

# Analytical Method and Synthetic Method in Marburg Neo-Kantianism

*[Método Analítico e Método Sintético no Neokantismo de Marburgo]*

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## Abstract

Kant distinguishes between two methods in philosophy: the analytical method and the synthetic method. According to the analytical method, philosophy starts from a given fact to find its conditions of possibility. On the contrary, the synthetic method starts from an obscure and confused representation to provide clarity and distinction to each concept in order to show its necessary relation with other concepts. Marburg Neo-Kantianism holds that philosophy must begin with the fact of science. These claims have led numerous commentators to identify the Neo-Kantian method as a regressive method. I will show that, according to Paul Natorp's approach, the progressive method is the fundamental method of philosophy while the analytical method is a second step in the investigation.

**Keywords:** Kant; Neo-Kantianism; analytical method; synthetic method.

## Resumo

Kant distingue entre dois métodos em filosofia: o método analítico e o método sintético. Segundo o método analítico, a filosofia parte de um fato dado para encontrar suas condições de possibilidade. Ao contrário, o método sintético parte de uma representação obscura e confusa para dar clareza e distinção a cada conceito a fim de mostrar sua necessária relação com outros conceitos. O neokantismo de Marburg defende que a filosofia deve começar com o fato da ciência. Essas alegações levaram vários comentaristas a identificar o método neokantiano como um método regressivo. Mostrarei que, de acordo com a abordagem de Paul Natorp, o método progressivo é o método fundamental da filosofia enquanto o método analítico é um segundo passo na investigação.

**Palavras-chave:** Kant; Neokantismo; método analítico; método sintético.

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## Introduction

Kant distinguishes between two methods in philosophy: the analytical method and the synthetic method. According to the analytical method, philosophy starts from a given fact to find its conditions of possibility. What is conditioned is taken as a fact and the conditions are sought. On the contrary, the synthetic method starts from an obscure and confused representation to provide clarity and distinction to each concept in order to show its necessary relation with other concepts. Kant considers the proper method of philosophy is the synthetic method.

Marburg Neo-Kantianism holds that philosophy must begin with the fact of science. The direction of philosophical argumentation is regressive. It goes from a given fact and looks for conditions of possibility. The starting point is the fact of experience. Experience is the science of nature. These claims have led numerous commentators to identify the Neo-Kantian method as a regressive method.

However, Paul Natorp, one of the representatives of the Marburg school, holds that the method of inquiry must begin with the fact of thinking. Philosophy, as an autonomous science, cannot be grounded on anything other than itself. There can be no extrinsic legitimation. The starting point is the very concept of thinking. The categories, which are the ways in which thinking exhibits its legality, must be deduced from the concept of thinking.

The problem is how to reconcile these two methodological prescriptions, how to reconcile the analytical method with the synthetic method. The aim of this presentation is to clarify this distinction. I will focus on Natorp's approach. I will show that the progressive method is the fundamental method of philosophy while the analytical method is a second step in the investigation.

First, I will briefly analyze the distinction between the analytic method and the synthetic method in Kant. Second, I will show the reasons for considering the Neo-Kantian method as an analytical method. Finally, I will explain why the Neo-Kantian method is synthetic.

## 1. Analytic and Synthetic method in Kant

The problem of method is one of the central problems of modern philosophy (Caimi, 2009, p. 75). Kant works on this issue from very early periods of his production. For Kant, the analytical method is regressive<sup>2</sup>. Kant describes the analytic method as one going from consequences to principles. According to the analytical method, philosophy starts from certain facts that must be elucidated. The fact is accepted, and the conditions of the fact are investigated. The objective validity of the fact is not questioned. The method is regressive because it starts from something known as a starting point. Then, one examines the conditions on which this fact depends. It starts from the fact and returns to the conditions of possibility that allow the fact in question to be possible. The analytical method "... starts from what is sought as if it were given" (Prol, AA 04:277). The analytical method is the exposition method of the *Prolegomena*. The facts that *Prolegomena* takes as a point of departure are the a priori synthetic judgments of pure mathematics and of pure science of nature<sup>3</sup>. Examples of these judgments in mathematics

<sup>2</sup> Certainly, the Kantian conception of the difference between analytic and synthetic method is much more complicated, as Kant's view shifted over the years (Caimi, 2014, p. 13 n49). Moreover, some scholars identify a broad and a narrow sense of the distinction (Gava, 2013, esp. 5ss). We will only focus on Kant's approach as he develops it in the *Prolegomena*. An account of Kant's views of analytic method can be found in: Falkenburg, Brigitte (2018). (Caimi, 2007, pp. xxi-xxiv).

<sup>3</sup> Kant states: "*Prolegomena* should by contrast be preparatory exercises; they ought more to indicate what needs to be done in order to bring a science into existence if possible, than to present the science itself. They must therefore rely on something already known to be dependable, from which we can go forward with confidence and ascend to the

are in geometry: “in a triangle two sides together are always greater than the third” (KrV, A25/B39)<sup>4</sup>, “the straight line between two points is the shortest” (KrV, B15; Prol, AA 04:269); in arithmetic:  $7 + 5 = 12$  (KrV, B16; A164/B205. Prol, AA 04:268). Examples of these judgments in the science of nature are: “in all alterations of the corporeal world the quantity of matter remains unaltered”, “in all communication of motion effect and counter-effect must always be equal” (KrV, B17). The a priori synthetic judgments do not stand in need of proof. These judgments are data that the method assumes.

As has been pointed out, the *Critique of Pure Reason* was unfavorably received on several occasions. The *Critique* was criticized for its length and complexity<sup>5</sup>. For this reason, Kant writes the *Prolegomena* in a more popular style (Logik, AA 24:639). The proper method of philosophy is the synthetic method. The synthetic method is the method that Kant follows in the *Critique*. The synthetic method is progressive. It starts from a first representation that is perceived as confused and obscure and seeks to gain clarity and distinction. In this process, the elucidation of the elements that constitute each part of the representation leads to an elucidation of the other parts. Reason is a system (KrV A835/B863). The way in which each part of reason operates determines the operation of the remaining areas. This systematic conception of reason demands a synthetic method of exposition. The synthetic method allows exhibiting this systematic structure of knowledge (Prol, AA 04:263ss). This method starts from the original germs without assuming anything. Nothing is put as a foundation, but a confused representation of what thought is. It is a progressive path because it advances by gaining determinations as they are required by the investigation, i.e., by the elucidation of the representation that is being analyzed<sup>6</sup>. Kant states:

In the *Critique of Pure Reason*, I worked on this question *synthetically*, namely by inquiring within pure reason itself, and seeking to determine within this source both the elements and the laws of its pure use, according to principles. This work is difficult and requires a resolute reader to think himself little by little into a system that takes no foundation as given except reason itself, and that therefore tries to develop cognition out of its original seeds without relying on any fact whatever. *Prolegomena* should by contrast be preparatory exercises; they ought more to indicate what needs to be done in order to bring a science into existence if possible, than to present the science itself. They must therefore rely on something already known to be dependable, from which we can go forward with confidence and ascend to the sources, which are not yet known, and whose discovery not only will explain what is known already, but will also exhibit an area with many cognitions that all arise from these same sources. The methodological procedure of prolegomena, and especially of those that are to prepare for a future metaphysics, will therefore be *analytic* (Prol, AA 04:274).

In the synthetic method, nothing is presupposed as given except reason itself. It starts from a fact that initially appears in an obscure and indistinct way, to gradually provide it with clarity and distinction. The organic structure of reason makes this procedure possible. Each element of reason is organically connected to other elements in such a way that when one takes an element of reason and clarifies it, this element leads to another necessary element. Each element, being clarified, introduces the one that follows. The elements are part of an organic whole and, therefore, lead to another element that is in a necessary connection with it. This new element is endowed with clarity and distinction and thus leads to another new element. Thus, increasingly complex syntheses are obtained. This is the method of philosophy. As Mario

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sources, which are not yet known, and whose discovery not only will explain what is known already, but will also exhibit an area with many cognitions that all arise from these same sources. The methodological procedure of prolegomena, and especially of those that are to prepare for a future metaphysics, will therefore be *analytic*” (Prol, AA 04:274).

4 We follow Paul Guyer’s translation of the *Critique of Pure Reason* (Kant, 1998).

5 (Cf. Kuehn, 2007).

6 Mario Caimi show how this method is carried out in the *Transcendental Aesthetic* (Caimi, 1996) and in *B Deduction* (Caimi, 2014).

Caimi explains, it can be described as an isolation-integration method (Caimi, 2007, pp. xxi-xxiv). It is not based on definitions<sup>7</sup> but on an obscure representation<sup>8</sup>. I will show below that this is the method followed by Natorp.

## 2. Analytic Method in Neo-Kantianism

In *Kant and the Marburg school*, Natorp introduces the pillar of the Neo-Kantian proposal. Neo-Kantianism proposes to undertake the task started by Kant. The aim is not to dogmatically follow the results achieved, but to return to the spirit of the critical system. Philosophy consists of a method of investigation. This method is called the transcendental method. Philosophy is the concept of a method. The central task of philosophy as a first science is the establishment of the fundamental truth. However, this task does not consist of a definitive task, but rather it is a perennial effort aimed at its development. For this reason, Natorp points out, the Marburg school does not dogmatically provide a philosophical doctrine but rather a method of philosophizing. The transcendental method represents the true return to Kant. The task is to establish a *deductio juris* for a *quid factum*<sup>9</sup>. The first requirement of the method demands a clear and intrinsic relationship to the facts to be elucidated; that is, “the firm correlation with the patent and historically determinable facts of science, morality, art, religion” (Natorp, 1912, p. 196). Natorp, following Cohen’s indications, rejects purely speculative approaches. Philosophy must find the first element to begin its task in the fact of culture. Philosophy must discover the conditions that make this fact under consideration possible.

Cassirer follows the same guidelines. In his debate with Heidegger at Davos, Cassirer argues that Neo-Kantian philosophy should not be understood as a finished theory but functionally<sup>10</sup>. Philosophy starts from a fact to find the conditions that make it possible. According to this method, philosophical research must start from a certain *factum* and proceed by searching for its conditions of possibility. Cassirer states:

I interpret the Kantian question of transcendence as Cohen has formulated it again. He saw the essence of the transcendental method in that said method begins with a fact, before which the following general definition: “Begin with a fact in order to ask about the possibility of that fact ...” (Heidegger, 1975, p. 294).

Cassirer’s and Natorp’s positions follow the guidelines introduced by Cohen. Those conditions that make a given experience possible must be found. Knowledge is not a modality of consciousness but a *factum* that is achieved in science (Cohen, 1883, p. 5). The fact is the experience, and the conditions of its possibility must be found. Experience is the science of nature. Cohen considers this to be the method followed by Kant. Kant departs from Newton’s principles of science as his starting point (Cohen, 1885, p. 1). In this regard, Cohen maintains: “...experience is given; the conditions on which its possibility rests must be discovered. (...) This is the whole business of transcendental philosophy. Then, the experience is given in

<sup>7</sup> In mathematics, the starting point is the definition, while in philosophy, the definition is the final result. (Cf. Martínez, 2019, esp. 683).

<sup>8</sup> As Caimi explains: The concept investigated in the *Critique of Pure Reason* is that of pure reason itself, taken as a faculty of metaphysical knowledge. But the starting point is the notion of representation, not taken as a psychological event but as a logical fact. That Kant will apply the method of isolating the elements is already announced in the title “Transcendental Doctrine of Elements” (KrV, A 17/ B 31) and leads, first of all, to a study of sensibility (in the Transcendental Aesthetic) (Caimi, 2014, p. 12).

<sup>9</sup> As Dufour remarks: Le néokantisme se caractérise par la repense et l’approfondissement de la distinction kantienne entre la question de droit et la question de fait (Dufour, 2003, p. 10).

<sup>10</sup> „Man muß den Begriff „Neukantianismus“ nicht substanzial, sondern funktionell bestimmen. Es handelt sich nicht um die Art der Philosophie als dogmatisches Lehrsystem, sondern um eine Richtung der Fragestellung“ (Heidegger, 1975, p. 274).

mathematics and in the pure science of nature” (Cohen, 1877 p. 24).

Marburg neo-Kantianism calls this method the transcendental method. For very sound reasons, this research method has been qualified as regressive<sup>11</sup>. According to this conception, the Neo-Kantian method “...begins with ‘the fact of science’, that is, the acceptance of mathematical physics as a *datum*; it then explains how that fact is possible, specifying the conditions for a mathematical knowledge of nature” (Beider, 2014, p. 498.). Marburg’s method of Neo-Kantianism is identified with Kant’s regressive method. Certainly, the Neo-Kantian proposal seems to lead in this direction.

However, we find in the proposal of Neo-Kantianism an indication that leads in another direction. In the next section, we will explain the reasons why the Neo-Kantian method can be considered synthetic or progressive.

### 3. Synthetic Method in Neo-Kantianism

#### 3.1. The task of Philosophy

According to Natorp, the object of investigation determines the method that should be employed in every specific field of knowledge. It is not possible to carry out the study on a certain scope of objects without considering that each scope of objects demands a peculiar method of study. The investigation is based on a minimum of assumptions, and these assumptions determine the method that will be used in the investigation. This is the way to ensure that the method that we employ is consistent with the purpose of the investigation.<sup>12</sup> For this reason, the first step of the philosophical investigation is to determine the object of philosophical research. Natorp defines the task of philosophy following the delineations of the classical tradition (Natorp, 1921, p. 460). For him, philosophy is the science that has the task of unfolding the fundamental principles of thinking. Philosophy is the first science on which all others depend. This science is the fundamental science of thinking and knowledge<sup>13</sup>.

Sciences relate to each other and to philosophy in a specific way. Natorp uses an analogy to explain such a relationship. Natorp claims that if we consider knowledge as a circle, the particular sciences go from the centre to the periphery while philosophy goes from the periphery to the centre (Natorp, 1911, p. 3)<sup>14</sup>. The multiplicity in which knowledge is branched is the field of particular sciences, which study the peculiarity of each region of knowledge. On the contrary, the task of philosophy is to find the centre that originates the periphery. Centre and periphery are two directions of the same path. However, as a centre of

11 Existing scholarship considers that the Neo-Kantian method consists in departing from the fact of science. Helmut Holzhey, Jünger Stoltenberg, Frederick Beiser, Alan Kim, Éric Dufour, Hernán Pringe, among others, claim that the Neo-Kantian transcendental method takes the science of nature as a point of departure of the investigation. (Dufour, 2003), (Kim, 2015, p. 48), (Holzhey, 2010, p. 34), (Stolzenberg, 2010, p. 133), (Beiser, 2014, p. 466, p. 23), (Pringe, 2021, p. 186).

12 For Natorp: „Durch die Eigenthümlichkeit des zu untersuchenden Gegenstandes muss die Eigenthümlichkeit der Untersuchungsmethode zum Theil bedingt sein; es lässt daher über die letztere sich nicht eher etwas feststellen, als das Gebiet der zu erforschenden Gegenstände mit Sicherheit bestimmt ist“ (Natorp, 1888, p. 2).

13 „Philosophie ist nach ihrem historischen Begriff die Grundwissenschaft, d. h. diejenige Wissenschaft, welche die Einheit der menschlichen Erkenntnisse durch den Nachweis des gemeinsamen letzten Fundaments, auf dem sie alle ruhen, sicherstellen soll“ (Natorp, 1904, p. 3). As we will see later, there is no qualitative difference between thinking and knowing. The most concise development of this issue is found in the summary of its logic lessons (Natorp, L, §2).

14 Hans Schneider explains this analogy. Cf. Schneider, 1936, p.13.

origin, philosophy guarantees the unity of knowledge. Centre and periphery are co-involved. However, it is the centre that guides and determines the periphery. This centre, observes Natorp, should not be conceived as a mere empty midpoint but rather is the origin of the periphery, its law of formation<sup>15</sup>.

In this sense, philosophy is the most abstract and general science (Natorp, 1888, p. 49, p. 54). Particular sciences study a particular domain of objects. Philosophy studies the conditions of all objectivity. It is the science of the principles of the conformation of the object in general (Natorp, 1888, p. 48)<sup>16</sup>. Therefore, this general science cannot be identified with any particular field of objects, but it is the foundation of any position of objects. The general form of knowledge determines the form of each particular cognition. A particular cognition can properly be knowledge because it obeys the rules of what in general can be legitimately called knowledge. The philosopher's task is to find this general legality that determines all particular cognitions.<sup>17</sup> The task of the philosopher is not to find *a* specific "logos" (τις λόγος) - the legality of a certain domain of knowledge - but *the* logos itself (αυτός ο λόγος) - the general legality of knowledge. The study of logos is the task of philosophy. This method is called transcendental philosophy. In contrast to the fundamental laws of philosophical thinking, the legality of sciences is derived because it is based on relative determinations of thinking. The particular cognitions expressed in the laws of specific sciences are conditioned positions of thinking. On the contrary, philosophy aspires to find the original legality. Philosophy does not seek *a* law but *the* law, not actual laws but the lawlikeness.

Consequently, philosophy guarantees the systematicity of knowledge in general, making sciences a coherent whole, and not a mere aggregate of specific cognitions<sup>18</sup>. The particular cognitions are not merely juxtaposed but coordinated as a whole. Philosophy is the articulating unity that enables this unification<sup>19</sup>. In this sense, philosophy is a fundamental science because it determines the place that all particular cognitions occupy and the relations among them. Thus, philosophy guarantees the systematic unity of science. Thanks to this systematic unity of thought, science is "one and indivisible"<sup>20</sup>. Knowledge is, in general, systematic knowledge<sup>21</sup>. Philosophy must find a system of concepts in which the analysis of

15 „Dabei hat man sich aber das „Zentrum“ nicht als leeren Mittelpunkt, sondern als zentrale Kraft, ganz im Ganzen und ganz in jedem Teil, lebendig schöpferisch das All durchwaltend und eben zum Ganzen zusammenschließend zu denken“ (Natorp, 1921, p. 512).

16 Aristotle would have recognized in his *Metaphysics* this fundamental task of philosophy. However, Aristotle identified the science of being in general with the science of substance. Plato's approach was superior in this regard (Natorp, 1888, p. 40). This would be one of the reasons to consider Aristotle's book K of *Metaphysics* to be inauthentic. Natorp thinks that there is a contradiction in considering philosophy as a science of being in general and then identification of this science as the science of God, a particular being (Natorp, 1888, esp. 49ss), (Natorp, 1888b, esp. 180ss).

17 The fundamental task of the philosopher is the "knowledge (*Wissen*) of the form of knowledge (*Erkenntnisform*)" since we generally call knowledge to a certain cognition only because it conforms to the general form of knowledge. "Aber das Wissen von der Erkenntnisform darf nicht getrennt bleiben von dem Wissen um das bestimmte Objekt, es muß in diesem zugleich liegen und zwar als es bestimmend, denn nur dem Formgesetz des Erkennens gemäß ist es überhaupt Wissen" (Natorp, 1921, p. 28). (Natorp, 1903, p. 26).

18 Geer Edel considers that the Neo-Kantians are the last philosophers who defend the idea of systematic philosophy. He holds: "Wie der Neukantianismus insgesamt, so ist in den Zwanziger Jahren des nun endenden Jahrhunderts bekanntlich auch der Systemgedanke in Mißkredit geraten" (Edel, 2001, p. 110).

19 "...die Begründung aller besonderen Wissenschaften in einem Systemzusammenhang, in welchem sie in bestimmter Ordnung, nach ihrer wechselseitigen Abhängigkeit und Verwandtschaft, sich zuletzt zurückführen auf eine gemeinsame Grundwissenschaft, die Wissenschaft von der Methode..." (Natorp, 1903, p. 75). (Natorp, 1921, p. 76).

20 For Dufour, this is one of the ruptures of Natorp's thinking with that of Cohen, for whom the science division is a *factum* found a posteriori. Cohen takes the science division as a given fact. Natorp believes that this division is exhibited *a priori* in the foundation of science in the logical law (Dufour, 2003, p. 104).

21 "Es wird also im Begriff einer (besonderen) Wissenschaft ein erschöpfender systematischer Zusammenhang aller möglichen Besonderheiten, je innerhalb eines durch einen generellen Begriff abgegrenzten Problemgebietes, und

one concept refers to the rest of concepts so that the elucidation of one of them leads to the understanding of others. This analysis will be executed by logic. Logic is another name for philosophy because it is the discipline that carries out its task. Philosophy is logic because it is the science of *logos*.<sup>22</sup>

In this sense, philosophy can be defined also as method, as it marks the path that thinking takes to become knowledge, and “the method is precisely what makes science a science”<sup>23</sup>. Philosophy is a grounding science as a science of the method. Therefore, philosophy should not be defined by its content but by its method.

According to this conception, philosophy is the first science. Philosophy, as the ultimate basis of all knowledge, cannot depend on any other science. In this sense, philosophy is independent. As an independent science, philosophy must be autonomous. Autonomy is the first general methodological prescription of philosophy. This first science must be grounded on itself and provide the foundation to the other sciences<sup>24</sup>. Philosophy must be grounded on itself to then ground the remaining areas of knowledge. This is what Natorp calls in the *Philosophical Propaedeutics* the “formal criterion” that philosophy must satisfy to become the first science. To this formal criterion of autonomy, and consequently of self-grounding, a “material criterion” is added. This discipline, as the centre of knowledge, must delimit the regions of the remaining objects of knowledge. However, it cannot contribute to the content of the particular sciences, but philosophy can only provide the ultimate principles of thought in general and, consequently, the elementary normativity in which the other areas of human knowledge unfold. That is, philosophy will not determine the material content of science but, rather, it will give the fundamental logical principles of its procedure. To accomplish this goal, philosophy must be able to have an internal foundation. Philosophy requires immanent legitimation. The circularity of foundation is introduced from the beginning as a primary methodical prescription because it is demanded by the purpose pursued. Therefore, there is a virtuous circularity internal to the method; philosophy, as a general science of knowledge, must have immanent legitimation. This requirement arises as an initial prescription in order to guarantee the epistemic status of a first science. This is the only way to guarantee that knowledge is raised upon secure foundations.

From this analysis, we can demarcate the following fundamental features of the conception of the philosophy of Natorp. First, philosophy is the science of the first principles. Philosophy must search for the most fundamental principles of knowledge, its fundamental concepts. Its goal is not to know a particular object but the unity of knowledge in general. Secondly, and as a consequence of its peculiar goal, philosophy

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zwar mitsamt ihren wechselseitigen Beziehungen und Verknüpfungsweisen (wie oben die „Systeme“ von Intervallen), gedacht” (Natorp, 1903, p. 303). (Natorp, 1921, p. 319).

22 Christian Krijnen highlights that this aspect has not always been sufficiently emphasized: “Philosophie wird also keineswegs auf Erkenntnistheorie reduziert, sondern die Erkenntnistheorie fungiert im Neukantianismus als *philosophia prima*. Als solche hat sie nicht nur eine spezifische Thematik, sondern zugleich eine darüber hinausgehende Bedeutung für das System der Philosophie, dessen Methode und Grundbegrifflichkeit sie vorzeichnet. Entsprechend ausführlich und umfassend haben die Neukantianer sich mit der Erkenntnistheorie auseinandergesetzt. Erkenntnistheorie ist für sie allerdings weder bloss ‚Epistemologie‘ anderer, nicht-philosophischer Erkenntnisse, sondern bezieht ihre eigene Erkenntnis mit ein, noch ist sie bloss Wissenschaftstheorie handelt es sich bei der wissenschaftlichen Erkenntnis doch um einen spezifischen Erkenntnisinn” (Krijnen, 2014, p. 12).

23 “Es bedarf allgemein der Betonung, daß für Plato wie nur je für Descartes oder Kant der Gesichtspunkt der „Methode“ der oberste Gesichtspunkt der Philosophie und Wissenschaft überhaupt ist” (Natorp, 1903, p. 62). (Natorp, 1921, p. 63).

24 “Denn Philosophie will allerdings Wissenschaft sein, nicht aber besondere eines besonderes Gegenstandes: vielmehr eben, was allen Sonderungen der vielen Wissenschaften gegenüber der Einheit der Wissenschaft ausmacht und begründet: das ist ihre eigentümlich Frage und Ausgabe” (Natorp, 1911, p. 3). Also: (1887, p. 257).

cannot depend on any other science. It must ground itself and thus establish the unity of the multiple fields of knowledge. Thirdly, as philosophy is the general science of knowledge, it must provide the general principles of all objective knowledge. In this sense, it is normative with respect to all regional knowledge expressed in the particular sciences, even when it only determines the general principles and not the particular laws of each particular science. Then, a primary task is to explain the relation of thinking in general with its concretions: particular sciences.

### 3.2. The Unity of Thought as the Necessary Starting Point of the Deduction of Categories

As we observed, Natorp argues that the task of philosophy is to provide the general foundations of knowledge. However, this task cannot be carried out without assumptions. A justification devoid of any assumption is, in general, nonsense. A minimum of necessary assumptions must be accepted, that make possible the pursuit of what is proposed as the task of the investigation. All legitimation requires a minimum of initial premises that are accepted as valid. This starting point is essential for all foundational research. To provide a foundation for knowledge, it must already be available a general concept of knowledge to enable the task to be undertaken. A minimum concept of thinking is essential to allow the investigation to begin. The definition of thinking as correlation will be this basic assumption necessary to provide the conditions of possibility of knowledge<sup>25</sup>.

By taking the concept of thinking as a starting point, Natorp follows the guidelines introduced by Hermann Cohen. According to Cohen, the logic of pure knowledge must have the concept of thinking as a starting point. Natorp also maintains that thinking is the origin. For both Cohen and Natorp *Denken* is the *Anfang*. Thinking is the beginning and the origin, and the fundamental forms of knowledge are obtained from the analysis of the ways in which thinking operates. Thinking must be the starting point. Natorp fully agrees with Cohen on this point. Cohen argues:

Wir fangen mit dem Denken an. Das Denken darf keinen Ursprung haben außerhalb seiner selbst, wenn anders seine Reinheit uneingeschränkt und ungetrübt sein muß. Das reine Denken in sich selbst und ausschließlich muß ausschließlich die reinen Erkenntnisse zur Erzeugung bringen. Mithin muß die Lehre vom Denken die Lehre von der Erkenntnis werden. Als solche Lehre vom Denken, welche an sich Lehre von der Erkenntnis ist, suchen wir hier die Logik aufzubauen (Cohen, 1922, p. 11).

A doctrine of knowledge is obtained from a doctrine of thinking. Thinking cannot start from anything other than itself. The sovereignty of thinking is also expressed in the methodological aspect, thinking is the starting point of deduction. Regarding the general perspective, as we will exhibit, Natorp will follow the Cohenian prescription at this point.

In his first published writing, Natorp defines thinking as correlation. The concept of correlation is one of the most important within Neo-Kantian terminology. It is interesting to note that this way of conceiving thinking, which accompanies Natorp throughout his philosophical trajectory, appears for the first time in his first published writing in 1881. On the occasion of

<sup>25</sup> “Dass eine Deduction ohne alle Voraussetzungen beginne, wäre ein widersinniges Verlangen. Vorausgesetzt wird in jedem Falle, ausser dem, was zum Verständniss der Aufgabe gehört, irgend ein Letztes, woraus deducirt wird. Voraussetzunglogik kann nur in dem Sinne gefordert werden, dass nicht mehr als das Unerlässliche vorausgesetzt, nichts, was schon zur Lösung gehört, vorweggenommen werde. Es ist daher unser Erstes, dasjenige Minimum von Voraussetzungen festzustellen, welches zur verlagten Deduction nothwendig und hinreichend ist.“ [...] „Die allgemeine Aufgabe, der die unsrige such als besondere Problem unterordnet, ist: die letzten im vorher erklärten Sinne objectiven Grundlagen der Erkenntnis überhaupt festzustellen. Vorausgesetzt wird also jedenfalls ein allgemeiner Begriff von Erkenntnis“ (Natorp, 1891, p. 2)



discussing the work of Wilhelm Herrmann, Natorp introduces the principle of correlation. This principle holds that the unity of the object is supported by the unity of consciousness and that, vice versa, the unity of consciousness is made explicit by establishing the unity of the object. The unity of the object only makes sense on the basis of the unity of consciousness. Natorp holds:

Die Wahrheit oder Realität dieser Art Erkenntnisse beruht darauf, daß die Objecte derselben Objecte unsrer Erkenntniß nur sind auf Grund eben der Einheit des Bewußtseyns, von deren Standpunkt allein wir über ihre Realität als Objecte urtheilen können. Die nothwendige Geltung einer so begründeten Einsicht beruht darauf, daß Object und Bewußtseyn nur in unauflöslicher Correlation zu einander bestehen, das Bewußtseyn seine Einheit nur behauptet in der Einheit des Objects und das Object nur in der Einheit des Bewußtseyns, dem es Object ist. Die auf diese nothwendige Correlation gegründete Erkenntniß hat allein Anspruch auf gegenständliche Wahrheit. Wofern man also mir diese im Auge hat, wird der Realitätscharakter unsrer Erkenntniß richtig bestimmt durch diejenigen Bedingungen, von denen die Einheit des Bewußtseyns in der Vorstellung seiner Objecte in unsrer Erkenntniß abhängt (Natorp, 1881, p. 245).

The unity of consciousness is the highest principle on which the reality of the object is grounded. The unity of the concrete object is only possible on the basis of the unity of the consciousness, and the unity of the consciousness is only possible in the unity of the object. This way of understanding the essence of thinking, the preeminence of the correlation, is maintained throughout his writings. In his inaugural lecture “Leibniz und der Materialismus” (October of 1881), published in 1985 by Helmut Holzhey, Natorp argues that the truth of the object is grounded in the peculiar form of unity constituted by consciousness. The unity of the concept, given by the unity of consciousness, is the truth of the object. Natorp maintains:

Schon Parmenides und Platon hatten erkannt, dass die Materie nichts völlig Reales sein könne, weil ihr diejenige Einheit mangle, welche zum Begriff der ousia, als des wahrhaften Seins, erfordert wird. Was diese verlangte Einheit sei, lässt sich durch nichts Sinnliches deutlich machen, hingegen versteht es sich sofort durch die Reflexion auf die Grundbeschaffenheit unsres Denkens, welches, wiewohl eine Vielheit von Objecten umfassend, doch diese stets in einer Einheit darstellt, in einer Concentration gleichsam, welche eben das ausmacht, was wir Denken oder Bewusstsein nennen. Leibniz sah ein, dass auf solcher formalen, ideellen, begrifflichen Einheit das beruht, was die Wahrheit der Phänomene, die Substanz oder das Wesen der Dinge im Unterschied von der blossen Erscheinung ausmacht (Natorp, 1881b, p. 9).

The conceptual unity and the concreteness of the object are just two sides of the same problem. This idea that appears in his early writings is developed and deepened in subsequent years. The methodological starting point in the research is pure thinking understood as unity and correlation.

In his Habilitation Thesis, *Descartes' Erkenntnistheorie*, the unity of apperception, as the starting point of deduction, is identified with the unity of the ‘I think’ of Descartes. Descartes recognized that objects depend on the form of conception of the understanding and, since the understanding is a perfectly articulated unity, it is possible to start a deduction of concepts from the unity of the understanding, taken as the leading thread of the knowledge of objects. For this reason, knowledge can be defined as a form of self-knowledge<sup>26</sup>. For Natorp, an element

26 “Bis ins Einzelne stimmt die Vorstellung Descartes’ zu dem kantischen Begriff einer Grenzbestimmung der Vernunft durch ihre Selbsterkenntnis (Kr. d. r. V., Kehrback, S. 5), welche mit absoluter Gewissheit und Vollständigkeit muss erreicht werden können, weil die Vernunft eine vollkommene Einheit ist (6), und weil es sich hier nicht um die Natur der Dinge, welche unerschöpflich ist, sondern um den Verstand handelt, der über die Natur der Dinge urtheilt” (Natorp, 1882, p. 4).

that brings the philosophy of Descartes closer to that of Kant, and that can lead to thinking of Descartes as a precursor of critical philosophy is precisely the definition of thinking as an original synthetic unit. In *Descartes' Erkenntnistheorie*, Natorp shows that Descartes would have originally introduced into the unity of the 'I think' what would later be called by Kant the unity of apperception. The cartesian unity of the Cogito is the Kantian unity of the transcendental apperception. In the Cartesian system, it can be seen *in nuisance* the recognition of the fundamental synthesis as a condition of possibility of any specific synthesis expressed in each concept. The intuited object is the product of this conceptual synthesis, and the deduction of concepts must show how this construction is produced. The author of the *Metaphysical Meditations* exhibited that each particular synthesis supposes the articulation in the central unity of the apperception. According to Natorp, Descartes saw that the unity of reason was the foundation of the possibility of knowing the multiplicity of objects. The very concept of reason is the name of this unity<sup>27</sup>. In this sense, Descartes was very close to critical idealism, more than Kant himself was willing to accept. Descartes anticipated Kantian ideas. However, the interference of metaphysical and theological prejudices prevented Descartes from taking his thinking to the last consequences<sup>28</sup>. Descartes saw that it is by virtue of this immanent foundation of knowledge that knowledge of objects can be achieved. Therefore, the foundation of knowledge is obtained by an analysis of the principles of reason, starting from this conception of thinking. Only a study of the nature and legality of reason itself can provide knowledge of objects<sup>29</sup>. We can only have an integrated knowledge of objects taking as a starting point the path that thinking follows in the construction of its objects. According to Natorp, when Descartes claimed that the method of mathematics should serve as a model of cognition, this statement must be understood under the light of how Descartes defined mathematics: as a universal method of construction of objectivity. For this reason, the Cartesian method is the method of universal mathematics. Only starting from this highest point of view, the unity of knowledge can be guaranteed; that is, it can be ensured that a multiplicity of cognitions is brought together in a unified whole. Since the operation of thinking consists primarily in correlating, the principle of correlation is the starting point of deduction also for Descartes. For this reason, it can be argued that "the universal science of human understanding is the basis of knowledge".<sup>30</sup> Descartes warned that the beginning of the investigation can only take place starting from this unity. Only taking as a starting point the principle of correlation, can true knowledge be achieved. Descartes presupposes the unity of the foundation of all true knowledge. He considers that all true knowledge has its origin in the unity of the understanding. This unity is the unity of the foundation (*Die Einheit des Fundaments*). Without this unity, there would be a mere dispersion of separate groundless cognitions and not true knowledge. True knowledge can only be achieved from a certain form of self-knowledge, on the self-own insight of the understanding (*von der selbsteignen Einsicht der Verstandes*). The point of departure of the investigation must be the unity of the understanding on which all

27 "Die Vernunft ist der Ausdruck der Einheit in unsrer Erkenntniss gegenüber der Mannigfaltigkeit ihrer Objecte; von ihr hängt alle Erkenntniss der Gegenstände ab, nicht sie von der Kenntniss der letzteren; und durch sie, nach dem Gesetze ihrer Einheit, giebt es allein Beziehung der Vorstellungen auf ein Object, Wahrheit und Falschheit" (Natorp, 1882, p. 19).

28 "Es fragt sich: hat Kant wohl ein Bewusstsein davon gehabt, dass das Ich, dessen Existenz Descartes begründen will, nothwendig nur das Ich sein kann, welches er selbst das Ich der reinen, transscendentalen Apperception nennt, nämlich jene rein intellectuelle Vorstellung, die Kant, mit Anlehnung an Descartes' Cogito, doch, wie gezeigt worden, nicht ganz in seinem Sinne, als den »Actus Ich denke« bezeichnet? – Es scheint nicht, dass Kant es so aufgefasst hat; es hätte ihm sonst nicht entgehen können, dass Descartes' Fundamentalsatz mit den tiefsten Grundlagen seiner Transscendentalphilosophie in genauer Beziehung steht, und den Grundgedanken seines „transscendentalen Idealismus“ – wiewohl ohne das Bewusstsein seiner entscheidenden Bedeutung – anticipirt" (Natorp, 1882, p. 37). See also: (Natorp, 1882, p. 83), (Cf. Tamb., p. 34, pp. 42ss, p. 83), (Natorp, 1897, p. 24).

29 "Der Ausgang von der Forderung einer Wissenschaft der menschlichen Intelligenz, d. h. einer unabhängig und für sich selbst feststehenden Gewissheit über den Begriff und das Fundament aller Wahrheit der Erkenntniss, welche deswegen erreichbar sein muss, weil sie nicht ausser uns in den Objecten, sondern in der Natur und Gesetzlichkeit der Erkenntniss selbst ihren Ursprung hat..." (Natorp, 1882, p. 21).

30 "Die universelle Wissenschaft des menschlichen Verstandes liegt allem Wissen, die universelle Mathematik näher aller Erkenntniss von Maass und Ordnung, endlich die besonderen Wissenschaften des Quantitativen aller Erkenntniss der Qualitäten zu Grunde" (Natorp, 1882, p. 23).

knowledge depends. According to Natorp:

Es braucht kaum noch darauf hingewiesen zu werden, dass diese Anschauungen mit denen der ‚Regeln‘ genau zusammenhängen und im Einklang sind. Auch dort ging Descartes aus von dem Gedanken der Einheit alles Wissens im menschlichen Verstande, als von dem alle Erkenntnis abhängt und in dem sie ihre letzte gemeinsame Wurzel hat. Auf dieser Grundlage wurde auch dort eine völlig zweifellose Gewissheit gefordert für alle Erkenntnis, die diesen Namen in Wahrheit verdient; und behauptet, es müsse erreichbar sein, sich einmal für allemal wenigstens darüber Gewissheit zu verschaffen, was von jedem Gegenstande zu erkennen möglich ist und was nicht. Auch dort wurde aus diesem Grunde alles irgend zweifelhafte, bloss wahrscheinliche Wissen für nicht viel mehr als Täuschung, alle bloss historische, auf die Autorität der Ueberlieferung gegründete Erkenntnis für werthlos vor dem Anspruch der Vernunft erklärt (Natorp, 1882, p. 25).

The process of thinking cannot start from anything external to itself. All knowledge always depends on the unity of the understanding, and it is from that unity that it finds its foundation. The unity of the foundation guarantees the objectivity of its concretions. The study of the understanding and its principles underlies all knowledge. Therefore, the starting point of research is not the Transcendental Aesthetics with its study of the forms of sensibility -as it was for Kant- but the Transcendental Logic. The starting point of the investigation is not the point of view of the intuition in its concreteness. On the contrary, the departing point is the very operative of the concept which has its origin in the transcendental unity of the apperception. The beginning is the Logic and not the Aesthetics because the origin is the conceptual process rooted in the unity of the synthesis.

The task of philosophy is to show how thinking can build objectivity. The formation of the objective takes place in the relationship between the multiple that makes up the object and the unity that determines it as an object as such. This unity is provided by the activity of thinking and can be defined in terms of synthetic unity. This unity of the understanding guarantees that each of these expressions is always in an interconnection. The unity of thinking guarantees the unity of the principles that govern each particular field (Natorp, 1887, p. 257). The multiplicity of appearances must be subjected to the unity provided by a law that establishes how the parts are articulated. The law regulates the way in which the various appearances are brought together in unity. The fundamental law of thinking is the search for this unity. For this reason, thinking can be defined as a synthetic unity, as a principle of unity of diversity<sup>31</sup>. This synthetic unity is the law of legality. Synthetic unity is the highest principle (Natorp, 1887, p. 285).

These peculiarities of the definition of thinking will find a mature expression around 1890. *Quantity and Quality* (1891) is one of the first works in which Natorp presents its deduction of concepts and, thus also, a definition of the concept of thinking that begins to acquire its own characteristics, different from the notion of synthetic unity that is properly Kantian. Indeed, Kant defined thinking as synthesis as well. For Natorp, thinking is the starting point of the deduction of concepts. The deduction of the categories is established from the minimum assumption of thinking defined as synthetic unity or as correlation. The content of this concept of consciousness will be an indispensable minimum assumption for the deduction of the concepts of thinking. Consciousness is the unifying point of view of multiplicity. It is the unity of the correlation that allows the connection of the multiplicity. The deduction of concepts departing from thinking is not an analysis of the formation of representations in the mind. Thinking should not be understood in this context as mind. Rather, the definition of thinking as correlation lies in the need to think of an articulating unity that expresses the

<sup>31</sup> "Alle wissenschaftliche Erkenntnis nun zielt auf's Gesetz. Die Beziehung der Erscheinung zum Gesetze (die Beziehung des „Mannigfaltigen“ der Erscheinung auf die „Einheit“ des Gesetzes) muss daher die in aller Erkenntnis ursprüngliche Beziehung auf den Gegenstand erklären. Die gesetzmässige Auffassung des Erscheinenden gilt als die gegenständlich wahre" (Natorp, 1887, p. 259).

“relation of a multiplicity to the central unity” (Natorp, 1891, p. 7).

The deduction of categories must be undertaken from the concept of thinking because the concept of thinking is the expression of the form of legality that underlies all particular legality. The deduction will allow showing how each particular position of thinking is carried out on the basis of the legality of thinking in general. All foundation is found in the law and thinking is the general expression of legality. Therefore, thinking is the foundation and beginning of deduction.

Starting from this guiding idea, Natorp undertakes the deduction of categories from a conception of thinking conceived as a unity of synthesis. The categories are the expression of the general principle of legality represented in the concept of thinking. They express the structure of being in general as a correlate of the positions of thinking. The Kantian synthetic method was precisely this one. More specifically, as Mario Caimi explains, Kant starts:

...with the observation of a blurred (confused and indistinct) concept, whose elements are then isolated and brought to clarity and distinction. In so doing, we will probably be compelled to admit new elements, which will in turn be joined to the foregoing ones, thus synthetically enriching the concept with which we started. Whereas the starting point of the *Critique* as a whole is, as we have already said, the very general notion of representation, in the particular case of the Transcendental Deduction, the starting point is the vague concept of synthetical thought related to a manifold, that is, the indeterminate concept of “Combination in General” (Caimi, 2014, p. 14).

Then, Paul Natorp’s method is closer to the Kantian synthetic method than to the analytical method. It starts from an obscure concept of thinking and advances by gaining new elements. This was the Kantian synthetic method, not the analytical.

In the first place, we studied the distinction between analytical method and synthetic method in Kant. Second, we showed that there are good reasons to consider the Neo-Kantian approach as an analytical method. However, we exhibited that for Natorp, the method of philosophy must be synthetic. This is required by the task of philosophy. Certainly, the conditions of possibility of experience cannot be entirely derived a priori. However, this does not undermine the progressive nature of the method. The synthetically introduced conditions of possibility of experience must be accredited in the fact of science. The analytical method is just the reverse of the synthetic method.

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