

**Sebastian Rödl**

*Categories of the Temporal: An Inquiry into the Forms of the Finite Intellect.* Trans. by Sibylle Salewski.

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In *Categories of the Temporal* Sebastian Rödl argues that all thought is possible only through what he calls generic thought. Atemporal logic, or the logic of inferential relations, needs a temporal logic to stand on. He shows this temporal logic to be a system of the finite intellect that consists of three forms of predication that are forms of the predicative unity of temporal categories.

Rödl uses the word “Aussage” in the German original, while the English translation prefers the term ‘thought.’ But for Rödl’s investigation it is indifferent whether he speaks of thoughts, statements or judgments since “this is one topic” (p. 20). What matters is to elaborate that underlying the atemporal logic (that philosophy is usually occupied with) is a temporal logic. Atemporal logic is discussed through representatives of the analytic tradition, while temporal logic is introduced with Kant: it is concerned with the way assertions, thoughts, or judgments relate to intuitions. Rödl argues “the philosophical-linguistic tradition does not appreciate that the human intellect is finite and depends on intuition” (p. 134).

Thought is possible only though generic thought and general knowledge cannot be gleaned from the particular subject that has sense perception – herein lies Rödl’s death knell to empiricism – but through a general subject, or what he calls a subject form. The real claim of Rödl’s book is not only that human beings experience everything through categories of the temporal, but also that these temporal forms are the primordial logical forms: forms of human life as such. Unfortunately Salewski’s otherwise excellent translation renders the notion of “Form menschlichen Lebens, unter die er fällt” (p. 18-19, literally “form of human life, under which the subject falls”) as “general subject” and “subject form.” This gives it quite a different ring in the English translation, which adds to the problem of understanding the whole dimension of Rödl’s claim. It is Rödl’s main thesis that “The primary subject of general knowledge insofar as it does not spring from sense perception cannot be a particular subject. It must be a general subject, a subject form” (p. 13) or a form of human life.

The term “form of human life” relates to the forms of life in Wittgenstein’s *Philosophical Investigations*. While Rödl does not write about Wittgenstein in any detail, he has a very interesting take on Wittgenstein’s concern with logic in the *Tractatus* and grammar in the *Philosophical Investigations*. Rödl argues that the Wittgenstein of the *Philosophical Investigations* is not concerned with a philosophy of ordinary language, a view that he thinks is founded on the dogma that the logical form of human life, under which the particular human falls is deductive logic. Instead, he argues that because deductive logic cannot describe the forms of the finite intellect many philosophers have concluded Wittgenstein looks at ordinary speech instead of logical form. Rödl’s answer is that we do look at logical form, but at transcendently logical form. His verdict is that “an analytic philosophy of language was up to now hardly able to develop,” (p. 167 fn14) because of the focus on deductive logic.

In the introduction, Rödl lays out an ambitious project that has as its object the logical forms of temporal thought in their most abstract description. Rödl wants to a) identify these forms and b) show that they have necessity. He makes it clear that a) is inseparable from b). Form can be discussed in logic in the narrower analytic sense and as logic as pure science of thought. Rödl suggests that the history of the analytic tradition could be rewritten as a history of the idea of logical form and its crisis. Rödl is aware that logic is a pure science of thought also for the analytic tradition. But it is a pure science only in the narrower analytic sense, namely, the systematic investigation of a calculus. He repeatedly points to a void in rendering the notion of a truly general and abstract logical form in analytic accounts. He shows that Carnap, Ryle, and Anscombe, as well as McDowell, say that the grammatical or logical form of thought cannot be exhausted by a system of deductive relations. But he argues that they do not say what it is.

Rödl's answer to what it is is a call to discuss logical form in terms of the way logical form relates to sensory intuition. "The principle of the form of thought is the relation of thought to intuition. The general form of thought is the form of thinking a content given through the senses" (p. 143). This leads to Kant and a discussion of the forms of temporal thought, but also to Aristotle. Rödl announces in the introduction: "Aristotle and Kant are the heroes of his book (p. 2).

The book itself is divided into two parts and each part has three chapters. The first chapter develops the idea of a transcendental logic as opposed to the narrower deductive logic of Frege, Carnap etc. Rödl holds that time is an object of transcendental, not of general, logic. He explains how this clashes with analytic discussions, which do not give creed to transcendental logic, but treat time within the framework of deductive logic. Rödl discusses Quine's and Prior's view as exemplary in the third chapter of the first part.

In the second part, Rödl develops the most general content of transcendental logic as he had defined it in the first part. Here is where the hard work lies and Rödl is doing it. He inquires into the general form through which thought relates to intuition. He discusses externally temporal and internally temporal thought, as well as a third kind of form, namely time-general or generic thought. Rödl argues that the generality of these forms does not lie in the quantity of their subject, but in the way in which they join subject and predicate. So all three internal, external temporal form and general form are forms of predication of their own (p. 10).

External temporal form is the equivalent of tense. Rödl explains that each thought, assertion or judgment already is tensed in that it is past/present. This bipolar form of predication has underlying it another temporal form, which is an internal temporal form, namely aspect. Aspect is used to indicate whether an action is completed or ongoing and through this it expresses something about the internal extension of thought. Aspect according to Rödl is tripolar (has been doing/is doing/has done). However, to get the unity of predication we need not only a bipolar form of tense, which presupposes a tripolar form of aspect, but both presuppose a generic form of thought that is time-general. Rödl calls it the form of human life. While analytic philosophy discusses the concepts of object and concept, Rödl discusses the notions of substance and state. For analytic philosophy a concept consists of a state and a tense, while present and past are elements of thought. Rödl claims that temporal thoughts are not structured in that way. The difference between a state and a concept is deeper. "A thought conjoins substance and state insofar as it relates to intuitions, it conjoins object and concept insofar as it stands in a deductive relations to other thoughts" (p. 134). Rödl discusses the categories of substance and state in connection with external time or tense, as well as the category of movement form in connection with internal time or aspect and finally the

category of substance form in connection with generic thought that is time general. These are the most general, pure concepts of the temporal or the categories of the finite intellect that we are.

With the in depth classification of temporal forms it is easy to forget that Rödl makes a strong criticism of empiricism with his book. He explains this best in the introduction. While the empiricist's dogma is that knowledge of particulars precedes general knowledge and does not depend on it, Rödl claims the opposite: empirical knowledge always already contains general knowledge, which is not inferred deductively from the former. Instead we have to look at the relation of thought to intuition, and this is what analytic philosophy, when relying on logic as inferential relations between concepts, has been missing.

The merits of Rödl's book lie on many levels. I will name three that stand out. First, he is a versatile thinker who understands deeply both the analytic and continental tradition of philosophy. He moves easily between the different vocabularies and elucidates both sides. Second, he does not shy away from bringing back a discussion of transcendental logic in such a way that allows people who have disregarded it to reconsider its merits. The third merit of the book lies in bringing back Aristotle's temporal concepts of *kinesis* and *energeia* in thinking about the temporal categories of the logical form of thought in connection to knowledge. Here lies also the book's one shortcoming: that it only gives a glimpse of the concept of *energeia* and how it relates to categories of substance form and movement form, to forms of the living and further to forms of rational life (p. 207). But in a footnote about *energeia* Rödl makes it sound like we may hear more about it in his next book.

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