgement or statement.

I should note at this point that Kant himself does appear at times to think that I cannot even *think* contradictions, and to this extent Heidemann's reading of *IMP* would be on interpretatively stronger ground than mine. In his essay against Eberhard, for example, Kant writes that «whatever conflicts with [the] principle [of non-contradiction] is obviously nothing (*not even a thought*)» (ÜE, AA VIII 195, emphasis added).<sup>4</sup> This would seem to straightforwardly contradict my account given above. Similarly, in the *Prolegomena*, Kant writes:

The logical mark of the impossibility of a concept consists, then, in this: that under the presupposition of this concept, two contradictory propositions would be false simultaneously; and since between these two no third proposition can be thought, through this concept *nothing at all* is thought.

(*Prolog.*, AA IV 341)<sup>5</sup>

In the *Critique*, however, Kant is more cautious when he says that «*no cognition (Erkenntnis)* can be opposed to [the principle of contradiction] without annihilating itself» (*KrV*, A 151 B 191, emphasis added). Notice that Kant is talking about *Erkenntnis* here,

<sup>1</sup> This contrasts also with A. NEWTON, *Kant's Logic of Judgment. Against the Relational Approach*, in *The Act and Object of Judgment. Historical and Philosophical Perspectives*, ed. by B. Ball & C. Schuringa, New York, Routledge, 2019, pp. 66-90, who believes that «contradictions [...] are not thoughts at all because there is no living bond (no synthesis) between the elements of the thought» (p. 77).

<sup>2</sup> See the discussion of Quine and 'the Sheer Logic Principle' in R. HANNA, *Cognition, Content, and the A Priori*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2015, pp. 165ff.

<sup>3</sup> Similarly, I could *think* of myself as not now existing as a logical possibility, where 'not now existing' is the semantic content of my actual self-referring thought, though not actually to exist whilst thinking is obviously a metaphysical impossibility.

<sup>4</sup> KANT, *Theoretical Philosophy after 1781*, p. 290.

<sup>5</sup> KANT, *Theoretical Philosophy after 1781*, p. 132. See also a *Reflexion* from the late 1780s: «[I]f thinking contradicts itself, then the thought and therefore the object as well are nothing, and both are stricken out» (*Reflex* 5726, AA XVIII 336).



not about *thought* as such (recall the important distinction between *denken* and *erkenntnis* that Kant makes at *KrV*, B 146, which signals the next step in the deduction proof).<sup>1</sup> For *Erkenntnis* the requirement is stricter than for thought as such because compliance with the principle of contradiction is a minimal necessary condition for cognition, regardless of the question whether it concerns analytic or synthetic judgements.

But what Kant seems to be saying in the Eberhard passage is that it is impossible to flout the principle of non-contradiction as a principle of general logic even if it is merely the case that I actually *think*, thus disallowing contradictory thoughts.<sup>2</sup> This would make it *prima facie* difficult, on Kant's account, to assess why or even to determine that, if some subject *S* were to flout the principle of non-contradiction in making a contradictory statement *p*, *p* is contradictory, e.g. the statement *a bachelor is a married man*. One could however make the case that such an assessment is in fact a second-order thought or statement *q* which points out or expresses the contradictory nature of *p*, e.g. the judgement *the statement 'a bachelor is a married man' is contradictory*, or the negative judgement *a bachelor is not a married man*; but *q* would of course itself thereby not be contradictory, and hence 'illogical'.<sup>3</sup>

Nevertheless, the more interesting point is that, given the apperceptive capacity that Kant accords thinking subjects, *S* must be seen to be able to apprehend, reflexively, the link between *himself* uttering the first-order statement *p* and then correcting *himself* by stating, by means of *q*, that *p* amounts to a contradiction. *S* should be able to *take*, in virtue of the principle of apperception, both *q* and *p* as statements or thoughts uttered or at least potentially uttered by *himself*, and understood by himself as being connected; and this would be difficult to maintain if *p* were, as Kant indeed says in the Eberhard passage, not 'even a thought' since it is contradictory, for how could *S* know that *p* was indeed a statement uttered by *himself* if not by accompanying with an 'I think' the representations that make up *p* as his own and thus unmistakably connecting them to his selfsame representations that make up *q*? It seems, then, that in the Eberhard passage Kant flouts his own principle of apperception as the universal principle of discursive thought, as «the highest point to which one must affix all use of the understanding, even the whole of logic» (*KrV*, B 134n.).

Whatever the case may be in regard to the interpretative question whether Kant allows contradictory thoughts, by no means does transcendental logic explain the principles of general or formal logic *simpliciter*, that is, answer the question of e.g. *why* we abide by the principle of non-contradiction or *why* the principle of the excluded middle says that either  $\varphi$  or  $\neg\varphi$ ; transcendental logic merely stipulates that there are certain metaphysically or quasi-metaphysically necessary conditions for the possibil-

<sup>1</sup> Note however that in the B-preface of the *Critique* Kant does say, in relation to the distinction between *erkenntnis* and *denken*, that «I can *think* whatever I like, as long as I do not contradict myself, i.e., as long as my concept is a possible thought» (*KrV*, B xxvi), thus suggesting that contradictory thoughts are not possible thoughts.

<sup>2</sup> C. TOLLEY, *Kant and the Nature of Logical Laws*, «Philosophical Topics», xxxiv, 1/2, 2006, pp. 371-407, discusses this passage in the context of an illuminating account of why Kant's general logic should be seen as constitutive, rather than normative. If Kant's general logic is to be seen as constitutive, as Tolley believes, then the laws of logic, such as the principle of non-contradiction, are not laws that we *ought* to obey, but ones which through their *sui generis* «bindingness» (p. 397) we in fact do obey in any act of the understanding, and so in any thought. Against the backdrop of the textual evidence, Tolley concludes that, in Kant's view, we do not have the freedom to think what is *illogical* (p. 389).

<sup>3</sup> Cf. TOLLEY, *Kant and the Nature of Logical Laws*, p. 391, 403n.43.

ity of what Kant calls general or formal logic (Quine's 'sheer logic') (see *KrV*, B 79, B 170), which makes general logic in that sense conditioned on Kant's transcendental logic, namely in the sense that general logic is not even possible without transcendental logic grounding it. Transcendental logic does not explain why the principle of non-contradiction is an absolute law of logic, though it can be demonstrated from what constitutes human discursive thought *that* the principle applies to *any* thought or rather combination of thoughts that one thinks, without, again, thereby explaining *why* this is so. This can be illustrated by looking at how the law of non-contradiction is conveyed in the very principle of transcendental apperception itself, as the principle of any discursive understanding (which includes making statements of analytic or conceptual truths).

The principle of transcendental apperception, the 'I think' proposition, states that I must be able to accompany all my representations, which implies – and I must pass over here many details that explain why this is so<sup>1</sup> – that representations that are not my representations strictly speaking are not accompanied, possibly or actually, by my 'I think'. In other words, representations can be called my representations only if I so accompany them, by thinking them, for any instantiation of the 'I think'. All other representations that are not accompanied by my 'I think' are *eo ipso* not my representations *sensu stricto*. That means that a representation cannot be mine if it does not belong to the set of 'all my representations', which a representation does only when it is accompanied by my 'I think' jointly with all my other occurrent representations, *i.e.* representations that I take together as one in whatever complex thought I entertain. It is intrinsically contradictory to have a representation which is claimed by me to be mine, *while not* thinkingly accompanying that representation, jointly with all my other occurrent representations, thus claiming it to belong to me. What is the contradiction here? Take two propositions

(A)  $x$  is a representation and  $x$  belongs to the set of 'all my representations'

and

(B) the 'I think' must be able to accompany  $x$

and the logical entailment

For all  $x$ , A entails B and B entails A.

B is of course a translation of sorts of the proposition that Kant himself formulates at the start of §16 (*KrV*, B 131-132). It expresses a modal necessity, indicated by the dual modality of 'must be able'. Often commentators think that the proposition states just a potentiality for reflective self-consciousness or points merely to the fact that a capacity (*Vermögen*) is concerned. But this is mistaken.<sup>2</sup> Neither is it the case that the

<sup>1</sup> For an account, see D. SCHULTING, *Gap? What Gap? On the Unity of Apperception and the Necessary Application of the Categories*, in *Immanuel Kant: Die Einheit des Bewusstseins*, ed. by G. Motta & U. Thiel, Berlin-Boston, de Gruyter, 2017, pp. 89-113, and D. SCHULTING, *Kant's Deduction From Apperception. An Essay on the Transcendental Deduction of the Categories*, revised edition, Berlin-Boston, de Gruyter, 2018.

<sup>2</sup> For an argument see SCHULTING, *Kant's Deduction From Apperception* and also D. SCHULTING, *Apperception and Self-Consciousness in Kant and German Idealism*, London, Bloomsbury, 2021, Ch. 4.

proposition articulates an existential principle concerning the psychological possibility of mere representation or the possession of representations. The modality rather concerns a necessary transcendental condition, which of course need not be existentially instantiated for all cases of representation all of the time. For one thing, note the indexical 'my' in 'all my representations', which limits the scope of the condition to the jointly accompanied set of all of those representations that *I* apperceive as mine; I do not apperceive as mine your or his representations or indeed obscure representations that remain hidden in the recesses of my mind. In other words, it expresses the conditional necessity that I must think a set of representations as mine *only if* I ascribe to myself that set of representations. There is an analytic identity relation between, on the one hand, the indexical 'my' that is a characteristic of the set of representations that I ascribe to myself, and the 'I' of 'I think', on the other hand.

The 'I think' proposition or principle of apperception articulated in B is therefore analytic (*KrV*, B 135) and conditional on there being representations that are mine. This is however not simply because I de facto possess such representations that are mine, the possession of which is then seen to be the ground for the possibility of apperceiving them as mine. Rather the conditional is a bi-conditional in that the representations being mine are equally conditional on there being an 'I' that apperceives them as such. There is an a priori identity between the mineness of representations and the synthesis that first constitutes the mineness, an identity which is not simply given but the result of an act of apperception. This a priori identity is what Kant has in mind in a central passage in the A-Deduction, discussed at length by Dieter Henrich in his seminal book on the Deduction,<sup>1</sup> where Kant states that

this unity of consciousness [of all possible appearances] would be impossible if in the cognition of the manifold the mind could not become conscious of the identity of the function by means of which this manifold is synthetically combined into one cognition. Thus the original and necessary consciousness of the identity of oneself is *at the same time* a consciousness of an equally necessary unity of synthesis of all appearances in accordance with concepts [...]; *for the mind could not possibly think of the identity of itself in the manifoldness of its representations, and indeed think this a priori, if it did not have before its eyes the identity of its action*, which subjects all synthesis of apprehension (which is empirical) to a transcendental unity, and first makes possible their connection in accordance with a priori rules.

(*KrV*, A 108, emphasis added)

The principle of apperception, which rests on an 'identity of its action' of synthesis of the manifold representations, thus expresses the fundamental logical principle of identity that a priori constrains our rational thought. Whatever I think of as being represented by me is what *I* self-consciously, in virtue of the identity of the function of synthesis, think of as belonging to myself insofar as being represented.

Now – to return to our topic – one cannot affirm A and deny B, as that would amount to a contradiction, inasmuch as A and B entail each other. That's the principle of non-contradiction right there at the fundamental level of rational thought itself. It is contradictory for me to ascribe representations to myself, as belonging to the set of 'all my representations', and at the same time deny that I am thereby think-

<sup>1</sup> D. HENRICH, *Identität und Objektivität. Eine Untersuchung über Kants transzendente Deduktion*, Heidelberg, Carl Winter Verlag, p. 102 et passim.

ing these representations since, in virtue of the aforementioned identity of the mind's 'action', there is an identity relation between the ascription of representations to myself and the thought that accompanies that ascription. Thought itself thus abides by the basic logical law of non-contradiction, or, put differently, thought expresses that principle at the heart of the logic of thought itself – by which I mean the *transcendental* logic of self-conscious thought, not the formal or general logic of valid conceptual relations.

This by no means reductively explains *what* the principle of non-contradiction is, nor, as I made it clear earlier, are contradictory statements *ipso facto* impossible thoughts, but at least it shows that thought itself fundamentally expresses the bindingness of the principle of non-contradiction and the principle of identity; and since the transcendental logic of our discursive thought is a necessary condition of all thought, transcendental logic grounds even the principles of 'sheer logic', such as the principle of non-contradiction.

This might seem contradictory itself: namely, in the sense that transcendental logic both grounds and is itself bound by the principle of contradiction. But this is only seemingly so, for it is not transcendental logic that is governed by general logic and its principles, it is the thoughts one has that are. Transcendental logic is the logic that grounds *the possibility of having* thoughts. General logic says how such thoughts must be bound by the basic principles that govern them. This still leaves the possibility of having contradictory thoughts or of making contradictory statements, since the rules of general logic are merely normative for thinking, they are not constitutive of thought. But even contradictory thoughts are bound by transcendental logic, which is constitutive of all possible thoughts, and so are a transcendental-logical or metaphysical possibility since I must be able to think of them, in virtue of the normative rules of general logic, *as* contradictory.

Recently, Clinton Tolley has argued,<sup>1</sup> in contrast to the orthodox interpretation, that with respect to the unrestricted scope of general logic transcendental logic is a special logic with a restrictive scope, that transcendental logic is not 'domain-subordinative' to, as traditionally most commentators suggest or argue, but rather 'domain-coincident' with general or formal (traditional) logic. Tolley's views in this regard tie in with my view, presented in outline above, that transcendental logic grounds even the principles of 'sheer logic' (Kant's general or 'traditional' logic, as Tolley refers to it). In the conclusion to an article that must be regarded as effecting an important shift in the understanding of the relation between Kant's general or 'traditional' logic and his transcendental logic, Tolley writes:

[T]ranscendental logic has been shown to deal with principles that govern all kinds of thinking and judging, no matter what sort of object is being thought about. This is because transcendental logic specifies a condition without which thinking would have absolutely no content whatsoever, because there simply is no other kind of content that is possible for thinking. To think *at all* is to cognize, to consciously represent an object, through concepts; to think *at all* is to think *about an object*. Yet because the generic concept of an object of thought just is the subject-matter of transcendental logic, transcendental logic, no less than traditional logic,

<sup>1</sup> C. TOLLEY, *The Generality of Kant's Transcendental Logic*, «Journal of the History of Philosophy», I, 3, 2012, pp. 417-446.

provides a *conditio sine qua non* for any instance of thinking and understanding. Both logics, therefore, are equally and unrestrictedly general in their scope, which implies that their domains must be viewed instead as perfectly coincident. The contrast between the logics is not to be understood in terms of the difference between kinds, or the difference between genus and species, but rather in terms of the difference between *aspects* of thinking or judgment that are at issue – namely, the difference between the form and the content of understanding.<sup>1</sup>

## 2. CONTRADICTIONARY THOUGHTS AND THE UNITY OF CONSCIOUSNESS

To recap: it seems that Kant does not allow the real possibility of thinking a contradictory proposition of the form  $A$  is  $\neg A$ . On the face of it, that would seem to imply that I could not make out even that a proposition is contradictory, *i.e.* I could not know that  $A$  is  $\neg A$  means to express a contradictory thought. I could not understand the principle of non-contradiction and its application. At the start of the actual deduction argument in the B-Deduction Kant advances the well-known principle of apperception, namely ‘the I think, which must be able to accompany all my representations’. Kant then adds that if this were not a necessary possibility, «something would be represented in me that could not be thought at all, which is as much as to say that the representation would either be impossible or else at least would be nothing for me» (*KrV*, B 132). The phrase ‘...which is as much as to say that the representation would [...] be impossible’ (*IMP*) is sometimes taken to refer to a contradictory representation or idea or proposition, *i.e.* a representation expressive of a typically logically contradictory proposition of the form  $A$  is  $\neg A$ .

I pointed out in Section I that to believe that Kant here expresses the view that I cannot think contradictions or contradictory concepts or thoughts is to confuse the transcendental level with the level of formulating logical propositions. The principle of apperception is a transcendental principle of the capacity to think, not a principle of logical validity. The principle of apperception is a metaphysical principle, not a logical principle. Transcendental apperception is in fact metaphysically primary with respect to logical principles, of which the principle of non-contradiction is probably the most basic. In the important footnote to *KrV*, B 133-134, Kant says that transcendental apperception grounds the whole of logic (it grounds it, it does not explain it).

If this is the case, then it cannot be the case that I cannot have contradictory thoughts – form or combine contradictory concepts – or cannot think a contradictory proposition of the form  $A$  is  $\neg A$ , for how could I otherwise understand the principle of non-contradiction, let alone understand its application in cases such as  $A$  is  $\neg A$ ? The transcendental principle of apperception allows one to differentiate between a contradictory and a logically valid proposition, between a thought that is logically false and one that is logically true, in other words it allows one to ‘apply’ or ‘use’ the principle of non-contradiction in thinking or forming propositions. But if that is true, then one must be able to have contradictory as well as logically valid thoughts and be able to hold them together, that is, combine them in thought. Transcendental logic articulates this capacity: it concerns the *original synthetic unity of consciousness*, also called the transcendental unity of consciousness, which constitutes a primordial abil-

<sup>1</sup> C. TOLLEY, *The Generality of Kant's Transcendental Logic*, p. 441, my underlining.

ity to identify and differentiate thoughts with a view to assessing their compliance or not with the principles of logic, in analytic judgements, say, as well as to establishing their objective validity – in contrast to a mere subjective validity – insofar as they combine to form a cognition of objects in synthetic judgements.

By contrast, Tyke Nunez has recently argued<sup>1</sup> that contradictory thoughts or judgements, or confused concepts such as *<bright darkness>* cannot form a unity of consciousness, and therefore are not genuine thoughts or cognitions; rather, they are failed cognitions, in that the representations fail to combine into a whole cognition. He writes:

[T]heir opposition prevents their combination. They cannot form ‘one consciousness’ or one whole of compared and connected representations. This is because their combination lacks ‘the logical form of a concept (of thinking) in general’, *i.e.*, unity of consciousness (A239/B298). [...] I have exercised my understanding in attempting to combine the predicates, but since these have the form *A* and *non-A*, they cannot be united into one consciousness. [...] I am claiming that when we have a contradictory cognition, there is no genuine thought for Kant – no whole cognition – because this is not a coherent way in which the understanding can compare and connect representations. This is because in such a case there is no unity of consciousness. The various compared representations are opposed, and not merely in what they are about, but in their form (for instance, *mortal* and *non-mortal*). I can only take these predicates to fit together into one cognition if I am confused – if I have fallen prey to a logical illusion. And in this sense, although I have exercised my understanding, I have not done it successfully: I have not coherently thought these predicates together in a single concept.<sup>2</sup>

Likewise, in a recent paper Alexandra Newton argues that «[i]n contradictions, there is no unity of consciousness of subject and predicate concepts (no predicate unity), no single act of combining or “thinking together” that I can accompany by the “I”», and that «[t]hinking a contradiction is impossible, because thinking is self-conscious, and self-consciousness requires unity or self-agreement (formal truth) in what I think».<sup>3</sup> Indeed, in Newton’s view «one cannot logically apperceive a contradiction».<sup>4</sup> She believes that «Kant thus holds a psychological version of the principle of contradiction».<sup>5</sup> According to Newton, there is in fact «no thought in a contradiction». But, somewhat vaguely and as it seems contradictorily, she thinks that while «it is impossible to think an analytic contradiction, [...] it is possible to think its negation».<sup>6</sup>

However, both Newton’s and Nunez’s interpretations would appear to rest on a misreading of Kant’s *transcendental* notion of the unity of consciousness, and the metaphysical logic that is expressed by it. The unity of consciousness concerns, not only true, non-contradictory combinations of representations that form genuine concepts or whole cognitions that are objectively valid, but also the combination of opposing or contradictory representations such as *<bright>* and *<darkness>* in the thought or confused representation *<bright darkness>*, *i.e.* combinations of representations that fail to constitute a genuine concept or a whole cognition that is at least

<sup>1</sup> T. NUNEZ, *Logical Mistakes, Logical Aliens, and the Laws of Kant’s Pure General Logic*, «Mind», CXXVIII, 512, 2019, pp. 1149-1180.

<sup>2</sup> T. NUNEZ, *Logical Mistakes*, pp. 1163-1164, 1166.

<sup>3</sup> A. NEWTON, *Kant on Negation*, «Australasian Journal of Philosophy», first published online 29 July 2020, p. 7.

<sup>4</sup> NEWTON, *Kant on Negation*, p. 16.

<sup>5</sup> NEWTON, *Kant on Negation*, p. 7.

<sup>6</sup> NEWTON, *Kant on Negation*, p. 13.



logically valid. Suppose I combine a manifold of representations, say, 'x is bright', 'x is large', 'x is heavy'. But I can also combine 'x is dark', 'x is long', 'x is fluffy'. So, if I can combine the first manifold and, independently, combine the second, then what could prevent me from combining all of these together?<sup>1</sup>

Unity of consciousness – which, it should be noted, is short for transcendental unity of consciousness, and is not just any kind of unity in consciousness, *i.e.* a psychological one – is a transcendental condition of both the unification and differentiation of representations in thought. This unity is the condition for the possible combination of representations, whilst combination (a priori synthesis) is also presupposed by «dissolution (analysis)», for one cannot dissolve what was not beforehand combined (*KrV*, B 130). What is analysed as contradictory in terms of semantic content is thus as much grounded on this a priori combination as any logically valid connection of concepts. However much a confused representation such as <*bright darkness*> is logically incoherent because contradictory, it is still a complex representation that is grounded in the transcendental unity of apperception qua a necessary synthesis to the extent that the contradictory representations are held together, 'combined', in a unity in thought, namely insofar as I even consider it. The necessity involved here concerns the necessary unification of opposed concepts in one's mind insofar as the opposed concepts are capable of being thought or represented conjointly at all.

That is to say, in order to see the concepts <*bright*> and <*darkness*> *as* contradictory I need to be able to hold them together in my thought, in terms of the necessary form that representations share in virtue of their being bound together in thought in spite of their, in this case, contradictory semantic content (contrary to what Nunez says). I could not understand that <*bright*> and <*dark*> are contradictory representations that do not together constitute a genuine concept if I were not able to unify those very representations in my thought, that is, exercise my capacity to think in thinking their contradiction in their very combination as jointly forming a unity of representations in my thinking (in virtue of the transcendental unity of consciousness) or, put differently, if, by contrast, they were concatenated in my mind in an accidental way. Thinking a contradiction is as much a necessary combinatory thought, in the transcendental sense that Kant means, as thinking a logically valid or indeed an objectively valid thought, a genuine cognition, is. The necessary unity of consciousness thus allows me to think contradictory thoughts and understand them as such, in contrast to what Heidemann, Newton, and Nunez claim is the case for Kant. So when Newton maintains that according to Kant «there is no thought in a contradiction», in other words, that «it is impossible to think an analytic contradiction», this would appear to conflict with her stating that «yet it is possible to think its negation».<sup>2</sup> For how can one apperceive the negation of a contradiction and not thereby apperceive the contradiction itself? If I think the *negation* of a contradiction, I should be able to think the contradiction itself in virtue of the unity of consciousness, because the negation of the contradiction and the contradiction form a unified complex of thoughts. Negating a contradiction is after all knowing that it is a contradiction and that its opposite is true. As Frege says: «It must be possible to negate a false thought, and for this I

<sup>1</sup> Thanks to Christian Onof for this suggestion.

<sup>2</sup> NEWTON, *Kant on Negation*, p. 13.

need the thought; I cannot negate what is not there».<sup>1</sup> Inasmuch as a false thought must have a being, as Frege says,<sup>2</sup> a contradiction must have a being, too.

What should be clear by now is that transcendental logic is a metaphysical logic of thought, which sets out the constitutive principles that govern the very possibility of thought, that is, the possibility to have thoughts *about* something in the most general sense; it gives thoughts the possibility to have semantic content. This includes the thought of logically contradictory representations, which in terms of their intension do not seem combinable. Transcendental logic is not a logic that dictates the normative rules governing relations between concepts (cf. *KrV*, B 140-141) such as rules, say, that stipulate that contradictory concepts cancel each other out. Nor does it explain why these rules are the rules they are. Transcendental logic just grounds general logic and hence logical truths, as it does possible cognition of objects and non-logical truths, in the sense that a logic of thought, what it means to have a capacity for thought, must precede the logic of valid reasoning.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> G. FREGE, *Negation*, in *The Frege Reader*, ed. by M. Beaney, Malden, MA/Oxford, Blackwell, 1997, p. 350.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>3</sup> Thanks are due to Christian Onof for his helpful comments on earlier drafts of this article. This article is simultaneously published in D. SCHULTING, *The Bounds of Transcendental Logic*, London, Palgrave Macmillan, 2021, and reproduced here with the permission from Palgrave Macmillan.



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