Abstract: It is safe to say that the main line of criticism against the reading of Critical Philosophy as Transcendental Semantics is that Kant would be concerned about semantic problems only on Critique of Pure Reason so that such reading would not make sense beyond that work. In this paper, I describe Transcendental Semantics in short words and analyze at length Kant’s theory of concepts on Transcendental Analytic of Critique of Pure Reason in order to make a suggestion: every concept has to attend the demands of Transcendental Semantics to be called a concept in critical sense.

Key-words: semantics, rules, concepts, critical philosophy.

INTRODUCTION

The main thesis of Transcendental Semantics is that, in order to have a meaning, any concept – theoretical or not – is in need to be able to be applied to a sensible domain. We do not need to know anything else about Transcendental Semantics to discuss the point of this paper. Transcendental Semantics thesis has been accept, with a condition, that we restrict its scope to theoretical concepts. So Transcendental Semantics would not be equal to Critical Philosophy.

On Kant’s Transcendental Semantics, pp. 45-47, Zeljko Loparic justifies the validity of his thesis beyond theoretical concepts by an appeal to Kant’s method of analysis and synthesis. Sensible construction of concepts or sensible examples of concepts would be essential to that method. So, since the method would be a constant in Kant’s thought, the applicability of concepts to sensible domains would be too. However, I intend to explore another possible justification for taking the whole Critical Philosophy as Transcendental Semantics. I will defend that the Kantian concept of concept refers us immediately to a semantic interpretation of Kantian philosophy while that is always rational knowledge by concepts.

My thesis depends on two basic points: 1) Transcendental Analytic is the core of the whole Kantian system, what means that, if there is any incompatibility between it and another doctrine advocated by historical Kant, the last one should be dropped. 2) Transcendental Analytic can work if and only if we accept a revolution in interpretation of concepts, what means that they are not
class concepts any more, but rules or functions of synthesis so that thinking is the same as synthesizing.

**I**

On “The Deduction of the Pure Concepts of Understanding”, Section 1, § 13, Kant explains how pure forms of sensibility can relate to objects: “since only by means of such pure forms of sensibility can an object appear to us, and so be an object of empirical intuition, space and time are pure intuitions which contain *a priori* the condition of the possibility of objects as appearances, and the synthesis which takes place in them has objective validity” (*CPR*, A 89, B121-2). By contrast, the relation between pure concepts and objects would be a problem, because an object could appear to us in empirical intuition without them:

The categories of understanding, on the other hand, do not represent the conditions under which objects are given in intuition. Objects may, therefore, appear to us without their being under the necessity of being related to the functions of understanding; and understanding need not, therefore, contain their *a priori* conditions. Thus a difficulty such as we did not meet with in the field of sensibility is here presented, namely, how *subjective conditions of thought* can have *objective validity*, that is, can furnish conditions of the possibility of all knowledge of objects. For appearances can certainly be given in intuition independently of functions of the understanding (*CPR*, A 89-90, B 122).

Before that, we were told concepts rest on functions, while we should understand a “function” as the “unity of the act of bringing various representations under one common representation” (*CPR*, A 68, B 93). If we think about that act as the one whereby the manifold of intuitions is brought together in a sensible representation, then those “functions” are conditions under which objects appear to us, even though they are not conditions under which objects are given to us. Then we would have to say that Kant misrepresents his problem on § 13. Nevertheless, we can understand that act that Kant talks about in a different way by now, since he also says that a representation is a concept when it comprehends another representations, what can be a mere class concept. But that is not Kant’s last word about concepts.

We can say that Kant understands a class concept as an analytic unity in our representations, that is, a common mark that we can find in different representations. Now, on § 10, he is concerned with a synthetic unity: “*By synthesis*, in its most general sense, I understand the act of putting different representations together, and of grasping what is manifold in them in one [act of] knowledge” (*CPR*, A 77, B 102-103). Kant makes two points that are essential to us here: a) Analytic and synthetic acts rest on the same functions: “The same function which gives unity to the various representations *in a judgment* also gives unity to the mere synthesis of various representations *in an intuition*; and this unity, in its most general expression, we entitle the pure concept of the understanding” (*CPR*, A 79, B 104-105), b) Synthesis precedes analysis: “Before we can analyse our representations, the representations must themselves be given, and therefore as

regards content no concepts can first arise by way of analysis” (CPR, A 77, B 103). Kant is not suggesting a kind of dogmatic harmony of faculties. Longuenesse has made clear why analysis depends on synthesis and both shares the same functions:

I want to suggest, then, that […] the ‘consciousness of the unity of synthesis’ immanent to any particular intuition [synthetic unity] is the condition of the empirical recognition of the generic identity of empirical representations [analytic unity] […]. If we were not conscious, for each particular intuition, that each of the elements of the manifold that we successively apprehend and reproduce in it belonged to one and the same act of apprehension/reproduction of the manifold of intuition, then we would not be capable of subsequently recognizing the generic identity of different empirical intuitions […]. The generic identity of the empirical intuitions reproduced by associative imagination is shown to be the generic identity of the acts of successive synthesis which in turn generate each of these particular empirical intuitions ‘as’ specific unities of a manifold (LONGUENESSE 1993, p. 47).1

So we can have a class concept if and only if we have a concept as a rule for synthesis of a manifold in intuition, because what is generically identical in different empirical representations is just the act of apprehension and reproduction of the intuitive manifold unified by a rule. In other words, because perception depends on concepts as “consciousness of the unity of synthesis”, we are able to have conceptions as generic representations of perceptions. But, then, an object can not appear to us without concepts and Kant made a mistake on § 132.

2

The problem with § 13 is even clearer, and Longuenesse’s point is also easier to understand, if we study the triple synthesis on section 2 of Deduction A, where Kant describes how we get a sensible representation of an object. According to a basic Kantian premise, sensibility can not unite sensible data, because it is just passivity, and it does not receive that unity either. So synthesis is an activity and its first level, the one nearest to sensibility, is apprehension: “In order that unity of intuition may arise out of this manifold […] it must first be run through, and held together. This act I name the synthesis of apprehension, because it is directed immediately upon intuition” (CPR, A 99). But we can not understand that “run through and held together”, ascribed to imagination, without the next level: the synthesis of reproduction:

if I were always to drop out of thought the preceding representations (the first parts of the line, the antecedent parts of the time period, or the units in the order represented), and did not reproduce them while advancing to those that follow, a complete representation would never be obtained: none of the above-mentioned thoughts, not even the purest and most elementary representations of space and time, could arise. The synthesis of apprehension is thus inseparably bound up with the synthesis of reproduction (CPR, A 102).

1 We have found a very similar point in Wolff: “The synthetic unity of a manifold of perceptions is […] the necessary condition of the analytic unity of a concept” (1973, pp. 68-69).

2 That is what Wolff says about § 13: “when the problem is posed in this way it has no solution, […] There can be no appearances ‘given in intuition independently of functions of the understanding’” (1973, p. 94). Later: “It is clear […] that Kant must give up the position taken in § 13” (1973, p. 156).
We “run through and held together” the sensible manifold in order to construct a “complete representation”, what would not be possible if we were not able to reproduce that successive manifold. Is that enough now? No, we need to reach the last level if we want to get a “complete representation”, the conceptual level or the synthesis of recognition:

If we were not conscious that what we think is the same as what we thought a moment before, all reproduction in the series of representations would be useless. For it would in its present state be a new representation which would not in any way belong to the act whereby it was to be gradually generated. The manifold of the representation would never, therefore, form a whole, since it would lack that unity which only consciousness can impart to it (CPR, A 103).

So recognition is a condition for reproduction and reproduction is a condition for apprehension as a “run through and held together” that produces a sensible representation. The last moment in the synthesis brings unity to the sensible manifold just like the theme brings unity to “a play, a speech or a story” (CPR, B 114)\(^3\), therefore, nothing can appear to us without recognition. Conversely, concepts are just rules of unity to turn sensible manifold into objects to us so that thinking is equal to unifying that manifold. A rule for such activity makes no sense at all without a manifold to be united. For sure, we can think about other rules as the manifold for second-order rules, but we can not extend the operation infinitely. This is the core of this paper.

At this point, we are in position to explain our main thesis. Wolff’s reading will be especially important here. We have shown that concepts are rules to turn a sensible manifold into an object to us, but we have not dealt with the critical object itself. Because of his synthesis theory, Kant has to conceive an object as the unity of a collection of representations. This amounts to say that I have a perception P of an object O when P is one of a manifold of perceptions which can be reproduced according to a rule which is the concept of O\(^4\). The idea that all those perceptions are perceptions of the same object is what binds them together. In other words, we can say that an object serves as the ground of the unity of a set of representations or that it is an especial way of organizing them. Since an object can not be a distinct entity from our representations of it, because it would be hidden from us, Wolff tells us “an investigation of the object of knowledge was turned into an analysis of the concept of that object, until finally the object become the concept – specifically, the concept for reorganizing a manifold of perceptions” (1973, p. 315).

Now because Transcendental Analytic needs to introduce the account of concepts as rules and objects as systems of sensible data, “there is a contradiction in the demand for a concept of the independently real” (Wolff, 1973, p. 315). Then we can not think about a thing in itself. There is

\(^3\) “Kant thinks [...] that a manifold acquires unity by being subjected to a certain operation, which in general can be called ‘reproduction according to a rule’. In the case of the unity of the manifold of contents of consciousness, this process of reproduction according to a rule is called synthesis” (1973, p. 101).

\(^4\) Indeed, even perception P as an organized image is determined in its form by its being part of that ruled series.
no such logical possibility because an object can not be conceived apart from sensible data and a class concept makes no sense apart from a ruled synthesis. The new semantics for concepts and objects that allows Kant to solve cognition problems does not allow him to talk about a world beyond sensible realm. To think what is beyond sensation or what affects us in a transcendental level has no meaning at all.

Wolff realizes Kant has a strategy to try to avoid the problem: “Kant continually slips from talking about an independent object to talking about an object which is known in a different way, namely, an object of an intellectual intuition” (1973, p. 315). However, I agree with Wolff, that is not enough:

an intuitive understanding (or an intellectual intuition – the two seem to be the same) knows its object ‘not discursively through categories, but intuitively in a non sensible intuition’ [B 311]. That is to say, an intuitive understanding is not compelled to introduce unity into a diversity presented in space and time. Consequently, once the categories are seen to be rules of synthesis rather than ordinary class concepts, it follows that they have not even problematic application to anything other than sensuous manifold (WOLFF 1973, p. 316).

FINAL REMARKS

I accept Kant was convinced that his ethical theory, for example, demanded that a logically possible object be given to the concept of noumenal self. Nevertheless, I agree with Wolff when he said that Kant should avoid to employ concepts as representations having a problematic application to things in themselves or noumena. The logical conclusion seems to be giving up Kant’s practical philosophy. It looks like Wolff’s choice is that. But that is not necessary if we admit the extension of our semantic principle beyond theoretical philosophy. If we can think practical concepts as rules to sensible domains other than the intuitive one (actions and feelings, for instance), then we can make sense of practical concepts in an authentic Kantian way. So to defend Transcendental Semantics beyond Critique of Pure Reason is the same as defending Critical Philosophy beyond Critique of Pure Reason.

REFERENCES

Kant’s Works:


Translations:


Other Works:

