Goethe, Maimon, and Spinoza's Third Kind of Cognition

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Abstract: Despite extant correspondence and mutual admiration, the relationship between Goethe and Salomon Maimon has only been touched upon once in the literature, and further clarification of the link between them remains a desideratum. Here I propose that the way to understand their seeing eye to eye is through Spinoza, and specifically their apparently shared interest in Spinoza's notion of *scientia intuitiva*. Initially I provide some context so as to make clear what is so extraordinary about Maimon's role here. Then I give a sketch of the relation Maimon and Goethe had both to Spinoza and each other while clarifying what is at stake. I conclude with various new findings.

Scholars have recognized that Goethe was dissatisfied with the reception of his *Versuch die Metamorphose der Pflanzen zu erklären* (Attempt to Clarify the Metamorphosis of Plants, 1790; hereafter: *Metamorphosis*).[1] Twenty-seven years after its initial publication, Goethe publishes the *Metamorphosis* again within the collection *Zur Morphologie* (On Morphology I, 1817) and reflects there on the earlier edition of this work within a set of short pieces. He discusses the *Metamorphosis* in its status as a manuscript, a printed work, a pivotal step in his study of plants—namely in the "Geschichte seiner botanischen Studien" ("History of the Author's Botanical Studies")—and otherwise. Regarding the manuscript, Goethe tells us retrospectively:

> Mit Herrn *Göschen*, dem Herausgeber meiner gesammelten Schriften, hatte

1. Translations are mine unless stated otherwise. In the following I cite both German and English editions of Goethe's writings, first the volume and page number of the Weimar (WA) or Leopoldina (LA) edition, then the page number of the translated *Botanical Writings* (BW), trans. Bertha Mueller (Honolulu: U of Hawaii P, 1952) or *Scientific Studies* (SS), ed. and trans. Douglas Miller (New York: Suhrkamp, 1988). I cite Spinoza in standard fashion, referring to passages in the *Ethics* (E) by means of the following abbreviations: p-(roposition), s-(cholium), and app-(endix). I cite the five parts of the *Ethics* with Arabic numerals. Translations of Spinoza are from Edwin Curley's edition of the *Collected Works* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1985-2016), but I have also consulted Carl Gebhardt's edition of the *Opera* (Heidelberg: Carl Winter, 1925).

> ich alle Ursache zufrieden zu sein; leider [...] ich glaubte zu bemerken, mein Verleger finde den Absatz nicht ganz nach seinen Wünschen. Indessen hatte ich versprochen, meine künftigen Arbeiten ihm vor andern anzubieten, eine Bedingung, die ich immer für billig gehalten habe. Ich meldete ihm daher, daß eine kleine Schrift fertig liege, wissenschaftlichen Inhalts, deren Abdruck ich wünsche. Ob er sich nun überhaupt von meinen Arbeiten nicht mehr sonderlich viel versprochen, oder ob er in diesem Falle, wie ich vermuten kann, bei Sachverständigen Erkundigung eingezogen habe, was von einem solchen Übersprung in ein anderes Feld zu halten sein möchte, will ich nicht untersuchen, genug, ich konnte schwer begreifen, warum er mein Heft zu drucken ablehnte, da er, im schlimmsten Falle, durch ein so geringes Opfer von sechs Bogen Makulatur einen fruchtbaren, frisch wieder auftretenden, zuverlässigen, genügsamen Autor sich erhalten hätte.
>
> I had every reason to be satisfied with Herr Göschen, the publisher of my collected works, but [...] I gathered that he did not find their sale up to his expectations. Yet I had promised to offer future manuscripts to him before anyone else, an arrangement that I always considered to be fair. I therefore informed him that I had completed a brief manuscript of a scientific nature which I desired to have published. I shall not go into the question here as to whether he no longer felt that my works would ever again amount to much, or whether, as I suspect in this instance, he had sought advice from the experts, which might well be the case with such a venture into a new field. Suffice it to say, I found it hard to understand why he refused to print my booklet when, merely by sacrificing six sheets of maculation at the very most, he might have retained for himself a prolific, reliable, easily satisfied author who was just getting a fresh start.[2]

Goethe had encountered difficulties with his natural-philosophical treatise on metamorphosis already prior to publication. The general reading public was, apparently, not in his favor. Though Goethe had been working with plants for years, researchers in the still-budding science of botany were skeptical: In what way could someone we understand to be a poet possibly add to the field? Women readers, marked as another audience, were also unimpressed. "Freundinnen,

2. WA II, 6:133f. | BW 168f. Translation altered.

welche mich schon früher den einsamen Gebirgen, der Betrachtung starrer Felsen gern entzogen hätten, waren auch mit meiner abstrakten Gärtnerei keineswegs zufrieden" ("My lady friends, who formerly had wanted to take me away from lonely mountains and from my study of lifeless stones, were again far from satisfied with my abstract gardening").[3] Goethe found another publisher, but he was so put off in sharing the *Metamorphosis* that he eventually regretted distributing free copies to acquaintances.

Various demographics helped to echo the sentiment of the natural scientific community that—Goethe claims—was against him from the start:

> Das Publikum stutzte: denn nach seinem Wunsch, sich gut und gleichförmig bedient zu sehen, verlangt es an jeden, daß er in seinem Fache bleibe [...] daß ein Talent, das sich in einem gewissen Feld hervortat, dessen Art und Weise allgemein anerkannt und beliebt ist, aus seinem Kreise sich nicht entferne, oder wohl gar in einen weit abgelegenen hinüber springe. Wagt es einer, so weiß man ihm keinen Dank, ja man gewährt ihm, wenn er es auch recht macht, keinen besondern Beifall.
>
> The public was taken aback, for inasmuch as it wishes to be served well and uniformly, it demands that every man remain in his own subject [...and] that a person who has distinguished himself in one field, whose manner and style are generally recognized and esteemed, will not leave his circle, much less venture into one entirely unrelated. Should an individual attempt this, no gratitude is shown him; indeed even when he does his task well, he is given no special praise.[4]

Goethe himself agrees with the stance that one ought to focus on something and come to some deep understanding of it. This sentiment can also be inferred from the sonnet referred to as "Natur und Kunst" ("Nature and Art," ~1800), where Goethe writes: "Wer Großes will, muß sich zusammenraffen;/In der Beschränkung zeigt sich erst der Meister" ("He who seeks greatness must confine himself;/Only in constraint does the master become manifest").[5] Yet

3. WA II, 6:140 | BW 172. Translation altered.

4. WA II, 6:134f. | BW 169. Translation altered.

5. WA I, 4:129.

this isn't to say that one should simply opt for intellectual tunnel vision. Goethe maintains the view expressed in "Nature and Art" in the later thoughts on the *Metamorphosis*, but replies that many foundational figures in the history of science have fruitfully avoided monolithic categorization. Even "dilettantes," he explains, have contributed in essential ways.[6] The readership remained unconvinced.

Thus far I have mentioned only motives Goethe saw for readers to avoid, discount, or fail to take seriously the *Metamorphosis*. Unfortunately for its author, who felt he had discovered something incredible and presented it with great care, still others read but took away from the work something foreign to what Goethe had in mind:

> Einer meiner römischen Kunstfreunde mich liebend, mir vertrauend, empfand es übel, meine Arbeit so getadelt, ja verwerfen zu hören, da er mich doch, bei einem lange fortgesetzten Umgange, über mannigfaltige Gegenstände ganz vernünftig und folgerecht sprechen hören. Er las daher das Heft mit Aufmerksamkeit, und ob er gleich selbst nicht recht wußte, wo ich hinaus wolle.
>
> One of my Roman artist friends, who was devoted to and also trusted me, felt aggrieved to hear my work censured, indeed even condemned, for he had heard me discuss various subjects quite sensibly and logically throughout our long-term contact. He therefore read my booklet with care, even if he did not know what I was aiming for.[7]

According to Goethe, this acquaintance understood the *Metamorphosis* to be an instructional text for artists hoping to visually capture living organisms. Though Goethe appreciated the effort, the author seems to have missed the point despite claiming: "Der Verfasser [...] hat eine eigene, verborgene Absicht, die ich aber vollkommen deutlich einsehe" ("[Goethe] has an original and unrevealed purpose, which I nevertheless see through clearly").[8]

In the "Schicksal der Druckschrift" ("History of the Printed Booklet")

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6. WA II, 6:114 | BW 158.
7. WA II, 6:138 | BW 171. Translation altered.
8. WA II, 6:138 | BW 171.

Goethe tells us that he was pleased by just *one* review, and only somewhat:

> Eine günstige Recension in den *Göttinger Anzeigen*, Februar 1791, konnte mir nur halb genügen. Daß ich mit ausnehmender Klarheit meinen Gegenstand behandelt, war mir zugestanden, der Rezensent legte den Gang meines Vortrags kürzlich und reinlich dar, wohin es aber deute, war nicht ausgesprochen, und ich daher nicht gefördert. Da man mir nun zugab, daß ich den Weg ins Wissen von meiner Seite wohl gebahnt habe, so wünschte ich brünstig, daß man mir von dort her entgegenkäme: denn es war mir gar nichts daran gelegen, hier irgendwo Fuß zu fassen, sondern so bald als möglich durch diese Regionen, unterrichtet und aufgeklärt, durchzuschreiten. Da es aber nicht nach meinen Hoffnungen und Wünschen erging, so blieb ich meinen bisherigen Anstalten getreu.
>
> A favorable critique in the *Göttingische Anzeigen* could satisfy me but partly. It was admitted that I had treated my subject with unusual clarity; the development of my thesis was presented briefly and neatly by the reviewer; but he did not articulate where it led and for that reason I did not benefit from the review. But since it was admitted that I had pioneered a path to knowledge, I fervently hoped that I would be met halfway: for me it was not a question of merely getting a foothold, but rather of making my way through these areas as soon as possible, instructed and enlightened. But since things did not turn out as I had hoped and wanted, I held to my previous arrangements.[9]

Anyone who examines this short gloss on Goethe's *Metamorphosis* sees quickly why he "did not benefit from the review," which is just barely encouraging.[10] Its author points out that Goethe presents plant development with "exceptional clarity"; but otherwise, the reviewer maintains great distance over the course of less than a page with repeated use of indirect speech.[11] This write-up in the

9. WA II, 6:145 | BW 175. Translation altered.

10. Anonymous review in *Göttingische Anzeigen* (27. Stück, den 14. Februar, 1791) 269.

11. It's worth noting, for comparison, that the periodical reviewed more earnestly a couple of days prior (26. Stück, den 12. Februar) an English-language botanical work by James Dickson and dedicated almost twice as much space to its discussion.

Göttingische Anzeigen merely summarizes, with little enthusiasm, a few ideas developed in the *Metamorphosis*. But Goethe's claim was to have arrived at knowledge; it would be an understatement to say that he expected much more from his readers. Alas, as we have seen, Goethe was consistently disappointed, often deeply, with almost every single reader of his work.

§1. Introduction

Considering this state of affairs outlined above, it's all the more remarkable that Salomon Maimon published his effusive review—the centerpiece of what follows—of Goethe's *Metamorphosis* in the year after its publication, i.e., still a quarter of a century before some of Goethe's reflections cited above. It remains a minor albeit unsolved mystery that this fact goes unreferenced in Goethe's discussions of the reception of the *Metamorphosis*. Maimon published his piece in the second volume of the *Deutsche Monatsschrift* of 1791, where Goethe printed some of his own poetic works. Indeed, Maimon and Goethe actually shared ink in this exact publication, and furthermore Goethe held the volume in his personal library.[12] But at present, I don't aim to investigate why this text goes unmentioned by Goethe and others. Rather, I aim to clarify what drew Maimon to Goethe's project. At the time Maimon's review was published, he was captivated by Kant's theoretical philosophy and was raising informed but skeptical questions about its fundamentals. He published the *Versuch über die Transcendentalphilosophie* (Essay on Transcendental Philosophy, 1790) in the same year Goethe published his *Metamorphosis*. Kant had moved on to his third critique by this time but was, as is well known, highly impressed by Maimon, writing to Marcus Herz "daß nicht allein niemand von meinen Gegnern mich und die Hauptfrage so wohl verstanden, sondern nur wenige zu dergleichen tiefen Untersuchungen soviel Scharfsinn besitzen möchten, als Hr. Maymon" ("that not only has Hr. Maymon understood me and my main question better than all of my enemies, but only few of them may possess such an acumen allowing for profound investigations of the like").[13] Goethe would likewise take

12. Hans Ruppert, *Goethes Bibliothek*: *Katalog* (Weimar: Arion, 1958) #315.

13. AA XI 49. Compare though with Kant's 1794 letter to Reinhold at AA XI 494: "[W]as aber z. B. ein Maimon mit seiner Nachbesserung der critischen Philosophie (dergleichen die

an interest in Maimon, particularly his autobiography, but one wonders what he would have thought of Maimon's text on the *Metamorphosis*—and what drew Maimon to it in the first place.

Their relation has only been touched upon once in the literature,[14] but perhaps we can learn something about both Maimon and Goethe by way of a shared philosophical affiliation. We know that the two had strong connections to Spinoza,[15] and this is especially important considering that Spinoza's thought was highly contentious at the time. Two poems by Goethe were published without authorization in Jacobi's *Über die Lehre des Spinoza in Briefen an den Herrn Moses Mendelssohn* (On the Teachings of Spinoza in Letters to Herr Moses Mendelssohn, 1785 et al), the central text of the Spinoza controversy. According to Jacobi's account of his conversation with Lessing, the latter had initially claimed to be in agreement with Goethe's supposed endorsement of pantheism in the poem "Prometheus." That is to say, Goethe was at the center of the debate from the very beginning, and Maimon would likely have known about Goethe's role in this controversy—could he have sensed a connection to Goethe for this reason?

Iuden gern versuchen, um sich auf fremde Kosten ein Ansehen von Wichtigkeit zu geben) eigentlich wolle [habe ich] nie recht fassen können und dessen Zurechtweisung [muß] ich Anderen überlassen" ("[W]hat, however, Maimon actually wants with his reworking of the critical philosophy (Jews like to try such things in order to give themselves an air of importance at the cost of others) I have never really been able to grasp, and I must leave the rebuke to others"). Kant likely had in mind the work on logic that Maimon sent him some months prior in 1793. See the relevant letter by Maimon to Kant at AA XI 470, which seems to have gone unanswered.

14. Günter Schulz, "Salomon Maimon und Goethe" in *Goethe. Neue Folge des Jahrbuchs der Goethe-Gesellschaft* 16 (1954).

15. On Maimon and Spinoza, see Yitzhak Melamed, "Maimon and the Rise of Spinozism" in *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 42.1 (2004). On Goethe and Spinoza, see Eckart Förster, *The 25 Years of Philosophy: A Systematic Reconstruction*, trans. Brady Bowman (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2012) 91-99 and Martin Bollacher, *Der junge Goethe und Spinoza* (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer, 1969), along with the literature I cite throughout the next section.

§2. Goethe and Spinoza

While Goethe's engagement with Kant has been studied in detail,[16] and while the literature has especially benefitted from productive work on Goethe and Spinoza in recent years,[17] it still remains less clear why Goethe was so interested in a kind of cognition[18] that was extolled by Spinoza and yet ruled out by Kant. It seems that Goethe even understood himself to have *achieved* such cognition in the *Metamorphosis*.[19] Undoubtedly, Goethe felt a great affinity for Spinoza and his notion of *scientia intuitiva* already by the eighties—the second period devoted to studying Spinoza intensively, now with Charlotte von Stein.[20] By 1786 in particular, Goethe will claim that he would spend a significant portion of his life pursuing this kind of cognition. That year, in the midst of the Spinoza controversy, Goethe writes to Jacobi:

> Übrigens bist du ein guter Mensch, daß man dein Freund seyn kann ohne deiner Meynung zu seyn, denn wie wir von einander abstehn hab ich erst recht wieder aus dem Büchlein selbst gesehn. Ich halte mich fest und fester an die Gottesverehrung des Atheisten p. 77. und überlasse euch alles was ihr Religion heisst und heissen müsst ibid. Wenn du sagst man könne an Gott nur glauben p. 101. so sage ich dir, ich halte viel aufs *Schauen*, und wenn

16. See Géza von Molnár, *Goethes Kantstudien* (Weimar: Hermann Böhlhaus, 1994).

17. See, in particular, Gunnar Hindrichs, "Goethe's Notion of an Intuitive Power of Judgment"; Frederick Amrine, "Goethean Intuitions"; and Horst Lange, "Goethe and Spinoza" in the special edition *Goethe Yearbook* 18 (2011), ed. Elizabeth Millán and John H. Smith.

18. Like some others—but in disagreement with Curley—I prefer in this context to translate *cognitio* as "cognition" rather than "knowledge" since for Spinoza, as we will soon see, some sorts of *cognitio* can be false, and while the English "cognition" easily allows for this, "knowledge" more often connotes facticity.

19. Goethe may have later shortened the title to *Metamorphose der Pflanzen* (Metamorphosis of Plants) from *Versuch die Metamorphose der Pflanzen zu erklären* (Attempt to Clarify the Metamorphosis of Plants) for just this reason.

20. Bernard Suphan, "Aus der Zeit der Spinoza-Studien Goethes 1784-85" in *Goethe-Jahrbuch* 12 (1891), was the first to claim that the so-called "Studie nach Spinoza" ("Spinoza Study"), an untitled manuscript in Charlotte von Stein's hand that Suphan first published, emerged from this collaborative reading.

> Spinoza von der *Scientia intuitiva* spricht, und sagt: *Hoc cognoscendi genus procedit ab adaequata idea essentiae formalis quorundam Dei attributorum ab adaequatam cognitionem essentiae rerum* [E2p40s2]; so geben mir diese wenigen Worte Muth, mein ganzes Leben der Betrachtung der Dinge zu widmen die ich reichen und von deren *essentia formali* ich mir eine adäquate Idee zu bilden hoffen kann.
>
> By the way: you must be a good man such that one can be your friend without being of your opinion, for I have just seen from the little book itself the extent to which we differ. I hold fast and faster to "the Atheist's" worship of God (p. 77) and leave to you all that which your religion can and must mean (ibid.). If you say one can only believe in God (p. 101), I say to you, I think highly of *beholding*, and when Spinoza speaks of *scientia intuitiva*, and says: *This kind of cognition proceeds from an adequate idea of the formal essence of certain attributes of God to the adequate cognition of the formal essence of things* [E2p40s2], these few words give me courage to dedicate my entire life to the observation of things that I can reach, things whose *essentia formali* I can hope to form an adequate idea of.[21]

Jacobi ignores the central concept in Spinoza that Goethe wants to highlight. Conversely, Goethe doesn't recognize the Spinoza that Jacobi—with a significant degree of accuracy[22]—assembles. Jacobi rightly senses that Spinoza is representative of a philosophy that takes seriously the Principle of Sufficient Reason (in Jacobi's terms, the principle *ex nihilo nihil fit*). But he is misled in his attempt to reduce Spinoza to nothing beyond the PSR, even if it's fundamental. Jacobi rejects Spinoza wholesale, and at least for Goethe, fails to recognize the importance of the third kind of cognition that Spinoza holds in high regard—in some cases as *the* ultimate goal. Meanwhile, Goethe aligns himself with Spinoza, even in the most general sense. Months after sending the above letter to Jacobi, Goethe also writes regarding Herder's *Gott*: *Einige Gespräche* (*God*: *Some Conversations*, 1787): "Mich hat er aufgemuntert in natürlichen Dingen weiter vorzudringen, wo ich denn, besonders in der Botanik, auf ein ἓν καὶ

21. WA IV, 7:214.

22. See Michael Della Rocca, *Spinoza* (New York: Routledge, 2008) 283-287.

πᾶν gekommen bin, das mich in Erstaunen setzt" ("It has encouraged me to penetrate further into objects of nature wherein I have—especially in the realm of botany—come across a one and all [*hen kai pan*] that astounds me").[23] But rather than explore what is at stake in Goethe's nod to pantheism,[24] I want to focus on this third kind of cognition, *scientia intuitiva,* in Spinoza. Here I can only provide a rough account of the status of intuitive cognition, which was of decisive importance for Spinoza and Goethe, and, as I will show in the next section, appears to have caught Maimon's interest as well. I skip ahead over earlier works of Spinoza to his discussion of the three kinds of cognition in the *Ethics*.[25]

Let us turn immediately to Proposition 40 of Part 2, which Goethe cites in his letter to Jacobi as he outlines the direction of his future studies. Here

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23. WA I, 32:77. Famously, Lessing uses the Greek phrase to stake his position on the side of Spinoza in conversation with Jacobi at JW I, 1:16, and this became a slogan for Hölderlin, Hegel, and Schelling in their Tübingen years. Regarding Herder, who played a pivotal role in developing Goethe's interest in Spinoza, see Michael Forster, "Herder and Spinoza" in *Spinoza & German Idealism*, ed. Förster and Melamed (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2012).

24. Since my focus is on Goethe and Maimon, I also say very little about Goethe's engagement with Spinoza into the 1800s. But it's of interest to note that excerpts from the then-modern edition of Spinoza's *Ethics*—the *Opera quae supersunt omnia* (1802-3) edited by Paulus, with assistance from Hegel that demands scholarly attention—were preserved in Goethe's papers (GSA 26/LIX,18a,1). In one passage Goethe draws attention to Spinoza's notion of a "*Modificatio quae et necessario et infinita existit*," that is: a modification which exists necessarily and infinitely. This formulation is from E1pp22-3, i.e., Spinoza's discussion of what have since been referred to in the scholarship as the "infinite modes." Goethe adds next to the passage: "Die Metamorphose wodurch alles stufenweise hervorgebracht wird" ("The metamorphosis through which everything is brought about in stages"). See M 61 at LA II, 1A: 274. An investigation into the possibility that Goethe came to understand metamorphosis as an infinite mode should prove highly instructive, but I set this topic aside for now. On Spinoza's notion of an infinite mode, see Melamed, *Spinoza's Metaphysics*: *Substance and Thought* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2013), 113-136.

25. Partly because of my focus on the *Ethics* (which Goethe himself cites, and which seems to have interested him most), I position Spinoza's doctrine differently from Amrine "Goethean Intuitions" 38-40, who considers Spinoza's earlier account in the *Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect*. I also propose that both Spinoza and Goethe were critics of abstraction. See the next two notes below.

Spinoza initiates the discussion of his taxonomy that stretches across the rest of the work (with important discussion of the third kind of cognition again in Part 5). The proposition sets out to prove that adequate ideas follow from adequate ideas, but the two scholia are most important in the current context. The first scholium presents an important characteristic of the human mind: it forms "notions they [humans] call *Universal*," (E2p40s1). Spinoza shows that these universals can have a number of sources. The next scholium collects these sources into three categories (which do not, however, line up with the three kinds of cognition of the *Ethics*).

(I) In the case of the first source, universals can emerge without order by means of the senses: we repeatedly see hairy four-legged creatures, for example, until we are eventually forced to use the shorthand, "dog." But this is a compensation mechanism of the human mind—not a virtue—as our cognition glosses over the individuality of each being and becomes less exact. Worse still, the way in which we generate such "universals" is influenced by the limited set of individuals we happen to come across (we can never perceive them all), leaving room for much confusion.[26] This explains a great deal of disagreement across the history of thought; the resulting universals are not really universal, but are instead regionalized. (II) We can also form universals in a misleading way by means of hearsay. In this case, we recollect things we have heard and form ideas accordingly. Together, this source along with the previous one (I) can be utilized to generate cognition of the *first* kind (*opinio* or *imaginatio*). This first kind of cognition will lead us into error. (III) The *second* kind of cognition (*ratio*), meanwhile, emerges by means of universals that have a third source. This final source of universals is made up of "common notions and adequate ideas of the properties of things" (E2p40s2). By engaging with universals that have this third

26. Compare with Goethe's maxim at WA II, 11:146 on theories: "Theorien sind gewöhnlich Übereilungen eines ungeduldigen Verstandes, der die Phänomene gern los sein möchte und an ihrer Stelle deswegen Bilder, Begriffe, ja oft nur Worte einschiebt. Man ahnet, man sieht auch wohl, dass es nur ein Behelf ist; liebt sich nicht aber Leidenschaft und Parteigeist jederzeit Behelfe? Und mit Recht, da sie ihrer so sehr bedürfen" ("Theories are normally abrupt acts of an impatient understanding that would gladly be rid of the phenomena, and instead squeeze in their place images, concepts, indeed just words. One senses, probably even sees, that this is just a workaround; but do not fervor and factionalism always love workarounds? And rightly so, because they very much depend on such helpful devices").

source, we achieve true ideas. Yet we are still restricted in that we must make use of the compensation mechanisms (universals) that are the result of the limited capabilities of our bodies.

Although Spinoza outlines three sources of universals, he only covers two kinds of cognition. That is because the *third* kind doesn't rely on universals. What would typically satisfy criteria for knowledge is not highest for Spinoza. He ranks reason (the second kind of cognition) below intuitive cognition (the third kind). Yet, since cognition of both the second and third kinds is necessarily true (E2p41), it's not immediately clear why one is superior to the other. Each concerns cognition of things (*rerum*) in the most general sense. However, the third kind is not generated through universals—a major advantage—and provides adequate knowledge of the essences of things. It's crucial that Spinoza presents these distinctions within scholia concerning the problems of abstraction.[27] Thus, in earlier work Spinoza argues that God knows universals only insofar as God knows the human mind; otherwise, God, who cognizes particulars in their particularity, doesn't need such a crutch.[28] *Scientia intuitiva* is hence divine knowledge. Additionally, it takes place in a different temporal register. Other cases of cognition involving so-called universals, generated through a process of abstraction, or relying on common notions and the like, entail significant duration. In contrast, according to E2p40s2, an instance of the third kind of cognition takes place "in one glance" ("*uno intuitu*").

An example of Spinoza's intuitive knowledge may illustrate how it works. Spinoza asks us to conceive a set of four numbers. We have three and must find another, attending to the relations between each. The first is to the second as the third is to the fourth. Spinoza presents the situation thus:

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27. See Samuel Newlands, "Spinoza on Universals" in *The Problem of Universals in Early Modern Philosophy*, ed. Stefano Di Bella and Tad M. Schmaltz (Oxford: Oxford UP, forthcoming) and also "Spinoza's Early Anti-Abstractionism" in *The Young Spinoza*, ed. Melamed (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2015).

28. See, for instance, Spinoza's *Cogitata metaphysica*, Part II, Chapter 7 and Melamed "Mapping the Labryinth of Spinoza's Scientia Intuitiva" in *Übergänge – diskursiv oder intuitiv?*, ed. Johannes Haag and Markus Wild (Frankfurt: Klosterman, 2013), 102 and 114.

> Merchants do not hesitate to multiply the second by the third, and divide the product by the first, because they have not yet forgotten what they heard from their teacher without any demonstration, or because they have often found this in the simplest numbers, or from the force of the Demonstration of P7 in Bk. VII of Euclid, viz. from the common property of proportionals. But in the simplest numbers none of this is necessary. Given the numbers 1, 2, and 3, no one fails to see that the fourth proportional number is 6—and we see this much more clearly because we infer the fourth number from the ratio which, in one glance [*uno intuitu*], we see the first number to have to the second (E2p40s2).

We need not recall what we have been told, but can accomplish the same operation with simple numbers that we have never encountered before. Neither do we require an algebraic formula (e.g., $1x = 3 \times 2$) that eliminates the visual element. The merchants Spinoza mentions rely on hearsay or such tools—in other words, the first or second kinds of cognition, respectively—although it's possible to realize the relationship at a glance and provide an answer instantaneously.[29]

Goethe, who was keen on anschauen (intuiting), schauen (beholding), or einsehen (realizing)—and not merely sehen (seeing)—saw something here, exactly in that expanded sense of seeing which Spinoza references in his example ("no one fails to see that the fourth proportional number is 6"). In order to clarify what form this third kind of cognition takes in Goethe, it may be helpful to say a few words about what it *doesn't* look like. A sort of cataloging that splits things into lifeless parts without paying attention to the vital relations between them doesn't satisfy. Thus, in studying Linnaeus's system, Goethe became aware of what

29. One might ask whether it could also be said that 1 is to 2 as 3 is to 4, or even 400. Perhaps the law governing the numbers is simply $n_2 = n_1 + 1$, or just $n_1 + x$ so long as $x > 0$ (in other words, $n_2 > n_1$). Similar issues arise from the questions Wittgenstein poses regarding rule-following. But keep in mind that the reference in E2p40s2 is Euclid's *Elements,* Book VII, where proportionality is clarified in terms of multiples and parts (Definition 20). In Spinoza's example, we are concerned with finding one missing number in a pair of two rather than the next numeral of a three number series. Furthermore, at the moment my aim is to clarify how the third kind of cognition may have been understood historically, not evaluate the cogency of Spinoza's taxonomy or example.

it lacked. "Durch Wiederholung prägten sich die Namen in mein Gedächtnis; auch im Analysieren gewann ich etwas mehr Fertigkeit, doch ohne bedeutenden Erfolg; Trennen und Zählen lag nicht in meiner Natur" ("Through repetition the names were engraved in my memory, and I gained greater skill in analysis—without conspicuous success, however, for I was by nature averse to classification and counting").[30] Though Goethe recognized the benefits inherent in such an endeavor, it did not answer the questions he found most pressing. In 1816 he wrote to Carl Friedrich Zelter: "Ich habe unendlich viel von [Linnaeus] gelernt, nur nicht Botanik. Außer Shakespeare und Spinoza wüst' ich nicht, daß irgend ein Abgeschiedener eine solche Wirkung auf mich getan" ("I have learned infinitely much from him, just not botany, and aside from Shakespeare and Spinoza I wouldn't know of another deceased person that has had such an effect on me").[31] Goethe eventually describes such taxonomy as creating "eine Art von Mosaik, wo man einen fertigen Stift neben den andern setzt, um aus tausend Einzelnheiten endlich den Schein eines Bildes hervorzubringen" ("a kind of mosaic, in which one completed block is placed next to another, creating finally a single picture from thousands of pieces") and concludes: "so war mir die Forderung in diesem Sinne gewissermaßen widerlich" ("the account was in this sense somewhat distasteful to me").[32] In other words, it formed a picture, but a dead one. There were gaps that Goethe could not bring himself to ignore.

Goethe's thinking changed course during his trip to Italy in the mid-eighties, however. He now claims that he encountered, among other things, new plants organized in new ways:

> Wie sie sich nun unter einen Begriff sammeln lassen, so wurde mir nach und nach klar und klarer, daß die Anschauung noch auf eine höhere Weise belebt werden könnte: eine Forderung, die mir damals unter der sinnlichen Form einer übersinnlichen Urpflanze vorschwebte. Ich ging allen Gestalten, wie sie mir vorkamen, in ihren Veränderungen nach, und so leuchtete mir

30. WA II, 6:107 | BW 155.

31. WA IV, 27:219. Goethe included nearly the same text in a draft of his "History of his Botanical Studies," but new lines were glued over it. See WA II, 6:380f.

32. WA II, 6:116 | BW 159f. Translation altered.

> am letzten Ziel meiner Reise, in Sizilien, die *ursprüngliche Identität* aller Pflanzenteile vollkommen ein, und ich suchte diese nunmehr überall zu verfolgen und wieder gewahr zu werden.
>
> Because they may be grouped under one concept, it gradually became clear to me that intuition could also be enlivened in a higher sense: a challenge which hovered in my mind at that time in the sensuous form of a supersensuous plant archetype. I traced the variations of all forms as I came upon them. In Sicily, the final goal of my journey, the conception of the *original identity* of all plant parts had become completely clear to me; and everywhere I attempted to pursue this identity and to catch sight of it again.[33]

The reference to a Spinozistic "Anschauung auf eine höhere Weise" ("intuition of a higher kind") should come as no surprise by now. New here is that Goethe had set demanding goals for himself and generated an important discovery. As though in a flash ("es leuchtete vollkommen ein"), he saw identity amongst difference. Such work is "intuitive" in that it involves the immediate apprehension of a whole; Goethe was able "alles dasjenige in Gesamtheit vorausahnen, was in der Folge sich mehr und mehr entwickeln, wozu das Entwickelte weiter führen solle" ("to glimpse in advance and in its totality something which [was] to emerge in succession with greater and greater detail in the manner suggested by its early development"), as he put it.[34] He eventually goes on to relay the six stages of a plant in the *Metamorphosis*. He outlines the laws that govern the relations amongst these stages, and we in turn realize what unifies them.

The conceptual basis for such pursuits is discussed in greater detail in Goethe's "Anschauende Urteilskraft" ("Intuiting Power of Judgment," 1817), a brief but informative text. Goethe doesn't dwell on his appreciation of Spinoza, but rather hones in on Kant's deficiencies—and it turns out that for Goethe there is a great deal of overlap between what Spinoza offers, and what Kant rules out. Goethe begins by summarizing the dilemma inherent in Kantian thought of

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33. WA II, 6:121 | BW 162. Emphasis in original; translation altered.

34. WA II, 6:122 | BW 162.

the critical period: we can conceive of an *intellectus archetypus*, but we cannot employ it. Even when we think it, we do so only negatively: intuitive thought is simply *non*-discursive thought. Goethe cites §77 of the *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, where Kant emphasizes the discursive nature of our understanding and contends that another sort of thought is beyond us. To this passage, Goethe replies:

> Zwar scheint der Verfasser hier auf einen göttlichen Verstand zu deuten, allein wenn wir ja im Sittlichen, durch Glauben an Gott, Tugend, und Unsterblichkeit uns in eine obere Region erheben und an das erste Wesen annähern sollen; so dürft' es wohl im Intellektuellen derselbe Fall sein, daß wir uns, durch das Anschauen einer immer schaffenden Natur, zur geistigen Teilnahme an ihren Produktionen würdig machten.
>
> Here, to be sure, the author seems to point to divine understanding. In the moral area, however, we are expected to ascend to a higher realm and approach the primal being through belief in God, virtue, and immortality. Thus it may arguably also hold true in the intellectual realm that through an intuitive perception of an eternally creative nature we can become worthy of mental participation in its creations.[35]

Given the context, Goethe approaches the issue from a different angle (in Kantian terminology) within this piece. But the result is the same: a higher kind of cognition is feasible, even one that—Goethe cautiously points out—brings us closer to God and the creative process. With this I turn to Maimon, who arrives by different means at a related conclusion.

§3. Maimon and Spinoza

According to his own testimony, Maimon—who developed the terminology of "acosmism" that was taken up by Hegel, Heine, and others to describe Spinoza's

35. WA II, 11:55 | SS 31. Translation altered.

metaphysics[36]—initially encountered Spinoza's writings during his second visit to Berlin in the early 1780s. But Maimon was already familiar with many of the ideas he came across at this time since he and Spinoza were beholden to the same medieval Jewish intellectual tradition, and since he had already engaged with what he would later consider to be Spinozistic doctrines in other settings. Amongst Kabbalists in Poland, Maimon became aware of an important doctrine he would come to associate with Spinoza, namely that God (or *ein sof*, "unending") is the material cause of the world. For Maimon this was the main point of convergence between Kabbalah and Spinoza: "In der Tat ist die Kabbala nichts anderes als erweiterter Spinozismus,[37] worin nicht nur die Entstehung der Welt aus der Einschränkung des göttlichen Wesens überhaupt erklärt, sondern auch die Entstehung einer jeden Art von Wesen und ihr Verhältnis zu allen übrigen aus seiner besonderen Eigenschaft Gottes hergeleitet wird" ("In fact, the Kabbalah is nothing but extended Spinozism, in which not only is the origin of the world explained by the limitation of the divine being, but also the origin of every kind of being, and its relation to other beings, is derived from a separate attribute of God").[38] Melamed focuses on this doctrine, which Maimon endorsed repeatedly

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36. See Maimon, *Lebensgeschichte* (LG), ed. Zwi Batscha (Frankfurt: Insel, 1984) 217 and—until a much-improved, forthcoming translation is published—Maimon, *Autobiography* (AU), trans. J. Clark Murray (Urbana: U of Illinois P, 2001.) 113f. Despite a misleading OED entry attributing the development of this term in German to Hegel, Maimon appears to be the first to flip the understanding of Spinoza as an atheist who denies the reality of God; if Spinoza is an acosmist, he denies the reality of the world and affirms only God. See Melamed, "Maimon," and Melamed "Acosmism, Hegel, and Spinoza" in *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 48.1 (2010) 77-92 for a refutation of this reading of Spinoza.

37. In his conversations with Lessing, Jacobi took the inverse position, claiming that Spinozism was like a more abstract Kabbalah. Accordingly Kabbalah is a sort of medieval predecessor of Spinoza. See Förster *25 Years* 79 and Melamed "Maimon" 82n57. For recent work on Kabbalah and German Idealism, see Paul Franks "Nothing Comes from Nothing: Judaism, the Orient, and Kabbalah in Hegel's Reception of Spinoza" in *The Oxford Handbook of Spinoza*, ed. Della Rocca (Oxford: Oxford UP, forthcoming).

38. LG 84 | AU 105. Translation altered. See also LG 156f. | AU 219: "Ich las den Spinoza; das tiefe Denken dieses Philosophen und seine Liebe zur Wahrheit gefiel mir ungemein, und da ich schon in Polen durch Veranlassung der kabbalistischen Schriften auf das

in his work, in his analysis of the relationship between Spinoza and Maimon. In the following, I turn my attention to another Spinozistic aspect of Maimon's thought: I ask whether Maimon might have been interested in Spinoza's third kind of cognition.

(1) First, a practical point: it's quite unlikely that Maimon, who declared his Spinozism publicly, could have missed Spinoza's discussion of the third kind of cognition. It's known that Maimon, having received rabbinic training, was fond of the Jewish commentary style[39] which required that one follow a work's necessary order slowly, carefully, and systematically.[40] In honor of this tradition, Maimon (formerly Shlomo ben Yehoshua) adopted his surname from Maimonides (or Moses ben Maimon). As Freudenthal points out, Maimonides asks the reader to approach his *Guide of the Perplexed* with reading techniques like the ones I

System desselben geraten war, so fing ich darüber aufs neue nachzudenken an und wurde von dessen Wahrheit so überzeugt, daß alle Bemühungen Mendelssohns, mich davon abzubringen, fruchtlos waren" ("I was reading Spinoza. His profound thought and his love of truth pleased me uncommonly; and as his system had already been suggested to me by Kabbalistic writings, I began to reflect upon it anew, and became so convinced of its truth, that all the efforts of Mendelssohn to change my opinion were unavailing").

39. See Kant's comment on this practice in note 13 above.

40. See for instance LG 74 | AU 91: "Die Art, durch dechiffrieren zu lernen, macht noch jetzt meine eigene Manier aus, die Gedanken anderer zu fassen und zu beurteilen [...] und nur alsdann kann man sich rühmen einen Autor verstanden zu haben, wenn man durch seine Gedanken, die man anfangs bloß dunkel wahrnimmt, veranlaßt wird, selbst über diese Materie nachzudenken, und dieselbe, obschon auf Veranlassung eines andern, selbst hervorzubringen. Dieser Unterschied des Verstehens kann einem scharfsichtigen Auge nicht entgehen. —Aus ebendiesem Grunde kann ich auch nur alsdann ein Buch verstehen, wenn die darin enthaltenen Gedanken nach Ausfüllung der Lücken miteinander übereinstimmen" ("learning by deciphering constitutes still my peculiar manner of comprehending and judging the thoughts of others; and I maintain that [...] no man can flatter himself with having comprehended an author until he is roused by his thoughts, which he apprehends at first but vaguely, to reflect on the subject himself, and to work it out for himself, though it may be under the impulse of another. For the same reason also I can understand a book only when the thoughts which it contains are consistent after filling up the gaps between them").

have just mentioned (and more).[41]

Maimon engaged Kant's first critique with such inspired commitment and experienced much success. In his *Autobiography*, he describes how he tackled Kant's work:

> Die Art, wie ich dieses Werk studierte, ist ganz sonderbar. Bei der ersten Durchlesung bekam ich von jeder Abteilung eine dunkle Vorstellung, nachher suchte ich diese durch eigenes Nachdenken deutlich zu machen und also in dem Sinn des Verfassers einzudringen, welches das eigentliche ist, was man sich in ein System hineindenken nennt. *Da ich mir aber auf ebendiese Art schon vorher Spinozas*, D. Humes und Leibnizens Systeme zu eigen gemacht hatte, so war es natürlich, daß ich auf ein Koalitionssystem bedacht sein mußte [...].
>
> The method according to which I studied this work was quite peculiar. On the first perusal I obtained a vague idea of each section. This I endeavored afterwards to make distinct by my own reflection, and thus to penetrate into the author's meaning. Such is properly the process which is called thinking oneself into a system. But as *I had already internalized in this way the systems of Spinoza*, Hume, and Leibniz, it was natural that I should grow interested in developing a coalition system.[42]

Maimon's technique was to trust the text, at least temporarily, and trace its larger idea step-by-step. He explicitly compares this approach to the 1st Critique with the one he had already used to read Spinoza; and, in fact, it's easy to imagine taking on the *Ethics* and its geometric order in this manner. Maimon could hardly have missed Spinoza's repeated emphasis on the third kind of cognition *if* he had truly handled Spinoza's work so systematically.

(2) Second, Maimon was most likely familiar with the treatment of *scientia intuitiva* in the *Ethics* because the issues surrounding this notion were all very much of interest to him. Maimon would have been deeply curious about Parts

41. Gideon Freudenthal, "A Philosopher Between Two Cultures" in *Salomon Maimon: Rational Dogmatist, Empirical Skeptic*, ed. Freudenthal (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 2003) 9f.

42. LG 201f. | AU 279f. Translation altered; emphasis mine.

2 and 5 of Spinoza's work, and, it seems, sympathetic. Maimon posited a soft distinction between the finite and infinite intellect, for example, and was interested in possible points of convergence between the two. The extent to which Maimon, a monist, would have been committed to exploring Spinoza's epistemology is so clear that Socher is rightly surprised that Maimon doesn't reference Spinoza in relevant passages in his Hebrew commentary on Maimonides's *Guide*: "Strikingly, [Maimon doesn't develop the implications of his idealist acosmism here] in terms of the philosophy of Spinoza, whose discussion of the way in which we understand God (or Nature) through singular things and the way in which the infinite substance of the deity understands itself through this limited understanding, in Book V of *The Ethics*, seems particularly apposite."[43] Instead, Maimon turns to Giordano Bruno. Both Socher and Melamed agree that there may have been rather strategic reasons for such a move.[44] One can only speculate, but if this is correct, Maimon tactfully chose on some occasions to reference a figure with whom Jewish readers would have been less familiar and who was not associated with controversy.

Yet because it would have been highly unlikely for Maimon to miss Spinoza's emphasis on *scientia intuitiva* considering his immanent approach (1), and because Spinoza's third kind of cognition would likely have been one of the most intriguing elements of his thought for Maimon (2), we might expect to find some other traces of an engagement with Spinoza and his third kind of cognition in Maimon's work (implicitly or explicitly). Indeed, it seems that we do. Consider, for example, Maimon's "Über die Progressen der Philosophie" ("On Progress in Philosophy," 1793), his response to the Royal Academy of Berlin's prize question "What progress has metaphysics made since Leibniz?" (1791), and one of several texts in which Maimon stresses the possibilities of construction.[45]

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43. Abraham P. Socher, *The Radical Enlightenment of Salomon Maimon*: *Judaism, Heresy, and Philosophy* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 2006) 95.

44. Melamed "Maimon" 85.

45. Regarding Maimon and construction, see David Rapport Lachterman, "Mathematical Construction, Symbolic Cognition and the Infinite Intellect: Reflections on Maimon and Maimonides" in *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 30.4 (1992) and, particularly with reference to Maimon's *Essay*, John H. Smith, "Friedrich Schlegel's Romantic Calculus:

Construction, in mathematics at least, and with the help of Maimon's Satz der Bestimmbarkeit (Law of Determinability), is not only held to be valid, but divine.[46] The manner in which Maimon, showcasing here his rationalist side, describes intuitive construction should remind us of Spinoza's discussion of the third kind of cognition in the *Ethics*. For Maimon, the finite human understanding can think pure mathematics in the way that the infinite intellect thinks the whole of nature. Maimon holds that the finite intellect can do real constitutive thinking in this respect: we can create objects in thought.

He is most explicit on this after giving an account of Leibniz, whose "system" he eventually identifies here with that of Spinoza.[47] For Maimon, the differences between Spinoza and Leibniz are superficial at best and motivated by Leibniz's cautiousness.[48] Maimon arguably follows Lessing on this point, who claimed—as presented in Jacobi's volume—that Leibniz "war [ich fürchte] im Herzen selbst ein

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Reflections on the Mathematical Infinite around 1800" in *The Relevance of Romanticism*: *Essays on German Romantic Philosophy*, ed. Dalia Nassar (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2014). Although Maimon develops his notion of construction in crucial ways in the *Essay*, I leave these passages aside here since they are wrapped up in Maimon's engagement with calculus, where Goethe doesn't seem to have had much interest (in contrast with numerous important figures in the period, as shown by Smith in both recent and forthcoming work).

46. On Maimon's Law of Determinability, see Oded Schechter, "The Logic of Speculative Philosophy and Skepticism in Maimon's Philosophy: Satz der Bestimmbarkeit and the Role of Synthesis" in *Salomon Maimon: Rational Dogmatist, Empirical Skeptic*, ed. Freudenthal (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 2003). Schechter, along with Freudenthal, *Definition and Construction* (Berlin: Max Planck, 2010), account for how this high standard for knowledge contributes to Maimon's skepticism. Notably, Maimon refers to his position in the *Versuch* (*Essay*) by means of the terms used for the title of the collection just referenced: "rational dogmatism and empirical skepticism." See Salomon Maimon, *Gesammelte Werke* (GW), ed. Valerio Verra (Hildesheim: Georg Olms Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1965-76), I 558.

47. Fichte later follows Maimon on this point, citing him in *Werke*, ed. Immanuel Fichte (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1971) I 101: "daß das Leibnitzische System, in seiner Vollendung gedacht, nichts anders sey, als Spinozismus, zeigt in einer sehr lesenswerthen Abhandlung: Über die Progressen der Philosophie usw. Salomo Maimon" ("Maimon shows in a piece which is very much worth reading, 'On Progress in Philosophy,' that the Leibnizian system, thought in its completion, is nothing other than Spinozism").

48. GW IV 47.

Spinozist" ("was, I fear, a Spinozist at heart").[49] Maimon writes a few years later in his "Über die Progressen": "Die Art diese Harmonie begreiflich zu machen, daß man Gott als einen Uhrmacher, und die Monaden als die von ihm verfertigten ähnlichen und zugleich aufgezogenen Uhren vorstellt, ist populair, exoterisch, und zu kras, als daß man im Ernst eine solche Vorstellungsart diesem großen Manne beilegen sollte" ("The way of making this harmony [of the monads] understandable by presenting God as a watchmaker, and the monads as the watches he has produced similar to himself and wound up, is popular, exoteric, and too crass to seriously attribute to this great man").[50] Maimon goes on to illustrate the true meaning of Leibniz, which he then agrees with:

> Gott, als eine unendliche Vorstellungskraft, denkt sich von aller Ewigkeit alle mögliche Wesen, d.h. er denkt sich selbst auf alle mögliche Art eingeschränkt. Er denkt nicht wie wir diskursiv, sondern seine Gedanken sind zugleich Darstellungen. Wird man einwenden, daß wir von einer solchen Denkart keinen Begriff haben, so antwortete ich: *wir haben allerdings einen Begriff davon, indem wir dieselbe zum Theil besitzen. Alle Begriffe der Mathematik werden von uns gedacht, und zugleich als reelle Objekte durch Konstruktion a priori dargestellt. Wir sind also hierin Gott ähnlich*. Kein Wunder also, daß die alten Philosophen die Mathematik hochgeschätzt haben, und keinem, dieser Wissenschaft Unkundigen, den Eintritt in ihren Hörsälen gestatten wollten. Nicht eben, wie man gemeiniglich vorgiebt, weil die mathematische Methode der Philosophie sehr zuträglich ist, *sondern weil die Mathematik uns den Unterschied lehret, zwischen dem bloß diskursiven und dem reellen Denken* [...] Gott denkt alle reelle Objekte, nicht bloß nach dem in unserer Philosophie so hoch gepriesenen Satze des Widerspruchs, sondern *wie wir* (ob zwar auf eine vollständigere Art) *die Objekte der Mathematik denken*, d.h. er bringt sie durchs Denken zugleich hervor.
>
> God, as an infinite power of representation, conceives from all eternity all possible beings; that is: he conceives himself limited in all ways. He does not think discursively, like us; rather, his thoughts are simultaneously

49. JW I, 1:23f.

50. GW IV 41f.

> presentations. Should one object by saying that we have no notion of such a manner of thought, I would answer: *we certainly do, in that we partly possess the same. All mathematical notions are thought by us, and simultaneously presented as real objects a priori through construction. In this sense, we are like God.* No wonder, then, that the ancient philosophers prized mathematics so highly, and wanted to refuse entrance into their auditoria anyone who was ignorant of this science. Not exactly because, as one normally purports, the mathematical method is so conducive to philosophy; rather, *because mathematics teaches us the difference between merely discursive and real thinking* [...] God thinks all real objects, not merely according to Principle of Non-Contradiction that is held so highly in our Philosophy, but rather *as we think the objects of mathematics* (if indeed in a more complete way); that is, he brings them forth simultaneously through thought.[51]

I am not concerned here with determining the extent to which this is an accurate representation of Leibniz (indeed it's all the more notable if not, and if Maimon thus seeks to endorse indirectly positions he associates with Spinoza). Maimon himself says regarding his interpretation: "[W]ill dieses ein Leibnizianer nicht zugeben, so mag es Spinoza's System heißen" ("[I]f the Leibnizian refuses to concede this, then let them call it Spinoza's system").[52] Kant, for his part, responds to similar claims by Maimon and associates them with Spinozism.[53] But the

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51. GW IV 42. Compare with Maimon's discussion of the sublime at GW III 55: "Das erschaffen aus nichts liegt nicht gänzlich außer unsern Begriffen" ("*Creatio ex nihilo* does not entirely lie outside of our concepts").

52. GW IV 58.

53. See AA XI 48. "Ich zweifle aber sehr, daß dieses Leibnitzens oder Wolfs Meynung gewesen sey, ob sie zwar wirklich aus ihren Erklärungen von der Sinnlichkeit im Gegensatze des Verstandes gefolgert werden könnte und die, so sich zu jener Männer Lehrbegriff bekennen, werden es schwerlich zugestehen, daß sie einen Spinozism annehmen; denn in der That ist Hrn. Maymons Vorstellungsart mit diesem einerley und könte vortreflich dazu dienen die Leibnizianer *ex concessis* zu wiederlegen" ("I very much doubt, however, that this was Leibniz's (or Wolf's) stance, even though this could be inferred from their explanations of sensibility as contrasted with the understanding; and those who adhere to the doctrinal concepts of these men will find it difficult to agree that they assume Spinozism. Herr Maymon's perspective is actually the one in unity with Spinozism, and could be used most excellently to refute Leibnizians *ex concessis*").

important thing to recognize is that Maimon emphasizes the difference between a discursive mode of thought and one that is clearly superior and associated with God. Maimon affirms the existence of this higher mode of thought, which supposes that the distinction between the finite and infinite intellect is really one of quantity and not quality. Compare with Goethe: in his "Versuch als Vermittler von Objekt und Subjekt" ("Experiment as Mediator," 1792), he contends that true researchers must be "gleichgültige und gleichsam göttliche Wesen [...] als wenn wir dem strengsten Geometer Rechenschaft zu geben schuldig wären" ("indifferent, godlike beings [...] as if our work would satisfy the strictest of geometricians").[54] In both cases, the claim that mathematics indicates to us the possibility of such knowledge must be read in the context of Spinoza's position in the Appendix to Part 1 of the *Ethics*, one of Goethe's favorite texts:[55]

> So they maintained it as certain that the judgments of the Gods far surpass man's grasp. This alone, of course, would have caused the truth to be hidden from the human race to eternity, if Mathematics, which is concerned not with ends, but only with the essences and properties of figures, had not shown men another standard of truth (E1App).

In Part 2 of the *Ethics*, it becomes clear that this "other standard of truth" corresponds to intuitive knowledge. My claim is that the notion of construction developed by Maimon in his "Über die Progressen" with regard to mathematics also corresponds to the third kind of cognition.

Maimon ends up very close to Spinoza in his account of this kind of knowing, around the same time that he writes his piece on Goethe's *Metamorphosis*. While Spinoza argues that intuitive knowledge is divine (as shown in the previous section), Maimon supposes that we can think and therefore be like God in

54. WA II, 11:22 | SS 11, 16. Translation altered. The piece was initially composed in the early 1790s, but Goethe did not publish it until 1823.

55. Goethe was fond of referencing E1App, and his personal copy of the Paulus edition of Spinoza's works (Ruppert #3132) contains marginalia in—and only in—this portion of the text. Katharina Mommsen's claim in *Goethe and the Poets of Arabia*, trans. Michael M. Metzger (Rochester: Camden House, 2014) 358n72 that "Goethe's copy [of this edition] has many markings in pencil" is not at all accurate.

mathematical construction. For Maimon as for Spinoza, if such mathematical constructions are carried out correctly, "the eyes of the mind, by which it sees and observes things, are the demonstrations themselves" (E5p23s). It's clear that for both Maimon and Goethe there is room for intuitive knowledge of this sort.

§6. Goethe and Maimon

We are now in a position to see the connection between the two. Consider first that Maimon entitles his review "Ueber die Stetigkeit in der Natur" ("On Continuity in Nature"). The term "continuity"[56] refers not to a state that could be described as constant, but rather to persistent unity across stages. Interestingly, Goethe never once uses this term in the *Metamorphosis.* But this doesn't mean that Maimon is off the mark; in fact, Goethe came to favor the terminology of continuity, for example in letters updating Schiller on his scientific progress in 1796. Goethe first indicates, after requesting that Schiller send back a manuscript of his on butterflies, that this concept is proving increasingly useful to him: "Ich bin mehr als jemals überzeugt, daß man durch den Begriff der *Stetigkeit* den organischen Naturen trefflich beikommen kann" ("I am more convinced than ever that with the concept of *continuity* one can splendidly come to terms with organic beings of nature").[57] Weeks later, Goethe writes: "In meinen Beobachtungen über Pflanzen und Insekten habe ich fortgefahren und bin ganz glücklich darin gewesen. Ich finde, daß, wenn man den *Grundsatz der Stetigkeit* recht gefaßt hat und sich

56. Grimm XVII Sp. 2570-83 draws a distinction between a pre-seventeenth- and post-eighteenth-century connotation of Stetigkeit, supposing a transformation through the 1700s. According to Grimm, the term is initially associated with Dauerhaftigkeit, in a legal context: long-term validity, or also therefore Unbeweglichkeit, which, indeed, seems foreign to Goethe's lively conception of nature. Associations of Folge, Continuität and Einheit, taken on "seit dem 18. jh." after the "alte bedeutung im 16. jh. erloschen war," then correspond much more with what Goethe and also Maimon had in mind here. The point is that we are dealing with a dynamic state of affairs, but one that nonetheless has a principle of organization.

57. WA IV, 11:155.

dessen mit leichtigkeit zu bedienen weiß, man weder zum Entdecken noch zum Vortrag bei organischen Naturen etwas weiter braucht" ("I have progressed in my observations of plants and insects, and was very happy in that respect. I find that when one has rightly conceived of the *Principle of Continuity* and knows how to avail oneself of it with ease, one needs no more, whether in the discovery or presentation of organic beings of nature"; emphasis in original here and in the previous passage cited).[58] It's entirely plausible that Maimon's review inspired Goethe to use this term, and Schiller may have even known this; Maimon was a topic of discussion between the two.[59]

Be that as it may, Maimon's title speaks to one of the most important aspects of Goethe's thought (in the *Metamorphosis* and going forward), which is concerned with stages and the transitions between them, much like Spinoza in his example of the fourth proportional. Thus Maimon tells us at the beginning of his piece:

> *Nur einem Genie vom ersten Range ist es aufbehalten*, die allerkleinsten Schritte der Natur und die allerverborgensten Operationen derselben auszuspüren. Nur einem Göthe ist es aufbehalten, die Identität der verschiedenen Theile der Pflanzen und ihre Verwandlungen ineinander in ihrem Progressu sowohl als in ihrem Regressu ausfindig zu machen.
>
> *Only for a genius of the highest rank has posterity left the job* of discovering the tiniest steps of nature and its most hidden operations. Only for *Goethe* has the task remained of outlining the identity of the different parts of plants and their transformations into one another in their *progressu* as well as *regressu* [emphasis in original].[60]

Maimon follows what Goethe is up to, tracing the plant both forward and backward. Maimon states that others have attempted to study the topic and provide an account, but claims that they have never done so as "bündig" ("succinctly") and

58. WA IV, 11:143.

59. See Schiller's 1794 letter to Goethe in NA XXVII, Nr. 34.

60. GW III 300.

"einleuchtend" ("pellucidly") as Goethe, who, Maimon notices, has "seine eigne Entwicklungsart" ("his own manner of development").[61] Particular to Goethe is the urge to, as Maimon points out, clarify that which *unifies* the various stages of the plant and their transitions into one another.

Throughout the middle section of the review, Maimon lets the *Metamorphosis* speak for itself. He quotes from it at length and then proceeds to rephrase what has been cited, point by point, before eventually advising: "Uebrigens verweise ich den Leser auf die sehr lesenswerthe Abhandlung selbst" ("Ultimately, I refer the reader to the treatise itself, which is very much worth reading").[62] In his conclusion, Maimon gestures ahead:

> Die Metamorphose der Pflanzen, die der Verfasser so glücklich erklärt hat, leitet uns auf die Untersuchung der Metamorphose anderer Gegenstände der Natur [...] Sollten nicht zum Beispiel die Naturkündiger mit eben so gutem Erfolg die Erklärung der Metamorphose der Insekten unternehmen? sollte man nicht zeigen können, daß das sich verwandelnde Insekt in seinen dreyen so verschiedenen Zuständen (als Raupe, Puppe und Schmetterling) immer dieselbe Form behält? [...] Ich glaube daß dieses angehen muß, wenn nur die Naturkundiger so viel Genie und Beobachtungsgeist dazu mitbringen, als unser Verfasser bey dieser Gelegenheit gezeigt hat.
>
> The metamorphosis of plants, which the author has so fortunately clarified,[63] leads us to the investigation of the metamorphosis of other objects of nature [...] Should not, for example, the clarification of the metamorphosis of insects be undertaken with just as much success? Shouldn't one be able to show that the insect maintains the same form in its transformation through three different states (as caterpillar, nymph, and butterfly)? [...] I believe that this must proceed—if only the naturalists would carry with them as much genius and observational spirit as our author has shown on this occasion.[64]

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61. GW III 300, 308.

62. GW III 304.

63. See my note 19 above regarding the shift in the title of Goethe's work.

64. GW III 304.

Maimon anticipates the eventual progress in Goethe's work, despite the fact that the *Metamorphosis* itself offers little indication of later developments. Given that the *Metamorphosis* is concerned with plants, Goethe doesn't mention insects at all; if anything, he ends the work modestly, indicating that he expects to continue refining his thoughts in order to make them—of course—"anschaulicher" ("more intuitive").[65] Maimon even suggests that we would do well to extend Goethe's investigations to the study of man. He also poses the frequently asked question regarding Goethe's status as both artist and natural philosopher: "Ein Mann, der sich schon als einen der größten Dichter berühmt gemacht hatte, zeigt sich jetzt als einen der größten Naturforscher. Wie mag dieses zugehen?" ("A man who has already made himself known as one of the greatest poets shows himself now to be one of the greatest naturalists. How could this come to be?") Or, put in a particularly clever way: "[W]o ist hier die Einheit im Mannigfaltigen der Aeußerungen eines und ebendesselben Individuums?" ("Where is the unity here in the manifold expressions of one and the same individual?").[66] Maimon's answer is wit. "Was anders als der durch Beurtheilung geleitete Witz, d.h. das Vermögen die entfernten Aehnlichkeiten der Dinge einzusehen; aber doch nur diejenigen Aehnlichkeiten zu wählen, die zur Einheit im Mannigfaltigen eines zu wichtigen Zwecken bestimmten Ganzen dienen[?]" ("What other than wit led by judgment—that is, the faculty of realizing the distant similarities amongst things, and choosing only those similarities that serve to bring about the unity in the manifold of a whole that is determined to vital purposes?").[67]

In my view, there is a clear overlap here with Spinoza's third kind of cognition. As with the relations between numbers in Spinoza's example, Maimon is concerned with seeing ("einsehen") the relationship between things—and not just any relationship, but that which is fundamental, and realizes the essential principle at hand.

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65. WA II, 6:94 | SS 97. Translation altered.

66. GW III 305.

67. Ibid.

Conclusion

Above I have highlighted elements of Goethe's and Maimon's relationships to Spinoza in order to shed light on what unifies them. To dispel with one potential objection: I do not think that Maimon wrote a laudatory review of Goethe's *Metamorphosis* because he needed a patron. One might be inclined to think so, as Maimon would eventually consider seeking help from Goethe. But this was several years later, after his patron Moritz had died, and it's unlikely that Maimon was planning ahead in this manner. Maimon found another patron at this time, and was almost constitutionally incapable of such politics; even as he did need assistance and Unger facilitated an opportunity for him to contact Goethe, Maimon failed to deliver the letter as planned.[68] When he eventually wrote to Goethe months later, Maimon plausibly explained that he had fallen in love with philosophy and married her without putting any thought whatsoever into how they would survive together.[69] He was not one to write a gushing review simply because he thought it might be useful to build a 'network' for a later date.[70]

My argument here is then that both Goethe and Maimon are intrigued and captivated by Spinoza's *scientia intuitiva*. Accordingly, Maimon's interest in this kind of cognition, shared with Goethe, enables his sympathy for

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68. See the letter from Unger to Goethe on July 5, 1794 printed at Schulz 280.

69. Maimon cited at Schulz 282. "Meine Umständen sind ziemlich bekannt. Sie sind so wie die Umständen eines Mannes nicht anders seyn konnen [sic] der kein Vermögen hat, keinen [sic] Profeßion, keinen Handel kein Gewerb betreibt, der sich, unbedachtsamerweiße in die Philosophie verliebt, sich mit ihr vermählt, ohne erst zu überlegen, wie er sich und die Philosophie erhalten wird?" ("My circumstances are pretty well known. They are as the circumstances of a man must be who has no wealth, profession, who conducts no trade or industry, who fell in love with philosophy and wed her without caution, without first considering how he and philosophy will survive").

70. See, on a similar note, the beginning of Maimon's "On Progress in Philosophy," where he points out that he is no diligent reader of magazines, and thus took no notice of the essay prize question of the Royal Academy of Sciences in Berlin until some days before the deadline.

Goethe's natural-philosophical work. Of course, Goethe and Maimon may still highlight different elements of this notion. Goethe emphasizes the fact that intuitive cognition happens at a glance ("*uno intuitu*"). Although Maimon is obviously partial to Goethe's project, elsewhere Maimon takes mathematics to be paradigmatically capable of construction.[71] But both put great weight on instances of constitutive cognition, Goethe encouragingly pointing out that "it may arguably also hold true in the intellectual realm that through an intuitive perception of eternally creative nature we may become worthy of participating mentally in its creative processes,"[72] and Maimon stating still more boldly that "in this sense, we are like God."[73]

Having clarified these claims, we can now grasp Maimon's praise of the *Metamorphosis*. Yet we also sharpen our understanding of both Goethe and Maimon, and the relationship between the two with respect to ideas that had a decisive influence on German Idealism and beyond.[74]

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71. Spinoza likewise restricts himself to mathematics in his discussion of *scientia intuitiva*, but does indicate other possibilities, which Goethe is unique in pursuing.

72. WA II, 11:55. Original text quoted at note 35.

73. GW IV 42. Original text quoted at note 51.

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