

*Przemysław Parszutowicz*

## ERNST CASSIRER'S IDEA OF THE CRITIQUE OF KNOWLEDGE

### *ABSTRACT*

The article analyses systematically and historically the specific idea of transcendentalism developed in the Marburg School of Neo-Kantianism. The unique line of the Marburg's School interpretation of Kant's critical philosophy consists in contrasting critical (relational) and dogmatic (substantial) understandings of basic philosophical concepts. This line is characteristic of the Marburg School idealism, and it perfectly grasps Ernst Cassirer's peculiar understanding of philosophy—as “the critique of knowledge.” The main thesis of this paper is the following one: the critical method understood as the method of searching for fundamental principles and conditions of possibility of objectiveness is a basic tool of analysis and investigations carried out by Cassirer.

**Keywords:** Ernst Cassirer; transcendentalism; critique of knowledge; Marburg School.

The specific form of the transcendental method developed in Marburg at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries took on the most complete and systematic expression in Ernst Cassirer's *Substance and Function* (1910). The interpretation of the critical philosophy presented there—consisting in the opposition between the critical (relational) and dogmatic (substantial) understandings of the fundamental philosophical notions—characterises, on the one hand, the specificity of the Marburg idealism; on the other, it describes the particularly Cassirerian understanding of philosophy. According to the subtitle of Cassirer's work's (*Studies in the Fundamental Problems of the Critique of Knowledge*), the writings are precisely a critique of knowledge. The critical-cognitive method, as a way of looking for the primary rules and conditions of objectivity, is a basic tool for analyses and studies carried out by Cassirer. Almost all his works are typified by it—starting with the initial historical-philosophical works, and ending with his last text, *The Myth of the State*.

The concept of critique of knowledge (*Erkenntniskritik*) was used for the first time by Herman Cohen, in his work entitled *Das Princip der Infinitesimal-Methode und seine Geschichte. Ein Kapitel zur Grundlegung der Erkenntniskritik*. The person considered to be the father of this concept—in his reference to Kant's critical philosophy—is Otto Liebmann, exerting a profound influence on the subsequent development and the shape of the Neo-Kantian movement in Germany. In his *Analysis der Wirklichkeit* (1876) he proposed to employ the term in relation to the cognitive faculties, and to equate its meaning with the notion of transcendental philosophy.<sup>1</sup> For Cohen, as well as for other Marburg Neo-Kantians, the concept of critique of knowledge was determined by a particular understanding of transcendentalism and the critical method which was developed in that school. The critique of knowledge is, on the one hand, differentiated there from the Kantian critique of reason, and, on the other, from the theory of knowledge.

In the aforementioned work on the infinitesimal method, Cohen differentiates the critique of knowledge from the critique of reason. The use of such a term is justified by claiming that this may allow for a reminiscence of the “proper sense” of the Kantian teachings.<sup>2</sup> Firstly, however, as we know today, this sense is considerably limiting. Secondly, it points out the shortcomings of the understanding of philosophy's primal task, traditionally ascribed to Kant.<sup>3</sup> The transformation of the critique of reason into the critique of knowledge constitutes one of the basic indicators of transcendentalism in its Marburg form, and specifies the shape of the research conducted in the whole Cohen's school.

According to Cohen, for Kant, the critique of reason means the opposition of science to reason. As Kant states, the critique of reason is not the critique of “books and systems, but of the faculty of reason, in general, in respect of all knowledge after which it may strive independently of all experience.”<sup>4</sup> Meanwhile, as Cohen argues, true idealism does not make the faculties of reason into its object as consciousness, but as a form of the possible understanding of reason as consciousness. “The objects of the critical-cognitive idealism”—as Marburg school's leader puts it—“are not objects and processes, or even objects and processes of consciousness, but scientific facts.”<sup>5</sup> Because knowledge finds its realisation in science, which

<sup>1</sup> “The study of cognitive faculties [...], especially from the times of the Kantian turn, should better be named critique of knowledge or transcendental philosophy.” Liebmann, O. 1876. *Analysis der Wirklichkeit*. Strasburg, 13.

<sup>2</sup> Cohen, H. 1883. *Das Princip der Infinitesimalmethode und seine Geschichte*. Berlin, 6.

<sup>3</sup> “The critique of reason is the critique of knowledge, or a critique of science. Critique discovers that what is pure within the reason, as long as it discovers the conditions of certainty which are the basis for knowledge as science.” Cohen, H. 1883. *Das Princip ...*, op. cit., 7.

<sup>4</sup> Kant, I. 1965 (1929). *Critique of Pure Reason*, AXII. Trans. Kemp-Smith, N.

<sup>5</sup> Cohen, H. 1883. *Das Princip ...*, op. cit., 6.

Cohen always treated as exact mathematical natural studies (much later, especially in the works of Ernst Cassirer, its understanding was expanded onto other types of knowledge), its fundamental object of study is “the scientific fact.” As he argues, “it is only in science that objects are given (*Dinge*), and only in science they become accessible for the philosophical inquiry.” For Cohen, the primary rules of knowledge are, therefore, the principal rules of scientific inquiry, and their structure is not the structure of reason, but of thinking, or—in other words—it is a structure of the possible objects of experience, as the products of intellectual synthesis.<sup>6</sup> From such a perspective there is no chance to assume any pre-given object of knowledge, nor any pre-given subject of knowledge which could also be complete and absolute. As important for the critique of knowledge as the justification of the conditions of possibility of the objects of knowledge is the decision about the capabilities of the subject of knowledge—as a certain, always relative, position from which its objects are specified. As a result, the aim of such a critique is not to analyse consciousness in the process of knowledge, but the synthetic principles on the basis of which consciousness may become the object of knowledge. The critique does not study the relation of the cognitive subject to its object, but the manner in which—during the cognitive process—some of its elements become taken as subjective (relating to the subject), and others as objective (relating to the objects). In other words, the main problem here is the question of the conditions of the objective legitimacy of knowledge, which, however, with all certainty cannot be confirmed and enclosed in some substantial reality, but need to be supported on the necessary functions, and because of this they are open to its continuous progress.<sup>7</sup> “The critique of knowledge”—writes Cohen—“is therefore tantamount to transcendental logic.”<sup>8</sup>

Therefore, a “scientific fact,” (or, actually, “scientific facts”) serves as a means with the use of which one can reach the synthetic principles organising a given domain of knowledge. Every possible area of knowledge in order to come into being as a “scientific fact” needs to constitute a systematised whole—a

<sup>6</sup> On reviewing Hönigswald's book, the following: “what is important [...] is to dismantle a certain systematic whole into its partial conditions, and not to assemble its heterogeneous, much later fitted components and parts”. (Cassirer, E. 1909. “Rezension von Richard Hönigswald, “Beiträge zur Erkenntnistheorie und Methodenlehre,” *Kantstudien*, 14, 98.)

<sup>7</sup> A “scientific fact,” in Natorp's terminology, is not anything finished and already “done” (*ein Getanes*), but an action or deed (*ein Tun*). “Wissenschaft ist Wissenschaffen, niemals hat sie etwas zu Ende geschafft”—writes Natorp in a vivid but difficult to translate excerpt (Natorp, P. 1918. *Hermann Cohen als Mensch, Lehrer und Forscher*. Marburg, 21). In a verbatim translation one may understand it as the following: “Science is the production of knowledge, it has never produced anything finally.” The term “die Wissenschaft” is usually translated as science, in accordance with its etymology, denoting “the effect of the process of producing knowledge.” Natorp emphasises the dynamic nature of science as the production of knowledge, thus, reinforcing the Marburg conception of knowledge as an unceasing process of defining, to which science is the tool.

<sup>8</sup> Cohen, H. 1883. *Das Princip ...*, op. cit., 7.

system of terms subject to one principle. In turn, each of these systems remains in a mutual relation with other systems, thus conditioning and defining them, simultaneously being conditioned and defined by them in return. Natorp offers the following characteristic of the particularly Marburgian understanding of the problem of knowledge:

“The transcendental condition of understanding the problem of knowledge is the fact that it can only be understood by the medium of various other perceptions, through pointing out one principle which allows a link and which conditions the coming to existence of the heterogeneity of the theory of knowledge; and, what follows from that, allows to construe them as a certain unity—therefore, through one, rule-based understanding of a specified relationship between “this particular” (*der*) science or knowledge.”<sup>9</sup>

The critique of knowledge should therefore be distinguished not only from the critique of reason, but also from the theory of knowledge. There can be an endless number of the theories of knowledge—depending on the theoretical standpoint from which they view objects as “given.” The critique is to be occupied with the conditions of the heterogeneity of the cognitive standpoints’ possibilities of coming into being—and, as a result, to be occupied with the conditions of the possibilities of the heterogeneity of the theories of knowledge, thus, resulting in the specification of their mutual relationship and the extraction of the source question, the fundamental soul need, lying at the foundations of the aforementioned heterogeneity.<sup>10</sup> One can reach such a source—which should not be understood in the substantial sense as a “metaphysical arche-principle”—only through the analyses of the points of synthesis, which are to be the analytics of the primary principles of knowledge.

That is why Cassirer, on commencing his greatest work concerning knowledge,<sup>11</sup> put forward a different goal than a mere chronological presentation of disparate theoretical and cognitive standpoints. As one can learn from Cassirer’s letter to Natorp, of 31st July 1903, his aim was not

<sup>9</sup> Natorp, P. 1887. “Über objektive und subjektive Begründung der Erkenntnis.” *Philosophische Monatshefte* 23, 265.

<sup>10</sup> Interestingly, Cassirer frequently uses both terms interchangeably (see e.g. 1923. *Einstein’s Theory of Relativity*. Trans. Swabey, W. C. and M. C. Swabey. Chicago). Only when he wants to distinguish the critical and the dogmatic approaches to the problem of knowledge he uses the terms critique and theory of knowledge, respectively. This is most probably caused by the conviction that the only proper way to practice the theory of knowledge is its critique—this, reinforced by the enclosed character of the Marburg school, allows him to use the “theory of knowledge” while meaning “critique.”

<sup>11</sup> Cassirer, E. 2011. *Das Erkenntnisproblem in der Philosophie und Wissenschaft der neueren Zeit*. Vols. 1–4. Hamburg.

“to introduce particular ‘theories of knowledge’ (*Erkenntnistheorien*) in their historical development but, rather, to demonstrate a certain logical ideal and a particularly methodological problem-centred approach (*Fragestellung*) which typified various epochs in their carrying out of scholarly work.”<sup>12</sup>

The task of this four-volumes work is to demonstrate the directions of the development of knowledge, in general, all this on the basis of historical analyses of instances of approaching the problem.

Simultaneously, the critique of knowledge constitutes the method encompassing and enabling the multiplicity of disparate theoretical and cognitive standpoints. There can be only one such a method, like there is only one logic (i.e. the transcendental logic—concerning the possibilities of object knowledge—as the only universally applicable and communicable means of cognition). In contrast, there is an indefinite number of the theories of knowledge because there is an endless number of possible cognitive standpoints and object forms. More importantly, the critique of knowledge’s task is not a plain simplification of particular theories of knowledge and squeezing them into a “metaphysical unity,” or linking them together on the basis of aggregation by the rule of some “cognitive meta-theory.” Its task is to provide a *s y s t e m a t i c s*—the designation of each of them to a particular place in a whole, specified by a logical function.<sup>13</sup> Cassirer addresses this issue in the following way:

“It appears as the task of a truly universal criticism of knowledge not to level this manifold, this wealth and variety of forms of knowledge and understanding of the world and compress them into a purely abstract unity, but to leave them standing as such. Only when we resist the temptation to compress the totality of forms, which here result, into an ultimate metaphysical unity, into the unity and simplicity of an absolute ‘world ground’ and to deduce it from the latter, do we grasp its true concrete import and fullness.”<sup>14</sup>

Consequently, the manner of conducting the philosophical meditation discussed here transcends the arguments concerning the supremacy of one “logic” over another, or the foundations of their rightness. It turns to the bases of their possibilities, namely, to the principles on which they rest (*quid juris*), and not to the facts (*quid facti*). It constructs the theory of relativity of various forms of knowledge, thus attempting to extract the fundamental principle of their *f u n c t i o n a l*, and not *s u b s t a n t i a l* unity—the principle of the possibility of the

<sup>12</sup> *Nachlass Natorp*, Universitätsbibliothek Marburg, Handschrift 831: 618.

<sup>13</sup> With reference to Marek Siemek’s proposal of differentiation, one can say that the critique of knowledge has an epistemological character, and not an epistemic one. See: Siemek, M. 1976. “Transzendentalizm jako stanowisko epistemologiczne” [Transcendentalism as an Epistemological Standpoint]. In: *Dziedzictwo Kanta* [Kant’s Heritage]. Ed. Garewicz, J. Warszawa.

<sup>14</sup> Cassirer, E. 1923. *Einstein’s Theory of Relativity*, op. cit., 446.

mutual reference one to another and their mutual interpretation.<sup>15</sup> This common principle would encompass the possibility of specification of all, endlessly possible, but numerous and disparate, past and future forms of knowledge, with their typical object forms—all forming a mutually permeating problems and their solutions.<sup>16</sup>

“Depending on the manner and the direction of an ongoing synthesis”—Cassirer states—“the same perception material can be formed in various and disparate terms.”<sup>17</sup> Any type of synthesis ties reality in a form of organisation which is typical only of itself; it is paralleled by a specific sphere of knowledge and a specific mode of its understanding—a special theory of knowledge. The critique of knowledge, on the other hand, determines precisely the conditions which each form of organisation is subject to, relating this form to the others, as if placing it on the map of the system of knowledge. The critique, however, has only a relative criterion at its disposal to determine the specificity of the aforementioned particular forms of organisation—through their mutual definition, based on an interrelation. Their value and character are not being specified according to some absolute position (according to some substance), but are always relative—with regard to the adopted theoretical point of reference, i.e. with reference to some form of ordering and hierarchy, and through it, with respect to the whole system of possible forms. This point of reference is privileged in the sense of its correspondence with the desired goal of knowledge. Its cognitive value corresponds to the number of links which it can produce. Consequently, the forms do not constitute—in Cassirer’s understanding of critique—the elements of the complete structure of knowledge, but its moments—ones that do not constitute its parts, but are aspects of the discussion of the problem, and have a specifically set task to perform. They do not reflect reality, but symbolise it.<sup>18</sup> Cassirer summarises the task of the critique as follows:

“It must follow the special sciences and survey them as a whole. It must ask whether the intellectual symbols by means of which the specialized disciplines reflect on and describe reality exist merely side by side or whether they are not diverse manifestations of the same basic human function. And if the latter hypothesis should be confirmed, a philosophical critique must formulate the universal conditions of this function and define the principle underlying it.”<sup>19</sup>

<sup>15</sup> The ultimate goal of knowledge is, as Paul Natorp states, “a representation ordering, encompassing all the elements in accordance with the law.” (Natorp, P. 1904. *Logik, Grundlegung und logischer Aufbau der Mathematik und mathematischen Naturwissenschaft*, Marburg, 3.)

<sup>16</sup> Cassirer, E. 1902. *Leibniz System in seinen wissenschaftlichen Grundlagen*. Marburg, V.

<sup>17</sup> Cassirer, E. 1953 (1923) *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*. Vol. 1. Transl. Manheim, R. New Haven, 84.

<sup>18</sup> Cassirer, E. 1923. *Einstein’s Theory of Relativity*, op. cit., 455.

<sup>19</sup> Cassirer, E. 1953. *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*. Vol. 1, op. cit., 77.

Cassirer transformed the critique of knowledge into the philosophy of symbolic forms. Each area of knowledge is no longer understood as corresponding to some reality in itself, but is understood as a symbol containing its own, specific, area-dependant form. What is only possible is the logical gradation of the forms—their hierarchic ordering, and not evaluation. The hierarchy consists in determining the logical scope of application, and only this aspect constitutes its criterion. Any external evaluation is a procedure characteristic of the “dogmatic” metaphysics (in the Marburg understanding) which attempts to find an external, absolute point of reference from which a given value can be measured.

What is important for the philosophy of symbolic forms are not only the primary logical conditions of objects, in general, but the determination of the formal structure of each possible area of grasping reality, and thus the specification of the mutual relations between these areas. It wants to find “the position which lies beyond all these forms; however, simultaneously, a position which does not lie outside them,”

“it wants to undertake the effort of understanding the mutual overlapping of the particular processes of objectivisation, and to ascribe each with a suitable place in the whole of knowledge. The contentious points between various theoretical and cognitive schools of contemporary thinking could not be explained and decided upon, if it were not for the expansion of such theoretical-cognitive horizon. The bulk of these arguments was caused by the fact that each particular orientation of a given form of knowledge which precedes some ‘scientific facts’ sets a fixed, absolute norm which is then used to measure the value of all knowledge. In this way, within the theory of knowledge, there appeared logicism and psychologism, biologism, physicalism, and historicism, which struggle for domination with one another. [...] the ‘critical’ philosophy needs to search for some general point of view thanks to which it will be liberated from the necessity of acknowledging a given particular form of knowledge for a universally legitimate one, and one that is the only one possible; this would, consequently, make it free from the establishing of any further ‘-ism’. This liberation has to be aimed at the totality (*Totalität*) of the possible forms of knowledge and at the relation taking place between the particular members of this whole: the relation which can be specified only at the point of determining the specific nature of each of these elements.”<sup>20</sup>

According to the abovementioned, the critique of knowledge constitutes an idea of the systematic philosophy, the main task of which, as Cassirer puts it, is “to free the idea of the world from the one-sidedness,”<sup>21</sup> caused by a substantialisation of the particular standpoints and favouring certain “-isms.” This liberation

<sup>20</sup> Cassirer, E. 1939. *Axel Hägerström*. Göteborg, 119.

<sup>21</sup> Cassirer, E. 1923. *Einstein's Theory of Relativity*, op. cit., 447.

can only be accomplished from the perspective of the whole, understood as a network of possible standpoints which are connected only by logical interrelationships. If it was able to carry out a thorough critique of knowledge, encompassing all its areas—not only the mathematical studies on nature, but also all other “forms of spirit.”

“Then we could have a systematic philosophy of human culture in which each particular form would take its meaning solely from the place in which it stands, as system in which consent and significance of each form would be characterized by the richness and specific quality of the relations and *concat nons* in which it stands with other spiritual energies and ultimately with totality.”<sup>22</sup>

Such a systematics is, however, an endless task for the critique of knowledge, and it is an idea of the world’s unity. The task, the solution of which we can only near due to the very nature of the functional approach, can never be finally realized. The critique of knowledge, on the one hand, faces the vast heterogeneity of phenomena, and, on the other, it has at its disposal an infinite number of possibilities to approach this heterogeneity. This stems from Marburg’s specification of philosophy as a method—a method understood in its Greek etymological sense, as “heading towards”<sup>23</sup>—a road from substance to function, a road on which “everything ‘what is given’ (*des ‘Gegebenen’*) needs to be deconstructed to the pure functions of knowledge.”<sup>24</sup> “We describe philosophy as a ‘method’: every constant ‘being’ (*‘Sein’*) needs to dissolve itself in a certain ‘run’ (*‘Gang’*), in a progress of thought”<sup>25</sup>—Natorp writes. Philosophy as a method, as a critique of knowledge which leads to a general systematics of the possible forms of knowledge, is realised and fulfilled only in this process of incessant “determination of the undetermined,” in its “heading towards.” Its goal is the act of heading towards something—“the road is everything, the goal—nothing.”<sup>26</sup>

The critique of knowledge may therefore be a science of the possibility and variety of ways of comprehending things. Each branch of science contains its own method of encompassing the variety of things in the conceptual unity, and each uses a different set of terms. The description of this specificity—the gen-

<sup>22</sup> Cassirer, E. 1953 (1923). *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*. Vol. 1, op. cit., 82.

<sup>23</sup> According to Paul Natorp’s claims from the essay *Kant und die Marburger Schule*, “in the very word ‘method,’ in *μετιέναι*, one can find not only planning, intention to act (*‘Gehen’*), or a movement forward; [...] but also the meaning of a movement towards a goal, or in any case, a movement in a direction: ‘a heading’ (*‘Nachgehen’*).” See: Natorp, P. 1912. “Kant und die Marburger Schule.” *Kantstudien*, XVII, 199–200).

<sup>24</sup> Cassirer, E. 1999. *Das Erkenntnisproblem in der Philosophie und Wissenschaft der neuen Zeit*, part 1. In: Cassirer, E., *Gesammelte Werke. Hamburger Ausgabe*. Vol. 2, Hamburg, 762.

<sup>25</sup> Natorp, P. 1923. *Die logischen Grundlagen der exakten Wissenschaften*. Leipzig, 199.

<sup>26</sup> Natorp, P. 1911. *Philosophie. Ihr Problem und ihre Probleme. Einführung in den kritischen Idealismus*. Göttingen, 16.

eral logic of constructing terms—constitutes the chief tasks for the critique of knowledge. A different way of encompassing the plurality into unity is characteristic of the natural sciences, in contradiction to the humanities. Each discipline uses a separate, characteristic, *sui generis* logic of terms.

“Since Plato we have possessed a logic of mathematics; and since Aristotle a logic of biology. With them the mathematical concepts of relation and the biological concepts of genus and species were given their secure places. The logic of the mathematical science of nature is constructed by Descartes, Leibniz, and Kant, and in the nineteenth century the first attempts at a ‘logic of history’ finally appear.”<sup>27</sup>

For the final “systematics of forms of knowledge” it seems very important to specify the difference between the terms of the natural sciences and the terms of the widely understood humanities, together with their respective kinds of “logic.”

Cassirer’s impressive philosophical oeuvre, despite the amazing variety of the undertaken topics, is characterised by the unity of the above-mentioned understanding of method. The critique of knowledge, as a general logic of the object knowledge, can be applied to any given object, and to any possible level of abstraction. Cassirer works on the completed products of the human spirit, on the “products of a higher-level synthesis”—be this Cohen’s “scientific fact,” or “a cultural fact.” He analyses the frequently contradictory conceptions and tries to find the basis and the conditions of this variety. He analyses, particular scientific theories, particular terms, particular social moments, as well as transient impressions and emotions. The latter ones, in Cassirer’s views, also contain their own level of object-like objectivity. This is so because they all contain the same primary structure of reason which permits to synthesise a certain plurality and put it into the forms. It is unimportant whether these forms have a scientific character (as in mathematics or natural sciences), or are unspecified (as in artistic production). It does not matter if they can use the concept of thing and law, or form and style. Each of these branches has its fundamental form being a complete production of the human spirit.

Cassirer’s theoretical and cognitive claims demonstrate and give an additional grounding to one of Kant’s main philosophical thoughts: “reason penetrates only what it produces according to its own concepts.” This claim—the legitimacy of which was demonstrated by Kant by use of the example of the natural sciences—is applied by Cassirer to the domain of culture. Since culture

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<sup>27</sup> Cassirer, E. 2000. *The Logic of the Cultural Sciences*. Trans. Lofts, S. G. New York, 58. The systematics of these modes of comprehension is the task of Cassirer’s theory of symbolic forms. These also include the following: “If [...] we consider the fundamental concepts of the sciences of language, art, and religion, we are struck by the fact that they are, as it were, still homeless: they have not yet found their ‘natural place’ within the system of logic” (ibid.). The finding of this place constitutes one of the main goals of *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*.

as a whole is the product of reason (“the human spirit”) there have to be reasonable principles governing it. The Kantian concept of reason does not fully represent reality’s heterogeneity in all its aspects. This concept needs a considerable extension—each discipline is, in its own right, “reasonable.” Consequently, knowledge is no longer tantamount to the scientific, mathematical natural studies, but one can also speak about knowledge in art, religion, or history. Each of these disciplines constructs an object which is typical only of them, and which “exists” in a special way, however, is always separated from the existential meaning of existence that is characteristic of dogmatic metaphysics. In relation to Kant’s philosophy, as well as in relation to the whole of natural sciences as one of the symbolic forms, not only the thing which can be “measured and counted exists.” There also exists something which can be communicated—done in such a way that other people are able to understand—consequently, it is done exactly through the medium of reasonable principles. Such a philosophy becomes the philosophy of the principles of building the community of meanings.<sup>28</sup>

In the ongoing process of the “creation of the human spirit,” the particular branches of the spirit’s activity permeate each other, and their “dogmatic” separation is impossible. A rigid classification of sciences in the Aristotelian way is out of the question. This does not, however, mean that particular areas, different in their “logical rank,” cannot be delineated—even only for the sake of avoiding the application of unsuitable principles in their respective fields.

“The theoretical, and in particular the philosophical, thought cannot ever forsaken such an act of delineation: it needs to, however, be aware that the boundaries which it establishes on purpose cannot be frozen into fixed barriers—these need to remain movable boundaries, so that they can encompass within themselves the fullness and the motion of phenomena.”<sup>29</sup>

The specificity of each of these disciplines does not rest on the specificity of the content that is included within a given area, but on the particular character of the forms which form any content. That is why

“despite the differences in the contents [...] we might assert the ideal relation between the individual provinces—between the basic functions of language and cognition, of art and religion—without losing the incomparable particularity of any one of them.”<sup>30</sup>

As a result, every expression of the spirit takes its rightful place according to a suitable logical hierarchy, or the specific function which it performs in this sys-

<sup>28</sup> This theme in Cassirer’s philosophy is undertaken by Bolesław Andrzejewski. See: e.g. his paper *Transcendental Philosophy and Communication* in the present D&U issue.

<sup>29</sup> Cassirer, E. 2009. “Mythischer, ästhetischer und theoretischer Raum.” In: Cassirer, E. 2009. *Gesammelte Werke. Hamburger Ausgabe*. Vol. 17. Hamburg, 427.

<sup>30</sup> Cassirer, E. 1953 (1923). *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*. Vol. 1, op. cit., 84.

tem, and not according to the external value judgements. Determining such a place is only possible—what should be emphasised once again—with the acceptance of the primary principle of the critique of knowledge: the principle of supremacy of function over substance. This supremacy opens before us a complete spectrum of problems and demonstrates its most important moments. Therefore, Cassirer's idea of the critique of knowledge comprises the supremacy of synthesis over analysis, of internal systematisation over the external determination, of meaning over "existence," of object over a thing, and the supremacy of a limitless "becoming" over the once-and-for-all fixed "being."

For the critique of knowledge, one dogmatic outline, capable of encompassing the vast and multi-dimensional heterogeneity of knowledge forms of the world, does not exist. However, this does not mean that the world cannot be studied; the aforementioned relativity—in relation to history, culture, religion, language, worldview, the degree and type of education, or life's experience, *etc.*—constitutes the necessary condition of the possibility of knowledge. The interrelationships of these forms and their mutual set-ups constitute the unified structure of reality. What we want to get to know is

"the totality of the forms in which human life takes place. These forms are infinitely differentiated and yet they are not deprived of unified structure. For it is ultimately the 'same' human being that meets us again and again in a thousand manifestations and in thousand masks in the development of culture."<sup>31</sup>

The critique of knowledge, consequently, becomes an "anthropology of culture"—the study of *animal symbolicum*.<sup>32</sup>

ABOUT THE AUTHOR — Ph.D., assistant professor, Chair of Social and Philosophical Sciences, Gdansk University of Technology; Department of History of Modern and Contemporary Philosophy, Institute of Philosophy and Sociology, Polish Academy of Sciences. Current research interests: history and theory of transcendental philosophy.

<sup>31</sup> Cassirer, E. 2000. *The Logic of the Cultural Sciences*, op. cit., 76.

<sup>32</sup> Cassirer E. 2009. "An Essay on Man. An Introduction to a Philosophy of Human Culture." In: Cassirer, E. 2009. *Gesammelte Werke. Hamburger Ausgabe*. Vol. 23. Hamburg.