

# The Key to All Metaphysics: Kant's Letter to Herz, 1772

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Kant's 1772 letter to Markus Herz is celebrated for its marking the 'Critical turn' in Kant's thought, a turn that would move Kant away from the speculative metaphysics of the 1750s towards the Critical philosophy of 1781. It is here, seemingly for the first time, that Kant asks the question concerning the relationship between concepts and objects, telling his former pupil that the answer to this question 'constitutes the key to the whole secret of hitherto still obscure metaphysics.' For anyone interested in the development of Kant's thought this makes for exciting news since it is the posing of this question that marks Kant's first step towards the *Critique* and it is the answer to this question that will come to identify the 'objective portion' of the Transcendental Deduction, a text that already begins with a rehearsal of points raised in Kant's letter.<sup>1</sup> But while the letter to Herz is clearly itself a key to what Kant sees as the 'whole secret of hitherto still obscure metaphysics', the question concerning concepts and objects itself poses interpretive problems that need to be addressed. Above all, one needs to ask how Kant arrived at such a question.

Between the *Inaugural Dissertation* of 1770 and the *Critique of Pure Reason* of 1781 Kant published nothing of significance so far as the development of the Critical philosophy is concerned. How then, we must ask, is it possible to explain the momentous shift that both the raising and the resolution of such a question represents for Kant's thought? The answer to this depends not only upon how one reads Kant's letter to Herz, but also on how one reads Kant's *Dissertation*, his wider correspondence, and the *Nachlass* of the surrounding years as well. With the scope of the project so broadened, however, interpretations have inevitably diverged, and the question concerning the relating of concepts and objects has been subsumed

under the prior question of whether or not we should take Kant's letter to be in fact a mere 'balance sheet of the past', rather than any real 'programme for the future.' If the former is the case, it is argued, then Kant's concepts must surely be looking for a relation to the noumena so prominently displayed only two years earlier in the *Inaugural Dissertation*; if, by contrast, we take Kant to have genuinely made his 'Critical turn', then we must consider these objects to be objects of phenomenal experience. Thus, any interpretive project starting out with an assumption regarding Kant's turn, is itself forced to turn back to the texts themselves if there is any hope of addressing Kant's question.

While Kant's letter to Herz has certainly left its mark on Kant scholarship, most intellectual studies are concerned with one or another of the constellation of issues surrounding the letter, and no single study has undertaken a comprehensive analysis of the problems raised in Kant's letter as a whole. In taking up once more the interpretive problems posed by Kant's question concerning concepts and objects, I propose to fill just that gap. My discussion will be driven by three concerns: first, how was Kant led to the question concerning concepts and objects as a problem to be resolved?; second, is it in fact objects with which Kant is concerned in this question, or, as some have argued, is he concerned instead to show the possibility of concepts that are a priori?; and, third, what might we guess Kant's solution, his 'key to the whole secret of metaphysics', to have been? Only once these questions are answered, I will argue, can we have a secure sense that Kant's 'Critical turn' of 1772 was indeed just that, and that the letter to Herz can be rightly seen as setting part of the agenda for the *Critique of Pure Reason* to come.

### **I. Reason has insight only into that which it produces after a plan of its own (B xiii)**

Determining the exact path that Kant would take to his consideration of concepts and objects is, of course, a matter for speculation. There are, nonetheless, grounds for treating some speculative hypotheses as more likely than others, and in this case two likely candidates stand out: J.H. Lambert and David Hume. Kant was well acquainted with a 1755 translation of Hume's *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, later praising Hume's 'confidence in his

own genius' in a letter to Herder in 1768 (10:74).<sup>2</sup> And it is clear to all readers of the 1766 *Dreams of a Spirit-Seer* just how potent Hume's scepticism had proven for the 'dreams of metaphysics'. Gone were the earlier forays into the metaphysics of vital forces, discovered was a new-found concern with metaphysics as a 'science of the limits of human reason' (2: 368). 'Hume's problem', as Kant would come to see it by the mid-1760s, however, would fall under the more general problematic of 'logical subreption'. This type of error occurs once concepts proper only to sensible experience transgress those limits once we apply them to the immaterial realm. Kant charged himself for having made this mistake, since both the *Nova Delucidatio* (1755) and the *Physical Monadology* (1756) ascribed forces of attraction and repulsion respectively to spirits and monads.<sup>3</sup> *Dreams of a Spirit-Seer*, by contrast, concludes that 'It is impossible for reason ever to understand how something can be a cause, or have a force; such relations can only be derived from experience.' In fact, 'All judgements, such as those concerning the way in which my soul moves my body, or the way in which it is now or may in the future be related to other beings like itself, can never be anything more than fictions ...' (2: 370, 371).<sup>4</sup> Kant's conviction on this point is even more pronounced in a somewhat defensive response to Mendelssohn's comments on *Dreams*:

[T]he upshot of all this is that one is led to ask whether it is intrinsically possible to determine these powers of spiritual substances by means of a priori rational judgments. This investigation resolves itself into another, namely, whether one can by means of rational inferences discover a *primitive* power, that is, the primary, fundamental relationship of cause to effect. And since I am certain that this is impossible, it follows that, if these powers are not given in experience, they can only be invented. (10: 72)<sup>5</sup>

Hume's scepticism, as both comments make clear, had struck a chord.

If the problem of logical subreption was to be overcome it seemed necessary, for Kant, to separate intellect from sense. This decision clearly determined the *Inaugural Dissertation* of 1770: *On the Form and Principles of the Sensible and the Intelligible World*. Indeed, as Kant wrote in a letter accompanying a copy of the *Dissertation* sent to Lambert, '[E]xtremely mistaken conclusions emerge if we apply the basic concepts of sensibility to something that is not at all an

object of sense' (10: 98).<sup>6</sup> It was, moreover, with just this concern in mind that Kant had closed the *Dissertation* with a section outlining the metaphysical fallacy of 'subreptive axioms', insisting there that the method of metaphysics concern itself wholly with the prevention of sensible principles from any transgression of their bounds (2: 411ff).<sup>7</sup> For his own part, however, Lambert appears to have been not only unmoved by such strictures, but in fact unconvinced regarding the virtues of such complete separation.

In rehearsing what he takes to be the main theses of Kant's *Dissertation*, Lambert identifies the 'heterogeneity' of sense and intellect with the following observation:

My thoughts on this proposition have to do mainly with the question of *universality*, namely, to what extent these two ways of knowing are so *separated* that they *never* come together. If this is to be shown a priori, it must be deduced from the nature of the senses and of the understanding. But since we first have to become acquainted with these a posteriori, it will depend on the classification and enumeration of their objects. (10: 105)

Lambert's remark raises two concerns: first, the seeming impossibility of an a priori demonstration of sense and intellect's universal separation; and, second, the resultant turn to their respective objects for evidence – a turn that would limit us to an a posteriori proof. Resorting to experience, however, is not a problem for Lambert, as he makes clear further on in his remarks:

[I]t is also useful in ontology to take up concepts borrowed from appearance [*Schein*], since *the theory must finally be applied to phenomena again*. For that is also how the astronomer begins, with the phenomenon; deriving his theory of the construction of the world from phenomena, he applies it again to phenomena and their predictions in his *Ephemerides* [star calendar]. (10: 108)

'In metaphysics', Lambert concludes, 'the method of the astronomer will surely be the safest', since the metaphysician can likewise 'take everything to be appearance, separate the empty from the real appearance, and draw true conclusions from the latter. If he is successful, he shall have few contradictions arising from the principles and win much favor' (Ibid.).<sup>8</sup> Now given what has been said, we might suspect Kant's immediate reaction to have been one of horror since Lambert seems to be advocating nothing short of 'logical sub-

reption' as the safest method in metaphysics. But what might have struck Kant most, rather, was the question of application.

In the *Inaugural Dissertation* Kant provides a list of intellectual concepts 'originally acquired' via the mind's attention to its own actions in experience, concepts such as substance, necessity, and cause. 'These,' Kant explains, 'never enter into any sensual representations as parts of it, and could not, therefore, in any way be abstracted from it' (2: 395).<sup>9</sup> Now the problem of logical subreption really concerns only the misapplication of sensible concepts to the intellectual realm, and in the *Dissertation* Kant's solution to this problem is to radically separate intellect from sense; this works well except for the fact that radical separation also means that intellectual concepts cannot in turn be applied to the sensible realm. Recalling this makes Lambert's point obvious: any irrevocable break between sense and intellect will leave metaphysics as sterile as ever; what is more, our access to putative intellectual concepts such as cause seems in fact to be necessarily empirical. Which is good, Lambert suggests, since Kant's system allows for no application of intellectual concepts to experience in the first place. Lambert's implicit diagnosis: modify your fear of subreption or risk missing the fact that 'the theory must finally be applied to phenomena again'. Thus while Hume's scepticism regarding necessary connection seemed to demand, for Kant, that concepts such as cause be deemed a priori, both Lambert and Hume were right to point out that this would leave 'matters of fact' out in the cold as far as intellectual concepts were concerned.

That Kant was influenced by these concerns seems clear once we turn to his letter to Herz, but before doing so it is worth noting Herz's own role in this story. A former student of Kant's, Markus Herz was chosen by Kant to serve as his official respondent during the presentation of the *Dissertation*. Herz went on to publish his response, sending a copy to Kant in 1771, and it was in reply to this that Kant ostensibly wrote to Herz in February of 1772 even though it is mentioned only in passing during the course of the letter. There is, however, a juxtaposition of events here that might have consequences for the case being made for Hume's influence. Herz's commentary offered a number of criticisms but we can limit ourselves to his discussion of 'cause'. Simply put, for Herz, cause and effect cannot be grasped without space and time; since, according to the *Dissertation*, space and time are forms of sensible intuition,

cause cannot remain inviolate as an intellectual concept.<sup>10</sup> Herz sent his book to Kant on 9 July 1771. And on 5 and 12 July of that year Hamann's translation of Hume's conclusion to Book I of the *Treatise* was published in Kant's local paper under the title 'Night Thoughts of a Skeptic', a text where Hume argues more forcefully than in the *Enquiry* for causality's subjective nature.<sup>11</sup> One might conclude at this point that the effect of all this, combined with the concerns raised by Lambert, worked to create a twofold problem for Kant: in the case of causality, at least, it might be impossible to prove its status as an a priori concept; at the same time, were causality actually shown to be a priori there would still be the problem raised by Lambert, namely the application and thus usefulness of a priori concepts at all.

This conclusion seems right once we turn to Kant's letter and read his reconstruction of the problem at hand, a problem, Kant admits, 'that in my long metaphysical studies I, as well as others, had failed to pay attention to and that, in fact, constitutes the key to the whole secret of hitherto still obscure metaphysics' (10: 130). The problem, Kant realizes, is maintaining that 'pure concepts of the understanding must not be abstracted from sense perceptions', and that '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', while also answering 'the further question of how a representation that refers to an object without being in any way affected [*affiziert*] by it can be possible'. Kant recalls that in the *Dissertation* he had argued that 'The sensuous representations present things as they appear, the intellectual representations present them as they are', but now he must ask 'by what means are these things given us if not by the way in which they affect [*affiziert*] us?' (10: 131). In mathematics it does seem possible, without the aid of experience, to find agreement between reason and its objects,

But in the case of relationships involving qualities – as to how my understanding may form for itself concepts of things completely a priori, with which concepts the things must necessarily agree, and as to 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 – this question, of how the faculty of the understanding achieves this conformity with the things themselves, is still left in a state of obscurity. (10: 131)

Not only is there a worry regarding the capacity of objects to affect 'concepts of things completely a priori', there is the other side of this, namely the capacity of a priori concepts to affect a relationship with 'objects involving qualities', i.e. the objects of phenomenal experience.

With these passages in mind, the answer to our first question seems clear. The problem of relating concepts and objects arose, for Kant, under the direct influence of Lambert and Hume. Hindsight allows us to see that an answer to Hume will depend on Kant's taking Lambert's implicit advice and modifying the concern with the problem of logical subreption; of recognizing that the transcendental synthesis of all appearances will require the joint efforts of intellect and sense. While Kant would never sacrifice the a priori status of intellectual concepts in favour of Lambert's inductive method, we can be reminded of Lambert's appeal to the methods of the astronomer when Kant later describes his own Copernican revolution in philosophy, announcing that 'reason has insight only into that which it produces after a plan of its own' (B xiii).<sup>12</sup>

## **II. The question of how to relate a priori concepts to objects is the first and most important question (17: 616, 4633 [~1772])<sup>13</sup>**

If, under the influence of Lambert and Hume, the relating of concepts to objects is established as the task at hand, the next question is to determine what it was that Kant actually took to be the heart of the problem. Is the real difficulty the a priori status of the intellectual concepts, e.g. the possibility of 'causality' as an a priori concept, leaving the type of objects to which they are related in some sense irrelevant, or is it instead the objects that are posing the greater obstacle, such that our job is really to determine whether Kant is concerned with noumenal or phenomenal objects as a clue to his solution? Much would seem to hang on this second aspect of the question since a concern with noumenal objects might confirm Kant's lingering ties to the metaphysics of the *Dissertation* whereas an exclusive focus on objects of phenomenal experience would mark a turn towards the Critical philosophy. My own sense is that Kant was concerned with the a priori status of concepts even as this concern was heightened by the worry of relating them to objects

of phenomenal experience, but this will require a somewhat closer look at Kant's texts to work out.

That Kant was indeed concerned with the viability of a priori concepts seems well evidenced not only by the influence from Hume's account of causality but also by the already cited text of the letter to Herz itself. There is further support to be found, however, once we look to the surrounding *Nachlaß*. In a somewhat lengthier anticipation of what would be said to Herz, Kant writes,

The question is: how can we represent to ourselves things entirely a priori, that is, independently of all (even implicit) experience, and how can we comprehend the principles which are not derived from experience but are a priori? How does it come about that to that which is but a product of our self-isolated mind there correspond objects and that these objects are subject to those laws which we prescribe for them? That there are such cognitions a priori pure mathematics and metaphysics teach; but it is an investigation of some importance to try to comprehend the ground of their possibility. (17: 564, 4473 [1771])

This rehearsal of the problems surrounding the possibility of a priori concepts, anticipating as it does the description in the letter to Herz, shows Kant to have been seriously thinking through these issues already in the months prior to his February letter.<sup>14</sup>

While there seems to be no question concerning Kant's concerns in establishing the validity of a priori concepts, some commentators have gone on to claim that this constitutes Kant's central concern in the letter to Herz. This claim relies on a purported ambivalence in Kant's letter when referring to the objects to which these concepts are problematically said to refer. At times Kant seems to imply that they are phenomenal objects of experience, such as those set in contrast to the case offered by the pure objects of mathematics; at other points he seems to intend rather *Intelligibilia* via his use of language taken directly from the *Dissertation*. Kant makes indiscriminate use, moreover, of *Gegenstand* and *Objekt* when referring to 'object' throughout the piece. For these reasons, interpreters have taken the debate concerning referents to be irrelevant, emphasizing instead Kant's focus on the problem posed by the possibility of a priori concepts at all.<sup>15</sup>

There are good reasons, however, for rejecting this claim and seeing, by contrast, that Kant's letter to Herz indeed concerns the relation of concepts to objects. Though Kant is worried about the



possibility of a priori concepts, the text of the letter explicitly turns on the question of relating concepts to objects, and to objects of experience or phenomena, in particular; a reading supported by the surrounding *Nachlaß* given Kant's repeated allusions there to 'experience'. And, as will be shown in what follows, a careful examination of Kant's *Inaugural Dissertation* does not bear out the possibility that Kant was there ever under the impression that a connection to noumenal objects could be possible given the fact that we are incapable of intellectual intuition. This fact not only weakens the possibility that Kant could suddenly somehow be concerned with a relation to noumena in 1772, it strengthens the case for Kant's Critical turn – a turn expressly understood as Kant's recognition of the central task to be the relating of a priori concepts to phenomenal objects – as having actually taken place in the letter to Herz. The idea that the letter to Herz is simply 'a balance sheet of the past', in other words, cannot be maintained once it is seen that in the *Dissertation* Kant was neither concerned with the relation of concepts to objects nor believed that a relation to noumenal objects could ever be achieved.<sup>16</sup>

Turning first to the passage cited earlier from the letter, we find language specific to the problem of phenomena once Kant contrasts the problem posed by objects with quantifiable predicates to what is, for him, the clearer case of those quantities making up the objects of mathematical concepts. There Kant asks 'how my understanding may form for itself concepts of things completely a priori, with which concepts the things must necessarily agree', and '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', deciding that these questions remain 'in a state of obscurity' (10: 131). Earlier in the letter Kant rehearses a series of questions similarly concerned with the problem of relating a priori concepts or 'intellectual representations' to independent objects:

I had said: the sensuous representations present things as they appear, the intellectual representations present them as they are. But by what means are these things given to us if not by the way in which they affect us? And if such intellectual representations depend on our inner activity, whence comes the agreement they are supposed to have with their objects – objects that are nevertheless not possibly produced thereby?

And the axioms of pure reason concerning these objects – how do they agree with these objects since the agreement has not been reached with the aid of experience? (10: 131)

In both of these passages the problem appears to be the same: how is it possible to relate a priori intellectual concepts, representations, principles and axioms to an independent experience, an experience in no way produced by them, but with which they must necessarily agree? While Kant later includes in this portion of the text references to ‘things themselves’, there is no sense either that Kant means this in anticipation of the later distinction between ‘things in themselves’ and ‘things as they appear’ or that it recalls the *Dissertation*’s distinction between ‘things as they are’ and ‘things as they appear’ since, as we will see in a moment, Kant is not finally interested there in a two-world programme of noumena and phenomena.<sup>17</sup>

Turning next to Kant’s *Nachlaß*, we can start by acknowledging a degree of agnosticism that must be maintained with respect to these texts, a collection of notes and reflections made, for the most part, in the margins of the two metaphysics and logic textbooks used by Kant, Baumgarten’s *Metaphysica* and Meier’s *Auszug aus der Vernunftlehre*. The marginalia do, however, reflect the variety of paths Kant followed as he developed the bases for transcendental idealism. Thus, while one might legitimately point out that as a body of work Kant’s notes are full of conflicting and contradictory remarks, hindsight should allow us to place a certain importance on those reflections seeming to presage the Critical philosophy; after all, there is a reason why these succeeded as lines of thought over others, it was not simply a matter of blind chance. In the *Reflexionen* surrounding Kant’s letter to Herz we in fact discover Kant to be quite close to a solution to the problems posed in the letter. In one case in particular, the point is striking:

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 anything that can ever be given to us by experience, because they contain the conditions under which experience is possible. [...] In every experience there is something through which an object is given to us, and there is something through which it is thought. If we take the conditions that lie in the activities of our mind, through which

alone an object can be given, we can know something a priori of all possible objects. (17: 618, 4634 [~1772])

Here we see once more the central concern with experience and its agreement with a priori concepts, but now Kant has made the critical move so far as he has redefined both: 'concepts contain the conditions of possibility – not of things, but of experience' (Ibid.).<sup>18</sup>

Apart from the texts of either the letter or the *Reflexionen*, however, there are already grounds internal to the *Inaugural Dissertation* that argue against an interest, on Kant's part, in seeking a relation between a priori concepts and noumenal, versus phenomenal, objects. The noumenal thesis stems from an account of the *Dissertation* as centrally concerned with a metaphysics specialized to the intelligible world. In 1770 Kant does indeed have an account of the 'Forms and Principles of the Sensible and Intelligible World', wherein sensible representations are said to present things 'as they appear' and intellectual concepts 'things as they are'. But while this seems to set up a two-world system – so much so, in fact, that Lewis White Beck would call the rejection of intellectual intuition 'the great lacuna' of the *Dissertation* since it allowed for no possible access to noumena – a careful reading of the text does not bear this out.<sup>19</sup> Kant's intellectual concepts [*intellectualia*], 'possibility, existence, necessity, substance, cause, etc.,' have a twofold function: their 'elencitic' role staves off the problem of subreption, i.e. 'they perform the negative service of keeping sensitive concepts from being applied to noumena'; their 'dogmatic' use is responsible for generating a moral exemplar or 'Perfectio Noumenon' which can serve as 'the common measure of all other things so far as real', a measure of perfection in either a theoretical sense, 'the Supreme Being, God' or a practical sense, 'moral perfection' (2: 395, 396). These originally acquired concepts – generated by the mind on the occasion of experience – are incapable of accessing a realm of 'things as they are'. Instead, as Kant explains, by the first use of the intellect it is only that 'the very concepts of objects or relations are given, and this is the *real use*' (2: 393). Kant deems this type of 'intellectual cognition' to be 'superior', but superior only so far as it is 'pure' when compared with that knowledge gained from the sensitive faculty. In saying that intellectual concepts represent things as they are, therefore, Kant merely intends to signal their capacity to present

the 'concepts of objects or relations' even if he has introduced the distinction between the objects of sense and intellect as what 'the ancient schools' referred to as noumena and phenomena.<sup>20</sup> That this is so is underlined by Kant's immediately following his presentation of the intellectual concepts with what constitutes a lecture and a warning against any mistaken belief that these concepts might allow for an intellectual intuition of things:

No intuition of things intellectual but only a symbolic [discursive] knowledge of them is given to man. Intellection is possible to us only through universal concepts in the abstract, not through a singular concept in the concrete. For all our intuition is bound to a certain formal principle ... this formal principle of our intuition (space and time) is the condition under which anything can be an object of our senses, and being thus the condition of sensitive knowledge it is not a means to intellectual intuition. Further, all the matter of our knowledge is given by the senses alone, whereas a noumenon, as such, is not to be conceived through representations derived from sensations. Consequently, a concept of the intelligible as such is devoid of all that is given by human intuition. (2: 396)

For an intuition such as ours, limited as it is to strictly empirical employment, intellectual access to noumena is forbidden; only 'the divine intuition, which is the ground, not the consequent, of its objects, is, owing to its independence, archetypal and so is completely intellectual' (2: 397). Kant is clear in 1770 regarding the impossibility of any access to noumena and it seems unlikely, therefore, that in 1772 he would suddenly see such a possibility as 'the key to all metaphysics', particularly in light of the fact that he would never relinquish his prohibition against intellectual intuition. If indeed 'The question of how to relate a priori concepts to objects is the first and most important question', then a survey of Kant's texts can at least provide us with a sense for what Kant took to be the heart of the inquiry: the relating of intellectual a priori concepts to phenomenal objects of experience (17: 616, 4633 [~1772]).

### III. The explanation of the manner in which concepts can thus relate a priori to objects I entitle their transcendental deduction (A 85/B 117)

The final question to be addressed in our examination of Kant's letter to Herz concerns the solution Kant might have envisaged at that time, a solution he surely considered within his grasp, telling Herz that 'so far as my essential purpose is concerned, I have succeeded', and that, as a result, he would be 'in a position to bring out a "Critique of Pure Reason," which should be ready to publish 'within three months' (10: 132). Of course, the fact that it would take Kant a good nine years longer to arrive at the *Critique* is certain evidence that there was more devil in the details than Kant had thought possible in 1772. One obvious piece of the puzzle still missing is the role played by transcendental apperception, the topic of the so-called 'subjective portion' of the transcendental deduction; that would still need to be worked out in the years to come. Concentrating on the problem of relating concepts to objects, the letter to Herz is concerned with what will come to be called the 'objective portion' of the deduction, that piece of the deduction seeking a 'transcendental proof' of the objective validity of the a priori concepts. In 1772, however, Kant provides limited hints as to what he takes the successful solution, so far as his 'essential purpose is concerned', to be. He does explain that he 'sought to reduce the transcendental philosophy (that is to say, all concepts belonging to completely pure reason) to a certain number of categories, but not like Aristotle', who found them merely by chance, but rather 'according to the way they classify themselves by their own nature, following a few fundamental laws of the understanding'. Despite this, nothing more is said regarding their necessary agreement with objects (10: 132).

There is one clue, however, that potentially stands above the others in at least suggesting that Kant's solution was one to be found within and not external to the mind. That an immanent solution is needed seems clear once Kant rehearses and rejects previous attempts to solve the problem. Calling the thesis of *deus ex machina* 'the greatest absurdity one could hit upon in the determination of the origin and validity of our knowledge', Kant is unstinting in his charges against Plato, Malebranche and Crusius on this point (10:

131). Indeed, Kant had moved to this position as early as 1771, declaring that, 'To say that a higher Being has wisely placed such concepts and principles in us amounts to destroying all philosophy. We must look into the nature of cognition in general in order to discover how such a relation or connection is possible even though only one of the relata is given' (17: 564f, 4473 [1771]). To see that Kant was concerned with finding a solution that avoided appeal either to intellectual intuition or the external help of God is not, of course, to identify what such an immanent solution might have been. Nonetheless, we can speculate on the direction of his solution by recalling some of the resources already provided by the *Inaugural Dissertation*.

There are two points in the *Dissertation* that go some way towards a sense of what Kant might have considered as he sat down to provide an answer to the question at hand. Each, in its own way, seeks a new mode of thinking through an old problem. And each, in some sense, does so via something like an immanent solution. The first point turns on Kant's account of the ideality of space and time. With respect to sensible representations, Kant argues that

[T]he form of the representation indicates a certain aspect or relation of the sensa and yet is not properly an outline or schema of the object, but only a certain law inborn in the mind co-ordinating with one another the sensa arising from the presence of the object, for objects do not strike the senses through their form or configuration. (2: 393)

What this means is that the appearing form of sensible objects says more about the subject than the object; that objects incapable of presenting their own form to the senses must be represented according to the mind's own means of coordinating the matter or 'sensa' of an object, and thus that the mind cannot be said to be offering an 'outline or schema' corresponding to the object when it comes to the generation of sensible representations. By this Kant seeks a mediate position: when it comes to objects of experience, sensible representations are neither copies nor archetypes, instead, they are the synthetic result of sensible matter and transcendental form and, as such, immanent to the laws of the mind.

For the second point we can look to what Kant says regarding truth. 'Although phenomena', Kant tells us, 'are, properly, semblances [*species*], not ideas, of things, and express no internal or absolute

quality of the objects, knowledge of them is nonetheless perfectly genuine knowledge' (2: 397). This 'perfectly genuine knowledge' is possible, according to Kant, because judgements about objects concern only an internal agreement between subject and predicate, not an external one between subject and object. In his words, '[T]he concept of the subject [of a judgement], so far as it is a phenomenon, can be given only by its relation to the sensitive faculty of knowledge, and it is also by the same faculty that the sensitively observable predicates are given', thus, since 'the representations of subject and predicate arise according to common laws', a 'perfectly true knowledge' can be allowed of phenomena (2: 397). With this immanent account of truth, any epistemic gap regarding sensible judgements is closed, and we see, once more, Kant's working to mediate between rival positions: the epistemic pitfalls of realism and the 'lazy philosophy' offered up by the Wolffian idealists.

In the *Dissertation* of 1770 we can thus identify an emergent account of knowledge, one that looks above all to 'the nature of cognition in general' as it seeks answers to the questions set by metaphysics. While Kant is still far from a finished deduction of the categories, by 1772 he has already set a precedent of thinking about problems from within the possibilities and limits set by reason. He argues for the validity of phenomenal experience so far as its appearances are formally organized by the mind according to space and time, and he believes in the possibility of a perfectly true knowledge of phenomena so long as our claims are both constrained and coordinated by the common laws of the intellect. The manner by which a priori concepts could be said to relate to phenomenal objects of experience in 1772 might thus well have anticipated much of what was to come: a redefinition of what is meant by phenomenal objects of experience so that rules set by the mind will allow not only for their mutual agreement but for a new account of experience and truth.

Kant's letter to Herz can thus rightly be recognized for its marking Kant's 'Critical turn' in philosophy. The combined influence of Lambert and Hume pushed Kant to ask the question famously containing 'the key to the whole secret of hitherto still obscure metaphysics': What is the relation of concepts to objects? Nine years later Kant would open the centrepiece of the *Analytic* with a similar statement of the task at hand: '[W]e are faced by the problem of how these concepts can relate to objects which they do not yet obtain

from any experience. The explanation of the manner in which concepts can thus relate a priori to objects I entitle their transcendental deduction' (A 85/B 117). An examination of the questions raised by the letter to Herz allows us to see the first steps on Kant's way to precisely that proof.

## Notes

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- <sup>1</sup> See A 92/B 124. All citations from the *Critique of Pure Reason* are given according to the standard formula whereby 'A' refers to the 1781 edition, 'B' to that of 1787, and with pagination as set by the German Academy of Sciences edition of Kant's *Gesammelte Schriften*. English translations by Norman Kemp Smith (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1965) or Paul Guyer and Allen Wood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).
- <sup>2</sup> Letter to Herder, 7 May 1768. Kant's letters translated by Arnulf Zweig, *Immanuel Kant. Correspondence* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), and cited with volume number followed by page as set by the German Academy of Sciences edition of Kant's *Gesammelte Schriften*. With the exception of quotations taken from the *Critique of Pure Reason*, all further citations from Kant will follow this format and all will be included in-text where possible.
- <sup>3</sup> *Nova Delucidatio*: 1: 415; *Physical Monadology*: 1: 484. For discussion of Kant's early account of forces see Alison Laywine's *Kant's Early Metaphysics and the Origins of Critical Philosophy*, North American Kant Society Studies in Philosophy, 3 (Atascadero, CA: Ridgeview Publishing Co., 1993), and Michael Friedman, *Kant and the Exact Sciences* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992), pp. 1–52.
- <sup>4</sup> *Dreams of a Spirit-Seer Elucidated by Dreams of Metaphysics in Immanuel Kant. Theoretical Philosophy 1755–1770*, translated by David Walford (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992).
- <sup>5</sup> Letter to Moses Mendelssohn, 8 April 1766.
- <sup>6</sup> Letter to J. H. Lambert, 2 September 1770.
- <sup>7</sup> That Kant's intentions in the *Dissertation* anticipate, in some sense, the Antinomies, is a commonplace. But the discussion of subreptive axioms also explains and connects seemingly disparate comments by Kant regarding the spur from his 'dogmatic slumber'. It is well known both that in the *Prolegomena* Kant cites Hume for having woken him from the dogmatism of speculative metaphysics (4: 260) and that in a late letter Kant describes the Antinomies as 'what first aroused me from my dogmatic slumber and drove me to the critique of reason itself' (12: 258). Viewed through the lens of logical subreption we can now



see how Kant took the problems posed by Hume and the Antinomies to be virtually the same for dogmatic metaphysics.

- <sup>8</sup> The word *Schein* is drawn from the study of optics, and Lambert, ever impressed with the successful methods of astronomers, accordingly called phenomenology a 'transcendent optics' to maintain its sense as a study of appearance in all of its modes, namely, as both illusion or *bloßes Schein* and as real appearance, i.e. that which is indexed to the real. See J. H. Lambert, *Neues Organon* [1764] in *Gesammelte Philosophische Schriften* (Hildesheim: Olms, 1965), IV, §4. For some discussion of this see Lewis White Beck, *Early German Philosophy* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1969), pp. 407–11.
- <sup>9</sup> *On the Form and Principles of the Sensible and Intelligible World* [*Inaugural Dissertation*], translated by Lewis White Beck in *Kant's Latin Writings*, American University Studies, 9 (New York: Peter Lang, 1992).
- <sup>10</sup> Markus Herz, *Betrachtungen aus der spekulativen Weltweisheit* [1771] (Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag, 1990), p. 72. While the *Inaugural Dissertation* does not distinguish between empirical cause and a general principle of causality, a new distinction does appear between what had previously been treated as identical concepts, namely cause and force, so that now force is given by experience (2: 417) whereas cause becomes intellectual (2: 395).
- <sup>11</sup> '*Nachtgedanken eines Skeptikers*', published anonymously, 5 July and 12 July 1771, *Königsberger gelehrte Zeitung*. Cf. Manfred Kuehn, *Kant. A Biography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), p. 197f. For more on Herz's influence, though from a different perspective so far as it seeks to link Herz with Locke, see Eric Watkins, 'The "Critical Turn": Kant and Herz from 1770–1772', in *Proceedings of the Ninth International Kant Congress*, 2 (2001), 69–77. For an account of Herz (and Mendelssohn's) role in raising the problem of connecting perceptions in time and thus towards the problematic posed by the unity of apperception see Heiner Klemme, 'Kants Wende zum Ich,' *Zeitschrift für philosophische Forschung*, 53 (1999), 507–29.
- <sup>12</sup> Lewis White Beck and Alison Laywine each take up the question of Lambert's influence on Kant though their agendas, particularly in the case of Laywine, differ from the discussion here. See Lewis White Beck, 'Lambert and Hume in Kant's Development', in *Essays on Kant and Hume* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1978), p. 108f, and Alison Laywine, 'Kant in Reply to Lambert on the Ancestry of Metaphysical Concepts', *Kantian Review*, 5 (2001), 1–48. While it will not be a focus of this essay, Kant's letter to Herz includes a discussion of points raised by Mendelssohn and Lambert's critique of the *Dissertation's* account of the relationship between time and change. For consideration of these as instead the decisive influence for Kant's Critical turn see H. J. de Vleeschauwer, *The Development of Kantian Thought*, translated by A. R. C. Duncan (London: Thomas Nelson and Sons, Ltd, 1962), p. 57ff., though it might be agreed that these were decisive for the development of the 'subjective portion' of the deduc-

- tion whereas the former concerns problems associated with the task of the 'objective portion'.
- <sup>13</sup> *Reflexionen* taken from Kant's *Nachlaß* are my own translations, though often in consultation with those available in W. H. Werkmeister, *Kant's Silent Decade* (Tallahassee: University Presses of Florida, 1979), and Paul Guyer and Fred Rauscher, *Immanuel Kant. Notes and Fragments* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005). Page citations are followed by the specific number and date as given by Erich Adickes for the Prussian (now German) Academy edition.
- <sup>14</sup> For discussion of this *Reflexion* in particular and Kant's concern, at the time, with the problems of a priori knowledge in general, see Robert Theis, 'Le silence de Kant', *Revue de Métaphysique*, 2 (1982), 209–39.
- <sup>15</sup> See Predrag Cicovacki, 'An Aporia of A Priori Knowledge', *Kant-Studien*, 82 (1991), 349–60. Alison Laywine explicitly supports this conclusion in, 'Kant in Reply to Lambert on the Ancestry of Metaphysical Concepts', p. 44. Cicovacki is responding to both Wolfgang Carl's argument for a 'phenomenal objects' reading and Lewis White Beck's 'noumenon' position. See Wolfgang Carl, 'Kant's First Draft of the Deduction of the Categories', and Lewis White Beck, 'Two Ways of Reading Kant's Letter to Herz: Comments on Carl', both in *Kant's Transcendental Deductions* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1989), pp. 3–20, 21–6.
- <sup>16</sup> Lewis White Beck, H. J. de Vleeschauwer and Alison Laywine all argue against seeing the letter to Herz as a 'programme for the future', believing instead that Kant's concern there with noumena shows the letter to be rather a 'balance sheet of the past'. As the argument of this section makes clear, I take this position to be mistaken given, above all, Kant's rejection of intellectual intuition in the *Dissertation*. See Beck, 'Two Ways of Reading Kant's Letter to Herz: Comments on Carl', p. 23, de Vleeschauwer, *The Development of Kantian Thought*, p. 59, and Laywine, 'Kant in Reply to Lambert on the Ancestry of Metaphysical Concepts', p. 21.
- <sup>17</sup> Beck reads Kant's use of 'intellectual representations' in the letter to be his (Kant's) translation of '*intellektualia*' from the *Dissertation*; this convinces Beck that Kant 'was still thinking that there can be pure conceptual a priori knowledge of noumena ...' in 'Two Ways of Reading Kant's Letter to Herz', p. 23. This seems unlikely given the context. Within four sentences in the letter Kant moves from the language of 'intellectual representations [*Verstandesvorstellungen*] in the mind' to 'the pure concepts of the understanding [*die reine Verstandesbegriffe*]' to 'intellectual representations' [*intellektuelle Vorstellungen*], asking how these representations, resting on the inner activity of the mind, can agree with objects that are independent of them' (10: 130). That these intellectual representations are synonymous with the mind's own concepts and not noumena is clear in the *Dissertation* where '*intellektualia*', translated as '*intellektuelle Vorstellungen*' in German editions, simply refer to intellectual concepts. See, for example, Kant's admoni-

tion against thinking of such concepts as either inductively abstracted from sense or innate when they are in fact 'originally acquired' by the inner activity of the mind (§§6, 8; 2: 394–5).

- <sup>18</sup> Adickes catalogues these reflections under 'o', identifying them as later than 1771 but earlier than 1776. Taking the earlier numbers in this series to be written in 1772–3, it is primarily on the basis of Kant's *Reflexionen* that Carl and Werkmeister each take Kant to be concerned with phenomenal objects in 1772. See Carl, 'Kant's First Draft of the Deduction of the Categories', p. 7, and Werkmeister, *Kant's Silent Decade*, pp. 86–9. Cicovacki bases much of his suspicion of Carl's thesis on the tenuousness of such dating practices at all – see 'An Aporia of A Priori Knowledge', p. 354.
- <sup>19</sup> Lewis White Beck, 'Two Ways of Reading Kant's Letter to Herz: Comments on Carl', p. 22. Markus Herz also found this to be a central problem for Kant's account, *Betrachtungen aus der spekulativen Weltweisheit*, p. 47, as did Kant's good friend, Johann Schulz, 'Review of Kant's *Inaugural Dissertation*,' in *Exposition of Kant's Critique of Pure Reason*, translated by James C. Morrison (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 1985), pp. 167–70. Kant's rejection of intellectual intuition is, of course, a problem for the *Dissertation* only if you take the project there to be predominantly Platonic or dogmatically rationalist. Once it is clear that Kant is not concerned to explain a mental access to noumena, but is concerned rather to describe the intellectual knowledge of 'things as they are' as knowledge of 'concepts and their relations' made pure due to their having been generated by the mind, (2:393, 394, 411) Beck's 'lacuna' disappears.
- <sup>20</sup> In dismissing Kant's apparent turn away from the sceptical programme set by *Dreams of a Spirit-Seer* in favour of a speculative metaphysics in the *Dissertation*, Frederick Beiser argues similarly, 'Although Kant sometimes loosely speaks of his noumena as if they were a kind of entity, we must be careful not to reify them. They are not a type of existing thing, but simply the forms or structures to which any existing or possible thing must conform ... Rather than contradicting the programme of 1766, then, the metaphysics of the *Dissertation* only continues it. For it does not attempt to extend knowledge into the unknown spiritual world; and its ontology does nothing more than determine those concepts that are necessary limits and conditions of reason,' 'Kant's Intellectual Development: 1746–81', in *The Cambridge Companion to Kant* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), p. 49.