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An Aporia of A Priori Knowledge

On Carl's and Beck's Interpretation of Kant's Letter to Markus Herz*

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Kant's letter to Marcus Herz of February 21, 1772, is an important source on Kant's so-called silent decade, that is, the period from 1770, when Kant defended his *Inaugural Dissertation*, until 1781, when the first edition of the *Critique of Pure Reason* was published. Kant announces in the letter that he noticed that he "still lacked something essential" which neither he nor any previous metaphysician had noticed before and which "in fact constitutes the key to the whole secret of hitherto still obscure metaphysics."¹ Kant furthermore believed that he had succeeded in finding a solution of the key problem and that he would be able to publish it within three months.

Interest in Kant's letter to Herz has been renewed by two recent papers, one by Wolfgang Carl,² and the other by Lewis White Beck,³ which argue for opposing views as to precisely what Kant thought the key metaphysical problem was. Is the problem, as Carl argues, how intellectual representations can refer to objects of experience, *i. e.*, the problem which Kant tries to solve in the *Critique*, or, as Beck believes, the one that Kant thought ought to have been solved in the *Dissertation*, *viz.*, how intellectual representations can refer to things as they are, without any intuition.

I shall begin my paper by presenting briefly the relevant part of the letter to Herz (X, 129–132) offering an interpretation of Kant's proposed solution, then proceed

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¹ *Kants gesammelte Schriften*, the Akademie edition, Berlin and Leipzig, 1900 ff., vol. X, p. 129. All quoted translations are from Arnulf Zweig's translation published in *Kant. Philosophical Correspondence 1759–99* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967), pp. 70–76. References to all other works by Kant will be given in accordance with the Akademie edition, except for the *Critique of Pure Reason* which will be cited according to the standard pagination of the First and Second Editions.

² Wolfgang Carl, *Kant's First Draft of the Deduction of the Categories*, in *Kant's Transcendental Deductions*, ed. by E. Förster, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1989), pp. 3–20. (Let me remark that Carl's book, *Der schweigende Kant*, appeared too late to be dealt with in this article.)

³ Lewis White Beck, *Two Ways of Reading Kant's Letter to Herz: Comments on Carl*, in *Kant's Transcendental Deductions*, pp. 21–26. All subsequent references to Carl's and Beck's papers will be given in the text of the paper.

to show why both Carl's and Beck's interpretations fail, and finally suggest what I think to be a better identification of Kant's key metaphysical problem.

I

Kant begins his story of what essential is still missing in metaphysics with a general question: "What is the ground of the relation of that in us which we call 'representation' to the object?"⁴ There seem to be, according to Kant, two alternative answers: either "a representation is only a way in which the subject is affected by the object," or "the object itself was created by the representation."⁵

If the former is the case, Kant thinks that it would be easily understandable how a representation can be in conformity with its object and how it can represent its object. Kant emphasizes that in this case we would have only a sensible representation of an object. What Kant implies by this remark is that this case would not allow us to account for the possibility of intellectual (or, in terms of the first *Critique*: *a priori*) knowledge of objects. As such, this case is uninteresting for metaphysics.

If the latter is the case, we will again be able to understand how a representation can be in conformity with its object. But this time a representation is not sensible and it seems, then, that the second case is more significant for an account of the possibility of intellectual knowledge of objects.

However, Kant realizes that there is a problem with the second case. An immediate problem is that *our* intellectual representations cannot create their objects (save in the case of moral ends). Consequently, Kant describes intellectual representations, or, as he also calls them, 'pure concepts of the understanding', as follows.

[They] must not be abstracted from sense perceptions, nor must they express the reception of representations through the senses; but though they must have their origin in the nature of the soul, they are neither caused by the object nor bring the object itself into being.⁶

We are now in a better position to understand what puzzles Kant: If all of the conditions mentioned in the quoted passage are to be satisfied (and Kant appears to believe so), how could there be intellectual knowledge of objects? More precisely: If, on the one hand, our intellectual (*a priori*) representations are not derived from experience and do not create their objects, and if, on the other hand, intellectual representations "must have their origin in the nature of the soul," how are our intellectual representations possible at all? To put it somewhat differently: What can be the ground of their relation to objects?

Kant tells us that he did not deal with this problem in the *Dissertation*. There he explained the nature of our intellectual representations (and intellectual knowledge

in general) in a mere negative and incomplete way. All he said there is that our intellectual concepts are not brought about by objects, and also that they represent things *as they are* (as opposed to sensible representations which represent things *as they appear*). But Kant "silently passed over the further question of how a representation that refers to an object without being in any way affected by it can be possible."⁷ This is the problem of the possibility of intellectual knowledge of objects.

The relation of representations and objects does not pose a problem in mathematics, according to Kant, because mathematical objects are only quantities and can be represented in sensible intuition as quantities. But how to explain agreement between intellectual concepts and objects in metaphysics, that is, in the case of qualities,⁸ this is the key question to the whole secret of metaphysics, which "is still left in a state of obscurity."⁹

Now come two relevant passages in which Kant first criticizes his predecessors and then goes on to propose what might look like his own solution of the key problem. Kant criticizes Plato and Malebranche for introducing some kind of "*influxum hyperphysicum*,"¹⁰ and then Crusius for the "*harmoniam praestabilitam intellectualem*."¹¹ All of them Kant accuses of introducing some kind of *deus ex machina* explanation of the possibility of agreement between our intellectual concepts and their objects.

After this presentation of the problem and the criticism of his predecessors comes the troublesome passage in which Kant announces that he has succeeded "as far as [his] essential purpose is concerned,"¹² and that he will be able to publish it within three months. It is hard to understand what would Kant's announcement refer to if not to the key problem of metaphysics, *i. e.*, "the key to the whole secret of hitherto still obscure metaphysics"? Here is a part of this passage which indicates what Kant appears to think the solution is.

While I was searching in such ways for the sources of intellectual knowledge, without which one cannot determine the nature and limits of metaphysics, I divided this science into its naturally distinct parts, and sought to reduce transcendental philosophy (that is to say, all concepts belonging to completely pure reason) to a certain number of categories, but not like Aristotle, who, in his ten predicaments, placed them side by side as he found them in a purely chance juxtaposition. On the contrary, I arranged them according to the way they classify themselves by their own nature, following a few fundamental laws of the understanding.¹³

⁷ Ak X, 130–131; Zweig, p. 72.

⁸ In the *Critique* Kant would modify his view about the difference between mathematical and metaphysical (philosophical) knowledge; cf. A 714–715/B 742–743.

⁹ Ak X, 131; Zweig, p. 72.

¹⁰ For Kant's usage of '*hyperphysicum*' see R 4146 (Ak XVII, 439).

¹¹ Ak X, 131; Zweig, pp. 72–73. See also Ak II, 409–410, R 4275 (Ak XVII, 691–692), R 4851 (Ak XVIII, 8), R 4859 (Ak XVIII, 12), R 4866 (Ak XVIII, 14), R 4893–4894 (Ak XVIII, 21–22), and an interesting note in the *Prolegomena*, Ak IV, 319 n.

¹² Ak X, 132; Zweig, p. 73.

¹³ Ak X, 131–132; Zweig, p. 73.

⁴ Ak X, 130; Zweig, p. 71.

⁵ Ak X, 130; Zweig, p. 71.

⁶ Ak X, 130; Zweig, p. 72.

Although Kant warns Herz that he is not "going into details here,"¹⁴ Kant's statements may have brought disappointment to Herz, as they do to us. We do not see any solution, but only new questions. What are the categories Kant is telling us about? The intellectual concepts like causality, substance, possibility, existence, necessity, and magnitude, which were mentioned in the *Dissertation*? What are "a few" fundamental laws of understanding in accordance with which Kant divided them into classes? And, above all, how does what Kant says here explain the agreement of our intellectual concepts with their objects? Kant does not seem to give us even a hint of how he thinks he can resolve the key problem for the whole secret of metaphysics.

In section III I shall argue that an understanding of Kant's "solution" is relevant for the proper interpretation of the key problem of metaphysics. Here, however, I merely want to point out that Kant's proposal need not be seen in such an unfavorable light if we pay more attention to the following points. First, we have to take his warning to Herz literally, *i. e.*, to mean that Kant is just going to outline his general strategy, or just outline his approach to the solution of the key problem. If so, we do not have to expect to find in the letter his solution developed at any great length. Second, we also have to consider Kant's criticism of his predecessors more carefully and see what it amounts to. More precisely, we have to see what general line(s) of reasoning Kant excludes and, consequently, see with what alternative he is left.

As it has already been mentioned, Kant accuses his predecessors of introducing, in one way or another, the *deus ex machina* explanation of the possibility of agreement between intellectual concepts and their objects. I speculate that Kant means by this that they have tried to explain the possibility of metaphysical knowledge by introducing an independent metaphysical assumption "from outside." That is, their explanations introduce something external to, or different from, both intellectual concepts and their objects (e. g., intellectual intuition, or preestablished harmony). Kant's criticism of the *deus ex machina* explanation suggests, then, that he believes that the agreement should not be guaranteed from outside. This conclusion invites an alternative, namely the view that the agreement should instead come "from inside." More precisely, Kant's strategic idea in the letter to Herz appears to be that the agreement has to come from the mutual relationship of intellectual concepts and their objects. The genuine solution to the problem must be, so to say, "immanent" in the problem itself. ("Nur eine Waffe taugt; die Wunde schließt der Speer nur der sie schlug" – Richard Wagner).

One way to look for an immanent solution would be to try to understand better the nature of intellectual concepts. I argue that this is precisely what Kant, according to the quoted passage of the letter, tries to do in the letter to Herz. To remind you, Kant tells us in the first paragraph of the letter that in his *Dissertation* he left unexplained the nature of intellectual concepts in a positive sense and throughout

the second part of the same paragraph he wonders about the real nature of those concepts. In the quoted passage, which has to contain his solution, Kant believes that he is able to tell Herz something positive about their nature. For instance, Kant believes to be able to reduce all concepts of pure reason to a certain number of basic ones, *i. e.*, the categories. Furthermore, Kant thinks to be in a position to arrange the categories "following a few fundamental laws of the understanding." It seems, then, that Kant believes that the proper understanding of the nature of intellectual concepts would solve the key metaphysical problem.

If this is really what Kant was thinking, then – from the point of view of the first *Critique* – he obviously was on his way eventually to find a complete and satisfactory (immanent) solution, but, on the other hand, was still clearly very far away from it. Even if we suppose that Kant had at that time some satisfactory solution for the metaphysical deduction of the categories (which is not clear at all¹⁵), something essential would still be missing from the critical solution of the problem, whether this problem is that of the *Dissertation* (relation of intellectual concepts to *noumena*) or the problem we know from the first *Critique* (relation of intellectual concepts to objects of experience). A new conception of objects was necessary for a complete immanent solution of the problem. And the quoted passage does not offer even the slightest hint that Kant had a new conception of an object of knowledge, *i. e.*, that Kant had come to believe that certain important features of objects of knowledge are dependent on necessary conditions of our knowledge. Hence, Kant's proposed "solution" in the letter does not offer us any complete immanent solution to the key metaphysical problem in the sense of either the *Inaugural Dissertation* or the *Critique*.

II

Let us now carefully examine Carl's and Beck's identifications of the key problem "to the whole secret of hitherto still obscure metaphysics."¹⁶ Carl sees the key problem in the following way:

"The key question of the Herz letter concerns an explanation of how certain concepts *a priori*, which are not causally related to their objects, can refer to *things*

¹⁵ In R 4646 (Ak XVII, 624) Kant talks about "the categories of quality, quantity, and position," and in R 4640 (Ak XVII, 621) he says that "cause and effect appear to be [necessary] for prevision, whole and part for the imagination, substance and accident for the senses, possibility for the faculty of poetizing (*Dichtungsvermögen*), reality for sense impressions, magnitude for intuition, necessity for ..."; Kant did not complete this statement, but added: "In all these cases the steady connection constitutes the basis for abstract concepts of the understanding," and from these concepts "derives the possibility of *a priori* judgements." The last fragment is translated by W. H. Werkmeister in his *Kant's Silent Decade*, (Tallahassee: University Press of Florida, 1979) p. 89.

¹⁶ Ak X, 130; Zweig, p. 71.

¹⁴ Ak X, 132; Zweig, p. 73.

accessible by experience in such a way that these things correspond necessarily to these concepts" and that in the "same letter to Herz, Kant is discussing the correspondence between the categories and the objects of experience" (p. 6, my emphasis) and tries to "explain the fact that appearances are ordered according to the categories" (p. 16).

Carl focuses his interpretation of the letter on one of Kant's several formulations of the key question: How my understanding may formulate real principles concerning the possibility of such concepts, with which principles *experience must be in exact agreement* and which nevertheless are independent of experience?¹⁷ Carl believes that this formulation of the problem is the essential one, which practically means that the key question in the letter is the one which Kant tries to solve in the *Critique*.

I must admit that in the text of the letter I see no evidence for Carl's interpretation of this sentence. Carl probably could not either, since he does not cite or mention any. He backs up his reading by one of the so-called *Reflexionen* (4634), which was written, according to Erich Adickes, around 1772 and which indeed seems to contain the first draft of the transcendental deduction of the categories.¹⁸ In effect, Carl's idea is that the mentioned formulation of the key problem from the letter to Herz indicates that Kant believes that intellectual concepts apply to objects of experience, and that the quoted fragment R 4634 shows that in 1772 Kant already had the same question in mind as in 1781. Hence, Carl believes, it is reasonable to conclude that the key question in the letter to Herz is the same one with the question which appears in the *Critique*.

There are several objections to this interpretation. On the one hand, they are related to the fragment on which Carl relies. The dating of many of the *Reflexionen* is uncertain; but even if we could establish with certainty that that particular fragment is from 1772, could it be also established that Kant wrote it before or about the same time as the letter to Herz? This hardly seems to be probable.¹⁹ If Kant really did write it before the letter, why did he fail to mention anything more explicit about it to Herz? Against Carl's supporting his interpretation on one of

¹⁷ Ak X, 131; Zweig, p. 72.

¹⁸ "If certain of our concepts contain only what makes experience possible for us, then they can be specified prior to experience; indeed, they can be specified *a priori* and with complete validity for everything we can ever encounter. In that case, although they are not valid of objects in general, they are valid of everything that can be given to us by experience, because they contain the conditions under which experience is possible. These propositions will, therefore, contain the conditions of the possibility — not of things, but of experience. Things that cannot be given to us by any experience, however, are nothing for us" (R 4634, Ak XVII, 618; Carl's translation).

Adickes himself does not date this fragment in 1772. It is grouped with some other fragments under 'o'; Adickes says that they are certainly later than 1771, and certainly earlier than 1776. Cf. Ak XIV, XXXIX–XL. W. H. Werkmeister interprets Adickes to mean that R 4634 and other fragments of the 'o' period are written in 1772 or 1773; see his *Kant's Silent Decade*, pp. 86–89.

Kant's fragments (*viz.*, 4634), it should be also noted here that what Kant states in one or even several fragments of one period should not be taken to prove that that was his prevailing view. There are many fragments from that time which are mutually inconsistent, and what they show is that Kant was trying various ways and that he was not sure which way to go.²⁰

On the other hand, the text of the letter indicates that Carl's reading of the key question is at least partially wrong. To show this, I shall first summarize Carl's interpretations as follows. (i) Although Kant does mention once the application of the categories (intellectual concepts) to objects of experience, Carl ascribes to him a much stronger theses. Carl argues that in the letter to Herz Kant *limits*, or *restricts*, the application of intellectual concepts to objects of experience (p. 8). Thus, Carl maintains that in the Herz letter "Kant considers *only* representations of things that affect us in some way or another, that are accessible *only* by way of experience. The 'intellectual representations' of the *Dissertation* are *explicitly excluded*" (p. 6, my emphasis). (ii) Since Carl moreover argues that in the letter Kant attempts to account for the fact that objects of experience are *ordered* according to the categories (p. 16), Carl believes that Kant's account of empirical knowledge in the letter is different from the view in the *Dissertation*. In effect, Kant's view on empirical knowledge in the letter is already close to the view of the *Critique*.

With respect to (ii) I remark that the text of the letter certainly gives the impression that Kant does not see anything wrong with his explanation of empirical knowledge in the *Dissertation*. When Kant talks about two possible ways in which a representation can be in relation (of agreement) with its object, one of the ways mentioned is the possibility that "a representation is only a way in which the subject is affected by the object."²¹ This suggests that Kant believes in this case that the nature of affection can explain the agreement between our sensible representations and their objects, and this is certainly very different from the *Critique* doctrine.

More importantly, Carl is mistaken with respect to (i), *i. e.*, the view that Kant restricts the application of the categories to objects of experience in the letter. As Beck has convincingly shown (p. 23), Kant still uses the terminology of the *Dissertation* in the letter. Such terminology clearly indicates, as Beck correctly argues, that Kant "was still thinking that there can be pure conceptual *a priori* knowledge of *noumena*" (p. 23). There is nothing in the letter which might even indicate that Kant now assumes that intellectual knowledge in the sense of the *Dissertation* is not possible. It seems, then, that Beck is correct in claiming, against Carl, that there is no clear evidence in the letter to Herz that "Kant's problem was how *a priori* concepts must be applicable to sensible objects (the problem of the *Critique*) rather than the problem of how there can be *a priori* knowledge of *intelligibilia* without intellectual intuition (the problem Kant now discovers he had overlooked in the

²⁰ Compare, for instance, R 4634 (quoted in note 16) with the *Reflexionen* quoted in note 15, which, according to Adickes, all belong to the same period.

²¹ Ak X, 130; Zweig, p. 71.

Dissertation),” and that the letter should be viewed as “Kant’s report of his last effort to answer some questions he should have raised in the *Inaugural Dissertation*” (p. 22).

Yet one problem still remains for Beck’s view. If Kant’s problem in the letter is concerned with *a priori* knowledge of *intelligibilia*, how should we understand the formulation of the key problem which Carl points out, in which Kant says that experience, that is, objects of experience rather than *intelligibilia*, must be in exact agreement with our principles?²² This is the (only) formulation in the letter that suggests that Kant is, as Carl believes, concerned with the application of intellectual concepts to objects of experience. Carl’s interpretation of the letter finds its only support in that formulation; Beck realizes this, and offers a reading of that formulation which is different from Carl’s. According to Beck’s reading, the intellectual concepts as described in the *Dissertation* do not perform here the work that the categories do in the *Critique*. Beck believes that Kant is in that particular formulation “espousing an essentially Leibnizian view of the relation of ontology to phenomenology, of reality to appearance. This view is characteristic of the precritical Kant and dominant in the transitional *Inaugural Dissertation*” (p. 25). According to this view, “the categories apply to things in themselves, and if they apply to phenomena at all it is because the entire empirical world is still to be conceived as grounded in the nonempirical” (p. 25).

Beck might be quite right in believing that Kant really holds here this Leibnizian view of the relationship of ontology to phenomenology, according to which intellectual concepts apply *indirectly* to the world of experience. Yet Beck’s explanation seems puzzling in the light of his other remark that Kant “may even have believed that intellectual concepts *do not apply* to objects of experience, as he did when in par. 5 in the *Inaugural Dissertation* he denied that there is a real use (*usus realis*) of reason in our observational knowledge” (p. 23, my emphasis).

Kant did, indeed, argue in the *Dissertation*, par. 23, that there is no real use of reason in our *observational* knowledge, but this does not imply that intellectual concepts cannot and do not apply (*directly*) to objects of experience. As Beck points out, Kant does insist that “the contamination of intellectual knowledge by sensitive”²³ should be prevented. That is, Kant emphasizes the following “all-important rule: carefully prevent the principles proper to sensitive cognition from passing their boundaries and affecting the intellectual!”²⁴ This contamination occurs when a sensitive concept is being predicated of an intellectual concept, but there is no such “contamination” when an intellectual concept is being predicated of a sensible concept. Kant mentions such a possibility in a note to par. 24:

²² Ak X, 130; Zweig, p. 72.

²³ Ak II, 411; this and all other translations of the *Dissertation* are quoted from *Kant’s Latin Writings, Translations, Commentaries, and Notes*, ed. L. W. Beck, (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, Inc., 1986) p. 178.

²⁴ Ak II, 411; Beck, p. 178.

For if the predicate be an intellectual concept, the reference of it to the subject of the judgement (however sensitively that subject may be thought), indicates always a mark belonging to the object itself.²⁵

It is, then, possible to apply (directly) an intellectual concept to objects of experience and get a “completely true proposition” (Kant’s own example of such a proposition is: “Whatever is somewhere exists”).

To go back to the letter to Herz, the formulation of the key question (on which Carl relies and which Beck tries to explain by means of the Leibnizian view of the relation of ontology to phenomenology) should be taken literally as it stands – it assumes that intellectual concepts do apply (directly) to objects of experience – and there is no reason to claim with Beck that Kant’s only problem in the letter is “the problem of how there can be *a priori* knowledge of *intelligibilia*” (p. 22), if “*intelligibilia*” is being used here only to refer to objects (like God and souls) which cannot be given in experience.

Let us summarize the position. Beck is right to claim against Carl that in the letter Kant does not restrict the application of the categories to objects of experience. Beck is wrong in claiming that Kant does not believe that the categories are (directly) applicable to objects of experience. Carl is correct in arguing that Kant does talk about the application of the categories to objects of experience, but he is mistaken in his belief that Kant (already) restricts the application of the categories to objects of experience. The application of the categories is not restricted in the letter to Herz in either way.²⁶ Thus, Kant is neither primarily concerned with the problem of how *a priori* concepts must be applicable to sensible objects as Carl believes, nor only with the problem of how there can be *a priori* knowledge of *intelligibilia* without intellectual intuition, as Beck holds.

Kant assumes in the letter to Herz that intellectual concepts can apply to both kinds of objects; there is a good textual reason in the *Dissertation* to believe that Kant affirms this, and no evidence in the letter that he has given up this view. Thus the problem about which Kant is puzzled is not how to apply intellectual concepts to this or that kind of object, but a (more) general problem of how there can be any application of intellectual representations to any object whatsoever. In other words, Kant is puzzled about how to explain the agreement of pure concepts with their objects, no matter what the nature of objects is. This is the problem which Nicolai Hartmann called an “aporia of *a priori* knowledge.”²⁷

²⁵ Ak II, 412; Beck, p. 178 n.

²⁶ This is how Hans Vaihinger reads the letter, but he does not mention any support for his reading; cf. his *The Transcendental Deduction of the First Edition of the Critique of Pure Reason*, in *Kant. Disputed Questions*, trans. and ed. by M. S. Gram, (Atascadero, CA: Ridgeview Publishing Company, 1984, sec. ed.) p. 48.

²⁷ *Grundzüge einer Metaphysik der Erkenntnis*, (Walter de Gruyter, Berlin 1949, Vierte Auflage) ch. 6, sec. (c).

III

What we have to see now is whether this new reading of the key metaphysical problem fits with the text of the letter. Let us first remark that if Kant's problem in the letter to Herz was the aporia of *a priori* knowledge rather than either of the problems suggested by Carl and Beck, this can explain something which puzzled both of them, *viz.*, Kant's careless and ambiguous use of the terms "Sachen," "Dinge," and "Gegenstände." If Kant was not concerned with the nature of objects of knowledge, then he had no need to be very concerned with the constant and precise use of these terms.

Much more significant is the following point: If the nature of objects of knowledge was irrelevant to the key problem of metaphysics as Kant had understood it in the letter to Herz, then we can see why he did not even mention objects of knowledge in his proposed "solution." As we have already seen, Kant's strategic idea was to find an *immanent* solution to the key metaphysical problem, in opposition to his predecessors who had been accused by Kant of trying to solve it 'externally,' by introducing, in one way or another, the *deus ex machina* solution. As we see it from the perspective of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, a complete, or a satisfactory immanent, solution had to include some new and better understanding of *both* the nature of intellectual concepts and the nature of objects of knowledge. In contrast to the view adopted later in the *Critique*, however, Kant's proposed "solution" in the letter was immanent but incomplete. It was incomplete because concerned exclusively with a new (whatever that meant) conception of intellectual concepts and completely silent about the nature of objects of knowledge. We are now in a position to understand Kant's general strategy in the letter: if the nature of objects of knowledge (*intelligibilia* or *sensibilia*) was not a part of the problem, then it could not be a part of the solution either.

I have argued earlier that Kant's unpublished fragments should not be taken as decisive evidence for any of the offered interpretations. However, just as Carl finds such fragments in support of his interpretation, I may be permitted to call attention to some fragments of approximately same time which support my interpretation. Thus, there are some fragments from that period which indicate that at one moment Kant thought that the problem of the nature of objects of (metaphysical) knowledge is irrelevant for metaphysics. He wrote, for instance, that "Metaphysics deals not with objects but with cognitions [*Erkenntnissen*]." ²⁸

This statement, as well as our interpretation of the key problem of the letter, certainly marks a significant shift from the *Dissertation*. Although Kant admits there that intellectual concepts apply to objects of experience as well as to *intelligibilia*, the former possibility is being mentioned only in one footnote to the text. On the other hand, even the title of the *Dissertation* – "On the Form and Principles

of the Sensible and the Intelligible World" – indicates that Kant there sharply distinguishes between sensible and intellectual objects. ²⁹

Notice, however, that when Kant informs Herz about his plans, that even in the titles of the books which he plans to write – "The Limits of Sense and Reason" and the "Critique of Pure Reason" (if the latter was really intended to be the book title in 1772) – there is a certain change in Kant's interest. As Cassirer has pointed out,

The center of the gravity of the problem begins to shift: the division between objects, the dualism of the sensible and the intelligible world, is displaced by a division between cognitive faculties which are the basis of any sort of objectivity ... The boundary is no longer drawn between the *mundus intelligibilis* and the *mundus sensibilis*, but between sensibility and reason. ³⁰

The problem of objectivity of knowledge becomes central for Kant. In the letter to Herz Kant (still) does not see any problem in accounting for the objectivity of sensible representations. The objectivity of our empirical representations is explained by their being caused by objects. On the other hand, the objectivity of our *a priori* mathematical representations can also be explained because, according to Kant, "objects of mathematical knowledge are only quantities." ³¹ This suggests that Kant's view is that we can always *construct objects* of mathematical knowledge for ourselves, and thus it is quite possible to understand and explain their agreement with our representations of them. ³²

However, our understanding cannot cause (the existence of) objects of metaphysical knowledge by means of its intellectual concepts, and this is what creates the real aporia: the objects of metaphysical knowledge are independent of our knowledge, that is, of our intellectual concepts, and yet they agree with our intellectual concepts. Thus, the puzzle is how to explain the very possibility of metaphysical (*a priori*) knowledge. It seemed to Kant at the time he wrote his letter

²⁹ Let me remark here that in my consideration of the letter to Herz, as well as in the description of his view in the *Dissertation*, I simply try to follow Kant's way of talking of sensible and intellectual objects, without ascribing to him any specific view on their mutual relationship. I do so for the following reasons. First, although I believe that Kant adopts a two aspect view in the first *Critique*, I am not sure that in 1770–1772 Kant was really aware of the dilemma: a two world view or a two aspect view. It can be a topic for another paper to establish what was the case. Second, I do not see that our ascribing to Kant either of these views helps us to understand and identify what he thought the key metaphysical problem is. Whichever was the case, Kant does not seem to think that it is more important to explain the possibility of intellectual knowledge for either intellectual or sensible objects. It seems to me that Kant simply does not make any significant difference between them in the letter to Herz.

³⁰ Ernst Cassirer, *Kant's Life and Thought*, trans. J. Haden, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981) p. 125.

³¹ Ak X, 131; Zweig, p. 72.

³² This has been pointed out by Paul Guyer, *Kant and the Claims of Knowledge*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987) pp. 23–24.

to Herz that if the objects of metaphysical knowledge are independent of our knowledge, then the nature of these objects *cannot* be a part of the problem of how metaphysical knowledge of them is possible. Consequently, if the nature of the objects is not a part of the problem, then — it seemed to Kant — it cannot be a part of the solution of the problem either, and Kant did not even mention them in his proposed “solution.” The problem seemed to Kant to consist entirely in the nature of intellectual concepts, and that was the problem for which Kant thought he had a solution and would be ready to publish it within three months.

From the fact that it took Kant nine years instead of three months to write the *Critique* we know that his search “for the sources of intellectual knowledge, without which one cannot determine the nature and limits of metaphysics”³³ was unsatisfactory. Nevertheless, the problem which Kant has noticed, the problem of how to explain the agreement of intellectual concepts with their objects, is a genuine one, and when Kant introduces that problem in the *Critique*, he presents it in that general form. (For instance, he says in the Preface for the First Edition that “the chief question is always simply this: What and how much can the understanding and reason know apart from experience?” A xvii; cf. B xvi — viii, A 92/B 124 — 125). In order to solve this general problem, that is, the aporia of *a priori* knowledge, Kant had to rediscover the significance of the nature of the objects of knowledge and limit the cognitive application of intellectual concepts to objects we can experience. When Kant realizes that “if the objects with which our knowledge has to deal were things in themselves, we could have no *a priori* concepts of them” (A 128), and that “there can be no *a priori* knowledge, except of objects of possible experience” (B 166) he faces a narrower problem, which can also be called a transcendental problem: how is (synthetic) *a priori* knowledge of the objects of possible experience possible when it is not possible for objects *an sich*?³⁴ But even then he presumably still had a long way to go to reach the conclusion that the conditions of the possibility of experience are at the same time conditions of the possibility of objects of experience.

Kant, as we have seen, could not claim this in the letter to Herz. But he did discover a problem whose philosophical significance he had not been aware of earlier. And as he himself wrote around 1772, the question of how to explain the relation of *a priori* concepts to objects is “the first and most important question” and that “even to raise this question is meritorious.”³⁵

³³ Ak X, 132; Zweig, p. 73.

³⁴ In R 4849, Ak XVIII, 5, Kant says that the purpose of metaphysics is to determine the origin of synthetic *a priori* knowledge; this, of course, does not mean that Kant already had the transcendental problem in mind, that is, that this question from the mid-1770's had at that time the same meaning for him as it would have in 1781.

³⁵ Ak XVII, 616.

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