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On the Transcendental Philosophy in the Light of the Kantian Aggregate – System Opposition

ABSTRACT: The article represents an attempt to determine the essence of critical philosophy in the light of Kantian distinction between aggregate and system. In order to achieve this, the article harks back to Kant's work and to accomplishments of Marburg School of neo-Kantianism and particularly to Ernst Cassirer's philosophy. Discrimination between aggregate and system as two possible types of knowledge representation rests on the precedent discrimination between substance and function and constitutes the main motive that determines the basic core of philosophical transcendental method in its opposition to the "dogmatic" method.

KEY WORDS: Kant • Marburg School • Cassirer • transcendentalism • aggregate • system • theory of knowledge

“**T**ranscendental philosophy” – as its founder puts it in the first of his *Critiques* – “is only the idea of a science, for which the critique of pure reason has to lay down the complete architectonic plan. That is to say, it has to guarantee, as following from principles, the completeness and certainty of the structure in all its parts. It is the *s y s t e m* [emphasis – P. P.] of all principles of pure reason”¹. According to Kant, it is not only the transcendental philosophy but all knowledge in general – if it is to be knowledge in the first place – that needs its own form of a system of rules, a whole where all the elements relate to one another and mutually describe one another. For the knowledge to constitute a system one needs to base it on the functional unity. Contrastively, the substantial unity is only an ordinary accumulation of elements – an *aggregate*. It is exactly this opposition that constitutes the main theme of the present paper and one which will serve as a reference point for an attempt at the description of the essence of the critical thought. It may also be considered as a useful tool for the demonstration of the mutual

¹ I. Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, A 14/B28, trans. by N. Kemp-Smith (further as *CPR*).

entanglement between the ontological and the epistemological issues. The crucial support for the execution of such meditations will be provided by the works of Kant himself as well as the Neo-Kantian thinkers connected with the Marburg School – as these are the places where Kant's theme of the shape of possible knowledge was being developed most extensively.

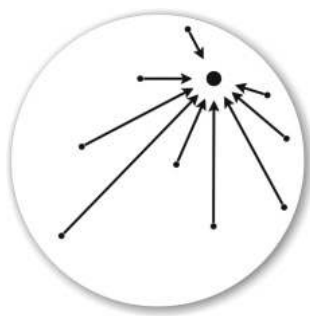
The attempt to characterise and understand the vision of philosophy after the Copernican Turn may benefit from the use of an old metaphor. The fundamental goal of philosophy, traditionally credited as being formulated by Pythagoras, is augmented by the critical philosophy with a significant innovation: a philosopher's task cannot solely consist in a passive observation of the daily life happening at the marketplace and at an attempt to understand the laws which govern this life. It is the philosopher who is to be the lawmaker and it is the philosopher who is to impose the order, so that the marketplace may function properly and does not transform into an ownerless plaything where the regulations are imposed by force of the strongest. The lawmaker, however, cannot be a stranger from a far-away land. Such a person has to be an integral part of the community which they create – it is only the regulations that the lawmaker introduces which effectively create the community. If this is not the case, the measure such a person uses to describe the behaviour of the people observed will not be adequate to the conditions of these people functioning and will not make the necessary allowances for the individual needs and interests of the community's members. The lawmaker has to formulate general laws without the destruction of the individual characteristics.

More to the point, the most important feature of the Copernican Turn in philosophy, and consequently the most significant principle of the critical philosophy, is the fact that the only way to access the "external world", i.e. the objects given, is apparently and paradoxically only attainable owing to the analysis of the "internal world", or the rules that govern our knowledge "Only the place inside the knowledge" – as formulated by Ernst Cassirer – "provides the standpoint for the transcendental approach to pose its possible questions"². The synthetic function of thoughts – as the principle of bidding diversity into unity – cannot be external to this diversity, but has to constitute an immanent principle and consider the specificity of its elements. Yet, such an approach was only developed at a relatively late stage of the thought's advancement. According to certain critics, especially the ones connected

² E. Cassirer, *Das Erkenntnisproblem in der Philosophie und Wissenschaft der neuen Zeit*, Bd. 3 – *Die nachkantischen Systeme*, [in:] *idem, Gesammelte Werke. Hamburger Ausgabe*, Bd. 4, Hamburg 2000, s. 124.

with the Neo-Kantian Marburg School, transcendentalism was in a sense its final achievement³. The problem of knowledge – construed as a problem of changing chaos into logos, or ascribing forms to the orderless diversity of reality, or the relationship between thought and being – took various forms throughout the centuries of philosophy. In the history of this problem we may distinguish three possible approaches to the relationship between being and its formulating principle. These can, in turn, be finally narrowed down to two positions characteristic for the point of view adopted in the present text and centred on the opposition between knowledge as a system and knowledge as aggregate, or the dogmatism and criticism opposition – to use the Neo-Kantian language.

The first approach attempted to narrow down the diversity of being, considered as given and ready, to some highlighted, single element of this being. This orientation may be represented in the following way:

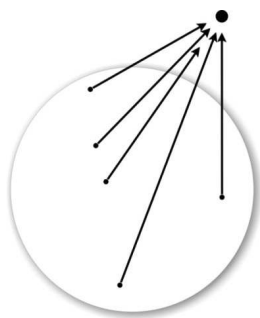


The schematic diagram above uses a circle to represent the closed and once and for all given area of being. Similarly to a mathematical set, this area contains a certain diversity of elements (represented in the diagram by the dots) which were included there by chance. Likewise, chance also governed the fact that one of the elements of the represented whole was singled out and given the status of a “primary substance”, “the principle”, “arche”. This principle has the primacy over all remaining elements of the group. The latter elements, consequently, may be reduced to this principle on the basis of the arbitrarily differentiated properties – ones which they hold on the basis of some process of abstraction. Such a diagram may well illustrate the philosophical thinking of the founding philosophers of nature, where the differentiated material part of being (water, air, fire, etc.) was ascribed the primacy over its other parts.

³ Cf. P. Natorp, *Kant und die Marburger Schule*, „Kantstudien”, XVII, 1912.



A similar role was played by the Aristotelian “primary principle” which was also a certain highlighted part of being, singled out of the multiplicity of “secondary principles”, seen as concrete things. Such principle was not of an immanent character, but became transcendent in relation to being which it is supposed to govern. These “off-world” entities – especially in Aristotle’s scholastic interpretations, but also in the dogmatic physics – took the form of the transcendentals which, in an obligatory way, a given reality is “entitled to”. However, they need to be firstly drawn out from this reality, only to be later located somewhere beyond. We may notice this in the works of one of the contemporary advocates of the metaphysical approach: “the world, reality, or being that was initially given to us are things not only genetically precedent to people, but also methodologically former than they are”⁴. The transcendentals are – obviously when considered in a simplistic manner – correspondent to the Kantian categories: they are to play the same part in the process of knowledge, but nonetheless are off-world entities (these are existence, essence, thing, something, unity). They are external to the reality which is entitled to them, that is why there occurs a situation of an opposition between a certain (given) reality, on the one hand, and some metaphysical entities which in a mysterious and complicated way are related to it, on the other hand. Such a movement may be illustrated as follows:



In this case the area of being is also closed, static and set. The diversity of the in-world phenomena and objects or, to put it differently – things, boils down to the off-world collection of principles. They set this world in order from without, not being its part themselves. Therefore, the order which they introduce is an illusory one and resembles the alphabetical order, i.e. an imposed one; one which has no relation to the actual form of the things which it arranges.

⁴ M. A. Krąpiec, *Człowiek i prawo naturalne*, Lublin 1986, p. 100.

In both cases we can notice the view of being as an aggregate or, in other words, an accumulation of elements which are bound together only by an imposed, overarching principle. Regardless of the possibility for the nature of this principle to be of “this-world” – as it can be seen in the simple examples of pre-Socratic philosophers, who arbitrarily identified a chosen material entity, or in the case of the scholastic thinkers, where the principle is transcendent to reality which it relates to – all of these cases show that it is an intrusion that uses force to pick out the features of the ready-made things and which, according to these features, divides them into classes and sub-classes. In both cases the area of being which can be subject to knowledge is closed and contains a previously set number of previously set objects. In this case, cognition always has the form of an abstraction the result of which consists in the process where the ready-made things, both in their existence and structure, allow to draw out certain common elements on the basis of the external criterion, one which is sometimes imposed against their “nature”. The externality of this criterion does not have to consist in the fact that it is a transcendent entity in the metaphysical sense, but it can consist in its taking under consideration the fact of the specificity of the analysed elements, thus constituting a transcendent unity in the logical sense. As the already mentioned Cassirer puts it, it is a typical mistake of both, the “naïve realism of the ordinary image of the world” as well as the “realism of the dogmatic metaphysics”. Such realism

[...] separates out of the totality of possible concepts of reality single one and sets its up as a norm and pattern for all the others. Thus certain necessary formal points of view, from which we seek to judge and understand the world of phenomena, are made into things, into absolute beings. Whether we characterize this ultimate being as ‘matter’ or ‘life’, ‘nature’ or ‘history’, there always results for us in the end confusion in our view of the world, because certain spiritual functions, that cooperate in its construction, are excluded and others are over-emphasized⁵.

This image of the whole is – as especially the Neo-Kantian Marburg thinkers understand it – characteristic of the metaphysics which earned its name in Marburg as dogmatic; it also illustrates its conduct as the substantialisation of viewpoints. Little does it matter if the preferred element of the world’s image is material or formal in character, be it Thales’s water,

⁵ E. Cassirer, *Einstein’s Theory of Relativity*, [in:] *idem, Substance and Function and Einstein’s Theory of Relativity*, trans. by W. C. and M. C. Swabey, Chicago-London 1923, p. 447.



Pythagorean number, Freudian drive, or Marxist class struggle; such metaphysics will always be constituted in the case where an attempt is made to narrow down the incalculable variety of the world into the one-sidedness of a given standpoint. “No individual form” – as we read in the last chapter of Cassirer’s work about *Einstein’s Theory of Relativity* – “can indeed claim to grasp absolute ‘reality’ as such and to give it complete and adequate expression”⁶. An unauthorized extension of the scope of a certain form always constitutes a metaphysical violence – it is an attempt to impose the form onto an area where it does not have any bearing. The “order” which is thus introduced is solely “mechanical” and does not give us any knowledge about the scrutinized object.

The adequate order for both of the abovementioned approaches represented in the diagrams, as it was already stated, is an alphabetical order. When we go to a library or when we order books online we most frequently make use of the alphabetical catalogue where it is easy to find the book we are looking for, provided we know the author’s name that is. In a sense, such a catalogue arranges the book collection, but it also has one drawback: in order to find something with its help, we need to know exactly what we are looking for, we need to know the features of the sought for object. We need to know such features of this object, however, which, are actually not related to the object in any way – in this case, the name of the book’s author that is not even remotely related to the contents of what we are looking for. The books which we may find in the same drawer do not have anything in common, apart from the initial letter of the names of their authors, and the possible similarities and convergences in themes discussed within these books are usually accidental in character. The ‘order’ which we are dealing with here is in fact no order at all. It is imposed from without on the basis of an arbitrary criterion which does not take into account the interest of the particular elements of the whole that are being arranged. Such a type of ‘ordering’ of the whole may be termed an accumulation or an aggregate.

Nevertheless, while using a library we also have systematic catalogues at our disposal (also called subject catalogues) where the whole book collection is arranged according to certain rules, stemming from the very nature of the arranged elements in the set and arranged according to a certain idea. In this case, particular drawers contain the works which were segregated according to an immanent principle and which, for example, discuss a particular subject. A different drawer will contain the books on

⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 446.

science, another one on humanities, still another on religion or arts, and yet another on history⁷.

The situation is similar with the critical model of knowledge. Here, instead of imposing an external criterion of arrangement, on the basis of which the objects are grouped into classes due to their sharing some quality – unimportant from the point of view of the discussed subject – each whole constitutes a system subordinate to the synthetic function which grants every element from the set its proper place in relation to another element. According to Ernst Cassirer, who is guiding us through the present deliberations, and according to other representatives of the Neo-Kantian Marburg School, the turn which took place together with Plato's thinking consists in the fact that the erstwhile fixed and ready being was problematized, whereas the thinking which in previous approaches had been aimed at a faithful reflection of the given things – in the works of Socrates' disciple – was to shape the very form of this being not from an external position however, but from within. As the introduction to the first volume of *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms* reads, „it no longer runs parallel to being, a mere reflection 'about' being, but by its own inner form, it now determines the inner form of being”⁸. The distinction between system and aggregate, or between the critical and dogmatic philosophy, which is presently of interest to us, was carried out here on the basis of the criterion of the internal or external principle of a given whole. In the critical philosophy the metaphysical real of the organising principle is less important than its logical function. While each internal principle is appointed by the system because of its very essence (just like in a systematic catalogue), the external principle is an intruder who imposes its own order by force, against the grain of the nature of the thing being arranged (like in the alphabetical catalogue).

Obviously, the philosophers who are associated with the critical orientation did not only devote their time to theoretical meditations, but were also engaged in wide-ranging historical research. Their method may well illustrate the above-sketched differentiation. We may generally call

⁷ It is worth noticing that this is exactly the key which was used to arrange the book collection in the renowned Warburg Library in Hamburg, one used by Ernst Cassirer while working on his *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*. For the discussion of the subject compare, e.g. H. Paetzold, *Ernst Cassirer – Von Marburg nach New York. Eine philosophische Biografie*, Darmstadt 1995., p. 68–85 as well as T. Cassirer, *Mein Leben mit Ernst Cassirer*, Hildesheim 1981, p. 125. See also: J. Habermas, *The Liberating Power of Symbol. Ernst Cassirer's Humanistic Legacy and the Warburg Library* [in:] idem, *The Liberating Power of Symbol. Philosophical Essays*, trans. by P. Dews, Cambridge 2001, p. 1–29.

⁸ E. Cassirer, *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*, Vol. 1 – *The Language*, trans. by R. Manheim, New Heaven 1975 (further as PSF1), p. 74.



it a problematic approach and oppose it to the purely chronological one. The history of philosophy, as the history of problems, in the light of the aforementioned arguments would be its presentation in a systematic manner, whereas a chronologically ordered version – however important on the one hand – would be otherwise secondary. The grouping together of philosophers, as philosophers indeed, according to the dates of their births and deaths makes as much sense as the grouping of their works on the basis of an alphabetical “order”. The thing that really binds them together is the convergence of the ideas they touch upon and the same question which they attempt to find an answer to. This does not at all mean the abandonment of chronology, but the removal of its primacy through the subordination of the content according to key which is a more suitable for philosophy itself: problem centred, i.e. the object⁹.

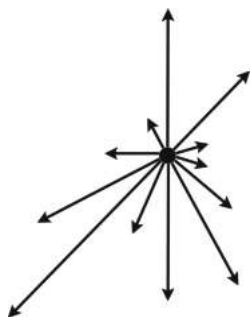
The opposition between aggregate and system, as fundamental for the description of the new task for philosophy which the critical thought poses for itself, can be found in numerous writings of Kant. In the *Critique of pure reason* we can read the following:

If we consider in its whole range the knowledge obtained for us by the understanding, we find that what is peculiarly distinctive of reason in its attitude to this body of knowledge, is that it prescribes and seeks to achieve its *s y s t e m a t i s a t i o n*, that is, to exhibit the connection of its parts in conformity with a single principle. This unity of reason always presupposes an idea, namely, that of the form of a whole of knowledge – a whole which is prior to the determinate knowledge of the parts and which contains the conditions that determine *a priori* for every part its position and relation to the other parts. This idea accordingly postulates a complete unity in the knowledge obtained by the understanding, by which this knowledge is to be not a mere contingent aggregate, but a system connected according to necessary laws¹⁰.

⁹ This similarity between the Latin „*ob-jectum*” and the Greek „*pro-blema*” is noticed and used by Natorp in his theses [P. Natorp, *Die logischen Grundlagen der exakten Wissenschaften*, Lipsk 1923, s. 30]. One of the best examples of such understanding of the ‘history of philosophy’ is the formerly referred to, four-volume work by Ernst Cassirer, *Das Erkenntnisproblem in der Philosophie und Wissenschaft der neueren Zeit* (1906–1950). On the issue of history of philosophy as the history of the problem of cognition see: P. Parszutowicz, *Historia filozofii jako historia problemu poznania – propozycja Ernsta Cassirera*, „Archiwum Historii Filozofii i Myśli Społecznej”, vol. 54, 2009.

¹⁰ CPR, A 645/B673. In another fragment of the *Critique* can we find the following: „By a system I understand the unity of the manifold modes of knowledge under one idea. This idea is the concept provided by reason – of the form of a whole – in so far as the concept determines *a priori* not only the scope of its manifold content, but also the positions

If we attempted to represent the whole, understood as a system, in a diagram similar to the ones used above for the illustration of the dogmatic metaphysical orientations – in the understanding of the Kantian philosophy advocates, that is – it might have the following shape:



In contrast to the previous diagrams, here the area of “being” is open and has the character of a possible experience. It is from the idea of the unity of the whole of experience that the completeness of being is derived, basing on the synthetic principles stemming from this unity and using it to form a system of the possible experience. Here the principles determine what is not specified and until “this” is not specified, we cannot speak about “it” as an object of experience, let alone as being. For the critical philosophy, as Natorp, one of the Marburg School masters¹¹ for instance claimed, nothing is given but it can be only thought. It is the thought that gives to the whole the scientific character – the systematic character of knowledge, or “its cohesion stemming from one primary principle”. Particular parts of the whole of knowledge are not given. What follows from this is the fact that the division does not take place mechanically, but remotely: the parts are granted with their respective traits owing to the idea of the whole. Such an approach may be found in the works of Kant himself. The author of *Critique of Judgment* writes the following in the first introduction to this work:

If the parts of such a possible whole are regarded as already completely given, the division is performed mechanically, according to mere comparison, and the whole becomes aggregate (roughly as cities become if land is divided among applicant settlers according to the intentions of each and without concern of policy). But if before

which the parts occupy relatively to one another” [*Ibidem*, A 832/B860]. See also: I. Kant, *Prolegomena to any future metaphysics*, trans. by P. Carus, Chicago 1949, pp. 118–120.

¹¹ Cf. P. Natorp, *Kant und die Marburger Schule*, *op.cit.*



determining the parts we can, and are to, presuppose the idea of a whole in terms of a certain principle, then we must perform the division scientifically; and only in this way does the whole become a system¹².

Therefore, it is only the case that the synthetic functions of thinking, while specifying the area of the unspecified, in a sense, “create” being as an object of the possible experience. It is the idea, as “a rational notion of the form of the whole”, that specifies the place of the particular elements in that whole, at the same time building out of it an orderly relationship which follows certain laws; all this in relation to the arbitrary accumulation (a gathering), i.e. aggregate.

In a similar way, the system is characterised in Hermann Cohen’s work, *Logik der reinen Erkenntnis*. Cohen however opposes the system as an orderly whole to the community (*Allheit*), which is solely a collection of the accidental points of view of the complete set of elements. What he uses as an example of system is the notion itself in its particular Marburg understanding, the theory of which was later developed by Cassirer in his *Substance und Funktion*¹³, and which is not, as Aristotle would see it, “a vessel for properties,” but precisely is the system of functions.

We know that the community (*Allheit*) does not take under consideration the particular elements which it encompasses; [...] they are not treated in their specificity, but they are simply included there. The notion does not turn away from the interests of the elements the unity of which it is to create. They are not its parts but its elements (*Glieder*). The parts do not care about the whole, the sum of which they are becoming. The elements are only the elements of the respective influences, they are conditioned by the system; however, they, not to a lesser degree, condition the system themselves¹⁴.

Based on the notion of substance, the whole as an aggregate is paradoxically never a whole in the exact sense of the words. It is, as if, just in the process of completion of the elements sharing some common feature. Despite the fact that it is supposedly a closed whole that is fully determined, for knowledge it is, however, always occurring in a way that is only fragmentary. In his *Metaphysical Elements of Ethics* Kant writes that

¹² I. Kant, *First Introduction to the Critique of Judgment*, [in:] *idem, Critique of Judgment*, trans. by W. S. Pluhar, Indianapolis 1987, p. 437.

¹³ E. Cassirer, *Substance and Function*, [in:] *idem, Substance and Function and Einstein’s Theory of Relativity*, op.cit.

¹⁴ H. Cohen, *Logik der reinen Erkenntnis*, Berlin 1914, p. 379.

the doctrine (*Lehre*) can be built in a fragmentary way, „as an aggregate of separate doctrines” or „as a true science (*wahre Wissenschaft*)”, that is, systematically¹⁵. The dogmatic approaches are in no way capable of pointing out the completeness of such an accumulation, while the system, as a system of synthetic functions, necessarily, encompasses and predicts all the possible elements of the whole¹⁶. Having the necessary principle of synthesis at one’s disposal, it is possible to anticipate objects on such basis; to paraphrase Kant: the knowledge of the object can thus exceed the object itself¹⁷.

Conclusions from the fact that the criterion of scientificity of a given doctrine rests on its usage of the synthetic *a priori* judgements lead Kant to the following description of science: „Every doctrine, if it is to be a system, i.e., a whole of knowledge ordered according to principles, is called science¹⁸”. Fragmentary knowledge can, to a certain extent, be taken for a doctrine (*Lehre*), but it cannot be taken for ‘a true science’ and it is, as Kant says, “a common knowledge”. Exactly, the “systematic unity is what first raises ordinary knowledge to the rank of science, that is, makes a system out of a mere aggregate of knowledge”¹⁹. The significant feature of any “true” science is its regularity²⁰.

Consequently, each domain of knowledge needs to necessarily constitute a system of notions where, on the one hand, every term has a specific form determined by the traits of the given area and, on the other hand,

¹⁵ I. Kant, *The Metaphysical Elements of Ethics*, trans. by T.K. Abbot, *Preface*, Andy Blunden 2003, p. 1.

¹⁶ Paul Natorp, in one of his works devoted to the interpretation of Plato’s works, describes the synthetic judgement as “[...] the judgement made by the reference to the one thing or another, through comparison, establishment of relationships, independent from its now, similarly to a momentary experience; due to this, it does not die with it, but in encompassing that what is past and present, it introduced their unity with that what is to come”. P. Natorp, *Über Platos Ideenlehre*, Berlin 1914, p. 15.

¹⁷ Cf. I. Kant, *Prolegomena*, *op.cit.*, p. 34.

¹⁸ I. Kant, *Metaphysische Anfangsgründe der Naturwissenschaft*, [in:] I. Kant, *Gesammelte Schriften* (Akademie-Ausgabe), Bd. IV, p. 467.

¹⁹ CPR, A832/B860. Kant calls the art of creating systems “architectonics” – this art is treated extensively in the third section of the transcendental methodology in his *Critique of Pure Reason*. Compare *ibidem*.

²⁰ The regular (systematic) unity is in Kant’s philosophy completely the effect of the cognitive intellect. Such deliberations lead him to the explicit expression, in the conclusion of *The Critique of Judgement*, that a human being is the only being which, owing to its reason, can use the aggregate of particular phenomena to build a system [compare I. Kant, *Critique of Judgement*, *op.cit.*, p. 383]; this claim is, in effect, tantamount to the claim that „the understanding does not derive its laws (*a priori*) from, but prescribes them to, nature” [I. Kant, *Prolegomena*, *op.cit.*, p. 82] – obviously, what is meant here is nature understood formally (*natura formaliter spectata*) [See: CPR, B164–165].

it takes its rightful place and is correlated with the remaining notions; in other words, the notion determines the others, while being determined by them in return. The specificity of each of these forms does not stem from its substantial character but from the relations which tie them to other forms. None of them is privileged but constitutes only a certain aspect of reality and it needs to be treated exactly as an aspect. The theoretical aspects we use to encompass a given domain are always correlated with the whole system of other aspects and the slightest change in one of them immediately entails the transformation in the remaining ones. According to Cassirer, „the system of knowledge tolerates no isolated ‘formal’ determination without consequences in all the problems and solutions of knowledge”²¹. In a systematized area, as Nicolai Hartmann demonstrates it in one of his early Marburg dissertations, every string of correlates, in its idiosyncratic way, permeates through the whole of the system, thus, influencing all of its elements. The diametrical opposition of the correlates, in a sense, “opens dimensions” where the particular attributes, determined by other elements of the system and other strings of correlates, can be seen²². The same applies to the basic philosophical notions the terms of which (meanings) depend on the place in the system and which, simultaneously, determine the meanings of other notions. In a small and early essay, *Systembildung und Idealismus*, Hartmann characterizes the mutual relationships of the scientific systems of notions in the following way:

The opposition between the principle (*Prinzip*) and the condition (*Gegenstand*) (condition and what is being conditioned) constitutes a dimension common for all the domains of philosophy, as well as the detailed sciences. The hypothetical way up (*Aufstieg*) and the deductive way down (*Abstieg*) fully and completely take place within this dimension. The remaining such significant basic correlations are: that which is rational and that which is irrational; that what is general and that which is individual, subject and object, *etc.* All of these depend on one another mutually and cannot be thought about in abstraction. Their directions intersect in any given point of the system²³.

For the critical approach, particular areas of knowledge cannot have the form of aggregates of observations which are linked together only by external

²¹ E. Cassirer, *Substance and Function*, *op. cit.*, p. iv.

²² Cf. N. Hartmann, *Systembildung und Idealismus*, *Systembildung und Idealismus*, [in:] *Philosophische Abhandlungen. Hermann Cohen zum 70sten Geburtstag (4. Juli 1912) dargestellt*, Berlin 1912, p. 5.

²³ *Ibidem*, p. 6.

associations, but are organised and united in a way suitable for a particular theoretical standpoint. Such a standpoint grants a particular, systematic form to a certain domain of knowledge. However, this form derives its possibility from the relations which tie it together with possible forms of talking about them. The aim of the critique of knowledge could only be met, if, as Ernst Cassirer puts it,

it could find a standpoint situated above all these forms and yet not merely outside them: a standpoint which could make it possible to encompass the whole of them in one view, which would seek to penetrate nothing other than the purely immanent relation of all these forms to one another, and not their relation to any external, 'transcendent' being or principle²⁴.

Finding such a viewpoint, not transcendent but transcendental one²⁵ – which would be immanent, in the logical sense, in relation to the whole which it encompasses – might allow to build a systematics of knowledge. Because, as Immanuel Kant states in the final parts of his *Critique of Pure Reason*, „not only is each system articulated in accordance with an idea, but they are one and all organically united in a system of human knowledge”²⁶. Therefore, the general systematics of knowledge, as a necessary form of scientificity, has to permeate through all aspects of the theoretical work, on all possible levels. On any given level of our conceptualization of the world, the thought erects the forms of notion which are typical for exactly this level. Each of these notions, exactly as a notion, needs to have the form of a system. In other words, whatever we transform into knowledge needs to have the character of a system of terms, understood as systematic and mutually correlated wholes, each of which constitutes the condition for the possibilities of the others. The condition that the transcendental philosophy sets out itself to meet is the idea of the systematic wholeness of cognition, postulated by the cognition itself and on the basis of its essence. It requires “to gather the various branches of science with their diverse methodologies – with all their recognized specificity and independence – into one system, whose separate parts precisely through their necessary diversity will complement and further one another”²⁷. In contrast to the dogmatic metaphysical standpoint,

²⁴ PSF1, p. 82.

²⁵ On the subject of the genesis and the history of the term “transcendental” and its differentiation from “transcendent” compare an interesting work by Hinrich Knittermeyer, entitled *Der Terminus transzendental in seiner historischen Entwicklung bis Kant*, Marburg 1920.

²⁶ CPR, A 835/B863.

²⁷ PSF1, p. 77.



this condition cannot ever be met in the substantial sense. This is because the whole of cognition is not described substantially – as closed and ready, together with its structure – but it will always remain an idea due to its continuous description in terms of relationality – as a system of mutually correlated moments of an ideal function which, exactly because of its character, is open to a constant progress of cognition.

This connection provides us with a special type of a whole. Such a whole is not created solely through the abstraction of a group of elements on the basis of some arbitrarily selected feature and its assignment to a special class, but it takes into account the “interest” of particular parts, their function and becomes a whole only because of a certain “interest”. In the same way, these elements – specified on the basis of unity and simultaneously determining the character of this unity – cannot be treated on their own as previously given substances, instead they become the moments of function. The whole based on the notion of substance is an aggregate; when based on the notion of function, it is a system.

To conclude, in the critical thought the transcendent substance, which is the metaphysical base of the wholeness of being as an aggregate, has to give way to function, which consists the logical guarantee for the whole of being as a system of the possible experience. The negative idea of an infinite edifice of knowledge, which is solely an accumulation of particular claims and notions – with infinity described negatively, as the impossibility of the determination of the whole – is replaced by a positive idea, one based on the principle of unity and the universal relationship of all the elements of the edifice. In this case, every element, despite their infinite number, is unequivocally specified on the basis of an universally-encompassing principle.



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