

# Salomon Maimon's “History of His Philosophical Authorship, in Dialogues”

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**ABSTRACT:** In this essay, I introduce a translation of Salomon Maimon’s posthumously-published “History of His Philosophical Authorship, in Dialogues.” I review Maimon’s importance as a historical figure, provide further context on this wrongly neglected piece, and then discuss several of its most interesting features. My translation follows.

**S**ALOMON MAIMON WAS likely the most radical philosopher to enter the orbit of the Jewish Enlightenment movement, or *haskalah*. In fact, he remains one of the most challenging and original Jewish thinkers of the modern era.

Maimon authored the first modern Jewish autobiography, published between 1792 and 1793. Since then, a wide range of thinkers and writers—including Heinrich Heine, George Eliot, and Chaim Potok—have studied this definitive text.<sup>1</sup> Through it and other work, Maimon also shaped the philosophical movement following Immanuel Kant and others known as German Idealism (which might, without too much hyperbole, perhaps better be called German-Jewish Idealism, given the importance of Maimon’s as well as Benedict Spinoza’s thought, and more—including apparently kabbalah).<sup>2</sup>

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1. For further discussion of the legacy of Maimon’s text, see Salomon Maimon, *Autobiography*, trans. Paul Reitter, ed. Yitzhak Melamed and Abraham Socher (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2018), xiii-xxxv. (Cited henceforth as A with page number.) See also Abraham P. Socher, *The Radical Enlightenment of Solomon Maimon: Judaism, Heresy, and Philosophy* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 2006), Ch. 5.
  2. On Maimon and German idealism, see for instance Yitzhak Y. Melamed, “Salomon Maimon and the Rise of Spinozism in German Idealism,” in *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 42:1 (2004), 67-96 as well as Jason M. Yonover, “Goethe, Maimon, and Spinoza’s Third Kind of Cognition,” in *Goethe Yearbook* 25 (2018): 267-287. Concerning Spinoza and German Idealism, see Eckart Förster and Yitzhak Y. Melamed, ed., *Spinoza and German Idealism* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2012) on the importance of Spinoza’s metaphysics and epistemology, in addition to Jason M. Yonover and Kristin Gjesdal, ed., *Spinoza in Germany: Political and Religious Thought across the Long Nineteenth Century* (Oxford: Oxford UP, forthcoming) on the legacy of Spinoza’s political philosophy and philosophy of religion. Finally, on kabbalah and German Idealism, see e.g. Paul Franks, “Nothing Comes from Nothing: Judaism, the Orient, and Kabbalah in Hegel’s Reception of Spinoza,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Spinoza*, ed. Michael Della Rocca (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2017), 512-539 as well

## 2 Maimon's "History of His Philosophical Authorship"

Thus, Johann Gottlieb Fichte, one of the movement's more canonical figures, already noted Maimon's significance in a 1795 letter: "My respect for Maimon's talents knows no bounds. I firmly believe that he has completely overturned the entire Kantian philosophy as it has been understood by everyone until now."<sup>3</sup> Nonetheless, despite all of this, Maimon led a volatile life that ended in isolation. Many of his writings continue to be neglected.

Maimon's own disappointment in his life circumstances was perfectly evident. The dedication to his *Attempt at a New Logic, or Theory of Thought* of 1794 reads: "For the erudite and professional gentlemen reviewers [*Den Hochgelahrten Herren Recensenten von Profession*]" (GW V 3), and Maimon immediately clarifies this locution in a footnote. After emphasizing that he hopes he doesn't offend any other gentlemen reviewers, he claims that he has his reasons for excluding them here. Alas, whether or not those readers Maimon wished to avoid held back from commenting publicly on his *Logic*, this opening to one of his major works shows how unimpressed he was with the contemporary reception of his thought. Presumably, Maimon's (by all appearances) staged interview with a critic in his "History of His Philosophical Authorship, in Dialogues"—translated into English below for the first time—is likewise a result of such frustration.

The piece, hereafter referred to as the "History in Dialogues," presents a series of exchanges between the "Author" and a "Reviewer." It was first printed posthumously in 1804,<sup>4</sup> within a periodical called the *New Museum of Philosophy and Literature* edited by Friedrich Ludewig Bouterwek.<sup>5</sup> Maimon's

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as forthcoming work.

3. Johann Gottlieb Fichte, *Early Philosophical Writings*, trans. and ed. Daniel Breazeale (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1988), 383f. A letter by Kant featuring significant praise has likewise been cited repeatedly; see Immanuel Kant, *Gesammelte Schriften*, Akademie-Ausgabe (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1900ff.), XI 49, though later also XI 495. (Cited henceforth as AA with volume and page number.)
4. Salomon Maimon, "Salomon Maimon's Geschichte seiner philosophischen Autorschaft, in Dialogen. Aus seinen hinterlassenen Papieren," in *Neues Museum der Philosophie und Litteratur* 2:1 (1804): 125-146. Reprinted in Salomon Maimon, *Gesammelte Werke*, ed. Valerio Verra (Hildesheim: Olms Verlag, 1965-76), VII 627-648. (Cited henceforth as GW with volume and page number.)
5. Contemporary readers may be struck by this appearance of the term 'museum,' given that museums are understood today to be brick-and-mortar institutions hosting collections of

text has mostly gone unnoticed in both the literature engaging his thought and the scholarship concerning German and Jewish thought around 1800 more broadly. But it contains fascinating discussions of his life and philosophical views. In order to present it most effectively, I begin by introducing Maimon as a figure in greater detail (I). I then provide additional philological context for the “History in Dialogues” (II), and finally explore several themes prominent in this wrongly overlooked piece (III). My translation follows.

## I. “The Author”

Salomon Maimon was born Shlomo ben Yehoshua, or Salomon, son of Joshua, in 1753, in what was then the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. (Only later—amid travels to Western Europe—did he try to adapt to foreign custom with characteristic audacity, and take on a surname referencing the great medieval Jewish philosopher Moshe ben Maimon, or Maimonides.) Maimon then lived into his twenties embedded within the Jewish community, and showcased extraordinary talent in rabbinic study. Nevertheless, as a result of his frustration with many aspects of the region, including the character of orthodox religious life there as well as anti-Semitic oppression, he began to travel. By these means, he was exposed to early Hasidism, a mystical movement in Jewish thought; later, he would write that it primed him for Spinoza’s philosophy, with which he would come to sympathize in several respects. Maimon eventually made his way to Berlin due to his excitement about intellectual developments there, but quickly encountered difficulties.

According to Maimon’s testimony, upon reaching the Jewish community in Berlin for the first time, he declared that he wished to take up academic pursuits and complete a commentary on Maimonides. Those in charge turned

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predominantly non-textual objects. But the term, with its classical roots, has historically held a more comprehensive meaning, and here refers simply to something consecrated to the Muses, or the goddesses of the arts and sciences. See Paula Findlen, “The Museum: Its Classical Etymology and Renaissance Genealogy,” in *Journal of the History of Collections* 1:1 (1989): 59-78. (I am grateful to Samuel Spinner for this reference.) Compare also the contemporaneous use of the term in *The German Museum, or Monthly Repository of the Literature of Germany, the North, and the Continent in general*, a periodical published around 1800 presenting English-language translations of German texts from the period.

him away, apparently shocked that he would propose spreading certain ideas of the thinker who had, among other things, tried to make Judaism consistent with ancient Greek philosophy. Maimon's second attempt was initially more successful—he spent some time in Berlin—but his stay likewise ended in chaos. Although he had the support of some Jewish intellectuals, he developed numerous enemies due to his tendency to dispute standard views and practices, even breaking with social mores via various kinds of debauchery. By way of Hamburg, Amsterdam, and other locations (including again Berlin), Maimon eventually ended up in Lower Silesia, where he died in 1800. Remarkably, over the decade prior, he had completed more than ten major works and several times as many essays.

Maimon provides the most extensive treatment of these life events—and much more—in his *Autobiography* of 1792-3. But by virtue of its publication date, this text excludes the last approximately eight years of his life, when most of his writings were completed. So, how did Maimon reflect upon the course of his life in his later years? And what else might the "History in Dialogues" have to offer, given that it must have been composed closer to the end of Maimon's literary career? In order to begin to answer these questions below, I first provide some further background on the text itself; additional clarification is warranted, as this piece has to date received very little attention.

## II. The Text

Bouterwek printed in total three volumes of the *New Museum*, each with two issues. Dispersed across the first four issues, we find four texts attributed to Maimon: "Ideas and Plans for New Investigations" (#1), the "History in Dialogues" (#2), and then so-called "supplements" to both (#3-4).<sup>6</sup> The "Ideas

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6. Bouterwek's progressive move to prominently include a Jewish author like Maimon in the periodical at all must be noted; and beyond this, Bouterwek's writings are also worth investigating further. He lived from 1766-1828, alongside many of the modern German-language tradition's greatest thinkers, and engaged with a number of them, primarily with the aim to popularize Immanuel Kant's philosophy. Ansgar Lyssy, "Reality as Resistance – The Idea of the Will in Bouterwek's Idea of an Apodictic (1799)," in *The Concept of Will in Classical German Philosophy*, ed. Manja Kisner and Jörg Noller (Berlin: DeGruyter, 2020), 159-80 emphasizes that Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel and others reviewed Bouterwek's



and Plans for New Investigations” (#1) presented in the first volume, first issue of Bouterwek’s journal is followed by a continuation of this text (#3) in the second volume, second issue. The “History in Dialogues” (#2), featured in the second volume, first issue is then similarly—if less straightforwardly—paired with Maimon’s “Critical Assessment of the Kantian Philosophy” (#4) printed in the second volume, second issue. (This latter text, written more programmatically and in a single voice, is thus subtitled by Bouterwek: “As Conclusion to the History of his Philosophical Authorship.”)

Because Bouterwek extends the “History in Dialogues” in this manner,<sup>7</sup> readers may accordingly consider dealing with both pieces together. They may also question the impression Bouterwek’s editorial decisions can give, namely that Maimon’s winding journey across diverse traditions of thought comes together in a final engagement with, more than anyone else, Immanuel Kant. (Although the “History in Dialogues” itself could also give us the same sense insofar as Kant is treated last, the text likewise emphasizes the importance of Maimonides as well as the eighteenth-century German rationalist Christian Wolff.<sup>8</sup>) Surprisingly, in any case, the “History in Dialogues” has much more

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work; that Bouterwek was a close friend of Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi; and that Bouterwek influenced Arthur Schopenhauer, who studied in Göttingen for some time when he taught philosophy there (Schopenhauer will later criticize Bouterwek on several occasions in print). Still, the past decades have seen almost no English-language scholarship on Bouterwek’s many philosophical, literary-historical, and literary works. Linda Lou Prusiecki Senne, *Friedrich Bouterwek, the Philosophical Critic: An Intellectual Biography* (dissertation at Stanford University, 1972) offers an overview that also details earlier literature. In German, see recently Daniel Elon, “Maimon and Bouterwek über Vernunft und Glauben,” in *Hegel-Studien Beiheft 68* (2019): 77-92 concerning Maimon and Bouterwek on the status of reason and additionally Ansgar Lyssy, “Kant für Jedermann: Über F.A. Bouterweks Versuch, Kant populär darzustellen,” in *Denken fürs Volk? Popularphilosophie vor und nach Kant*, ed. Christoph Binkelman and Nele Schneiderheit (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2015), 139-166 on Bouterwek’s popular orientation.

7. In an afterword to this second volume, second issue, Bouterwek writes that all multi-part contributions begun in previous issues have been completed by this issue, such that the two volumes can be read together as a whole. The next and final volume with two issues features no text attributed to Maimon.
8. Maimon’s emphasis on Wolff in the “Dialogues” is unusual. Maimon also notes the importance of Wolff to his own thought in A 194, but the discussion there is mostly negative, and the distinction Maimon specifies he learned from Wolff in the “History in Dialogues”

to offer than the "Critical Assessment" on Maimon's relationship to Kant. Certainly it's more technical than the "Critical Assessment," which concerns not just Kant,<sup>9</sup> but also "the Kantians," for whom Maimon doesn't have much sympathy.<sup>10</sup>

I return at least briefly to questions concerning Maimon's philosophical debts in the next section. Meanwhile, one basic textual issue still deserves attention here: the unusual form of the "History in Dialogues." Maimon experimented throughout his literary and philosophical career with three primary ways to talk about his extraordinary life in the German language,<sup>11</sup> each of which I gloss in turn (a-c).

(a) Maimon's initial such writings were published around 1790 in a periodical called the *Magazine for the Study of the Experience of the Soul*, often considered the first journal of psychology (and, once Maimon took on leadership, the first German journal edited by a Jew).<sup>12</sup> Here Maimon presented

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(see 643 in my translation below) goes unmentioned.

9. In one of his numerous bold gestures opening the way for post-Kantian thought, Maimon writes of a problem he associates with Kant's thought: "It claims an absolute rule, and boasts of a perfection that does not befit it—as if it were the highest goal of all philosophizing, and, once reached, there were nothing left for the independent thinker but to join in its service or give up any aspiration to philosophy" (GW VII 669).
10. Maimon speaks for instance of "the Kantians who, by means of the system erected by Kant—and by means of belief in the same—imagine themselves to have been freed from the tricky business of independent thinking" (GW VII 669f.).
11. Much work remains to be done on Maimon's Hebrew writings, but see meanwhile especially Abraham Socher, *The Radical Enlightenment of Solomon Maimon: Judaism, Heresy, and Philosophy* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 2006), Ch. 2, Gideon Freudenthal, "Maimon's Development from the Kabbalah to Philosophical Rationalism" (Hebrew), in *Tarbiz* 80 (2012): 105–71, Gideon Freudenthal, "Shlomo ben Yehoshua [Maimon] the Kabbalist" (Hebrew), in *Tarbiz* 86 (2019): 419–478, and Warren Zev Harvey, "Four Jewish Visions of the Garden of Eden" (Manuscript).
12. See Salomon Maimon, "Fragmente aus Ben Josua's Lebensgeschichte," in *ΓΝΩΘΙ ΣΑΥΤΟΝ oder Magazin zur Erfahrungsseelenkunde* 9:1 (1791): 24–69, as well as the "Fortsetzung des Fragments aus Ben Josua's Lebensgeschichte" in *ΓΝΩΘΙ ΣΑΥΤΟΝ oder Magazin zur Erfahrungsseelenkunde* 9:2 (1791): 41–88. On Maimon's involvement in the periodical, see Stefanie Buchenau, "Wahre Menschenkenntnis. Salomon Maimons Lebensgeschichte im Magazin zur Erfahrungs-Seelenkunde," in *Das Abseits als Zentrum. Autobiographien*

his biography in the third person, and these texts accordingly reference “BJ” or “Ben Josua.” In making this move, there can be no question that Maimon was significantly influenced by Karl Philipp Moritz, initial editor of the *Magazine* and author of the crucial *Anton Reiser* that was likewise presented in the third person.

As far as we know—and despite a strange letter sent to Johann Wolfgang von Goethe by an obscure figure who claimed robust involvement some years later, a circumstance that has to date received no attention<sup>13</sup>—Moritz

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*von Außenseitern im 18. Jahrhundert*, ed. Françoise Knopper and Wolfgang Fink (Halle: Universitätsverlag Halle-Wittenberg, 2017), 409-428 as well as Lothar Müller, “Periodische Aufklärung: Karl Philipp Moritz, Salomon Maimon und das Magazin zur Erfahrungsseelenkunde,” in *Jüdische und christliche Intellektuelle in Berlin um 1800*, ed. Cord-Friedrich Berghahn, Avi Lifschitz und Conrad Wiedemann (Hannover: Wehrhahn, 2021), 113-134.

13. Moritz is credited as the editor of both volumes of Maimon’s *Autobiography*. But the mostly-forgotten Karl Friedrich Klischnig (1766?-1811) remarkably indicates, in a nearly forgotten 1809 letter to Goethe, that he authored a volume he refers to by means of the title “*Maimon’s Life*” (emphasis in original, no date of publication listed). While one might initially wonder whether Klischnig has in mind here the *Maimoniana*, a volume commemorating Maimon, this was published only several years later in 1813—and by Sabbatia Joseph Wolff, again not Klischnig. Furthermore, Klischnig refers to Maimon’s *Autobiography* in the same terms, i.e. with the title “Salomon Maimon’s Life” (here without emphasis), in a bibliography of Moritz’s works, noting the date of publication as 1792, but not noting that he had contributed in any manner. See Karl Friedrich Klischnig, *Erinnerungen aus den zehn letzten Lebensjahren meines Freundes Anton Reiser* (Berlin: Vieweg, 1794), 268. On the one hand, this means we ought to assume Klischnig truly means to assert in his letter to Goethe that he worked on Maimon’s *Autobiography*. On the other hand, Klischnig seems to contradict himself in listing the work (by Maimon!) both among texts that Moritz worked on as sole editor—ruling out Klischnig as editor—and among his own writings.

Given that the purpose of Klischnig’s letter to Goethe is to seek financial assistance due to legal troubles, including fraud—Klischnig clarifies to Goethe that he is in a “very sorry state”—some might wonder whether Klischnig is just misrepresenting himself in order to impress. As Gideon Freudenthal has interestingly suggested to me in correspondence, a more charitable way to understand Klischnig’s claim might be as follows: because Moritz died already in 1793, and because the second volume of Maimon’s *Autobiography* was published this same year, the possibility exists that Klischnig took over editorship from Moritz for some period of time, though he wasn’t credited for this. But as we have seen, not even Klischnig himself will claim a contribution to Maimon’s text when referencing



would remain the editor of Maimon's writings regarding the course of his life as he expanded the pair of initial journal publications into a fuller two-part *Autobiography*. But (b) Maimon shifts at this point from the third to the first person in this expanded text. Although we lack in the literature a detailed analysis of textual material throughout the transition from the initial journal publications to the full autobiographical work, this much is clear: references to "BJ" become references to an "I."

Finally (c), Maimon returns in the text with which we are primarily concerned here—the "History in Dialogues"—to a third-person perspective, arguably with even more distance than previously. Perhaps Maimon missed the partnership of Moritz, his previous editor, or also other interlocutors. In any case, Maimon's "Reviewer" serves to push the "Author" along, requesting clarification on various points while also issuing the occasional active challenge.

With this context on the table, I now proceed to discuss the content of the piece in brief.

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it elsewhere—and Freudenthal emphasizes that there are no letters from Klischnig in the archive of Maimon's publisher. Indeed, to my knowledge nothing but this piece of neglected correspondence, namely an unsolicited letter from Klischnig to Goethe, suggests involvement on the part of Klischnig. Furthermore, Christof Wingertzahn has confirmed to me in correspondence that there is precedent for false claims of authorship in the case of Klischnig.

Whether or not Klischnig fabricates his publication record in writing to Goethe in this or any other sense, two points are worth noting. First, it's interesting in and of itself that Klischnig thought the best way to sway Goethe was to claim participation in the project of Maimon's *Autobiography*—about a decade after Maimon's death, and almost two decades after the first publication of the *Autobiography*. Second, it's even more fascinating that this tactic may really have worked. Anneliese Klingenberg, "Moritziana aus Weimarer Archiven," in *Moritz zu ehren: Beiträge zum Eutiner Symposium im Juni 1993* (Eutin: Struve, 1996), 160 notes that Goethe's account book features an entry for "alms" around the time of Klischnig's letter. She claims it's unusual that no recipient is listed and suggests that Goethe may have quietly sent assistance. Additional work is needed on Goethe's account books (GSA 34) in this connection.

I am grateful to Florian Ehrensperger as well as Dan Wilson for help with Klischnig's letter and more in this context. For further information, see Klischnig's original letter (GSA 28/52/41f.).

### III. The Highlights

The “History in Dialogues” can be divided into two segments: whereas the latter portion of the text is more explicitly philosophical, its initial section is primarily autobiographical (although this distinction between the philosophical and the autobiographical must be drawn only loosely in Maimon’s case).<sup>14</sup> Throughout the piece, Maimon touches upon a wide range of themes, many also covered by his contemporaries within the Jewish Enlightenment and post-Kantian frameworks. A more thorough engagement with the text would thus feature a closer look at its historical moment, among other things. But in what follows, I merely highlight a few of the most important issues raised by Maimon’s “History in Dialogues.”

In its first segment, Maimon the “Author” begins by asking the “Reviewer” for permission to explore his personal background. Regarding Maimon’s origins as an Eastern European Jew, made explicit almost immediately (“The author is a man of the *Jewish nation*”), he is blunt but pained. The anxiety evident in the discussion of Maimon’s education emphasizes just how traumatic the culture shock must have been for him upon reaching the more ‘civilized’ shores of Western Europe (I provide the cautionary quotes here, though Maimon would not have). He explains that although there are affinities between him and Mendelssohn, the differences are substantial. Allegedly, Maimon wasn’t capable of navigating the cultural elite so “diplomatically”—or, to provide a more literal translation: “politically”—due to the influence of his origins.<sup>15</sup> Maimon’s

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14. In a crucial move within the *Autobiography*, Maimon hints at the continuity between his philosophical projects and his attempt to grasp his own life as well as his milieu when he references in parallel both his “understanding [of] God and his works” and the “understanding of humanity” that he develops throughout his turbulent existence (A 108). In other words, it can be said that a rationalist impulse led Maimon to pursue not only philosophy and theology but also autobiography and what might today be called sociology or anthropology. Further work is needed to clarify the philosophical underpinnings or aspirations of Maimon’s autobiographical writings; but see Jason M. Yonover, “Spinozism Around 1800 and Beyond,” in *Oxford Handbook of Nineteenth-Century Women Philosophers in the German Tradition*, ed. Kristin Gjesdal and Dalia Nassar (Oxford: Oxford UP, forthcoming) for a related discussion of Caroline Michaelis-Böhmer-Schlegel-Schelling and her correspondence.

15. See also Yitzhak Y. Melamed, “Salomon Maimon and the Rise of Spinozism in German

critique of generational advantage in these passages is moving. One point here is also particularly humorous, though perfectly serious: Maimon's mention of "certain bodily movements—for instance dancing," which he apparently could not manage (636). In the end, although Maimon speaks at least somewhat positively of his Jewish education, he still has very few favorable things to say about the opportunities available for intellectual development throughout his early years. He tells us that only one kind of study was allowed; and while it certainly exercised his intellect, this religious training supposedly failed to offer him any true knowledge.

Eventually, in what may be distinguished as the second segment of the piece, Maimon begins to consider issues bearing directly on theoretical philosophy, by way of a biographical transition through discussion of his "three epochs." These periods correspond to three historical figures who, Maimon tells us, successively effected the greatest "revolutions" in his thinking: Maimonides, Wolff, and Kant (639f.).<sup>16</sup> Maimon references something he learned from each, and then delves into problems emerging from his engagement with Kant in particular. By these means, Maimon comes to his pivotal Principle of Determinability, which he considers positioned to fill gaps left open by Kant's theoretical philosophy.<sup>17</sup> In short, Maimon claims here that this principle allows us to make judgments that clarify impossibility. This means we can have some knowledge, prior to construction, of some objects. While Maimon doesn't explain the Principle of

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Idealism," in *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 42:1 (2004): 69-73.

16. Of course, Maimon's choice to reference these three influences here should not be taken to indicate that he has no significant philosophical debt to other thinkers. Regarding for instance Maimon's exposure to early Hasidism and Rabbi Dov Ber, the 'Maggid of Mezritsh,' see especially A 86-100 and Yitzhak Y. Melamed, "Spinozism, Acosmism, and Hassidism: A Closed Circle," in *Der Begriff des Judentums in der klassischen deutschen Philosophie*, ed. Amit Kravitz and Jörg Noller (Tübingen: Siebeck, 2018), 75-86.
17. For discussions of Maimon's Principle 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. Gideon Freudenthal (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 2003), 19-31; Daniel Elon, *Die Philosophie Salomon Maimons zwischen Spinoza und Kant: Akosmismus und Intellektkonzeption* (Hamburg: Meiner, 2021), Ch. 5; and Yitzhak Y. Melamed "Salomon Maimon's 'Principle of Determinability' and the Impossibility of Shared Attributes," in *Revue de Métaphysique et de Morale* 109 (2021): 49-62.

Determinability at any length in the “History in Dialogues,” we know from his *Logic* and other works that it’s meant to demand the following of synthetic thinking, i.e. thinking that’s not just tautological: “every subject must be a possible object of consciousness, not only as a subject but also in itself”; and “every predicate must be a possible object of consciousness, not in itself, but only as a predicate (in connection with the subject)” (GW V 78).<sup>18</sup> The details of what this ought to mean—as well as its consequences—have long been the subject of debate,<sup>19</sup> but we might begin to clarify the main idea by way of an example. In the case of ‘right angle,’ ‘angle’ is subject and ‘right’ predicate, as ‘angle’ can be thought without ‘right’ but ‘right’ cannot be thought without ‘angle.’ Likewise, a ‘right triangle’ is just a triangle with a right angle. For Maimon, in successfully distinguishing subject and predicate, we also see that we have successfully distinguished a possible concept. One might take ‘circular angle’ as a contrast case: neither the former nor the latter can be distinguished as subject or predicate in this proposed synthesis, and thus it fails. In any case, even if we can arrive at some especially mathematical knowledge under the guidance of such principled thinking, Maimon’s high standards for knowledge will then often lead him to a skeptical position—*denying* that we ultimately are in the position to know—resulting in what has been called his “apostate rationalism.”<sup>20</sup> In this spirit, for instance, Maimon notes in the “History in Dialogues” that he sides with Hume in supposing that “the fact that we are in possession of necessary empirical knowledge can be doubted” (643).

Further analysis of Maimon’s theoretical positions developed in the “History in Dialogues” and beyond would require that we wade into Kant’s critical philosophy, which cannot be done here. Instead, I begin to conclude by stressing that because Maimon explores central aspects of his biographical and philosophical development across the “History in Dialogues,” this short work clearly deserves further attention in the literature. Notable scholarship concerning Maimon’s life and thought has referenced the text only on rare

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18. Translated in Melamed, “Maimon’s Principle.”

19. Earlier literature includes especially Friedrich Kuntze, *Die Philosophie Salomon Maimons* (Heidelberg: Winter, 1912), 48-69 and Samuel Atlas, *From Critical to Speculative Idealism: The Philosophy of Salomon Maimon* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1964), Ch. 8.

20. See Peter Thielke, “Apostate Rationalism and Maimon’s Hume,” in *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 46:4 (2008): 591-618.

occasion, and without discussing it at any length.<sup>21</sup> Indeed, a claim made six decades ago—according to which certain discussions found within what I have called the first segment of the piece “have escaped the attention of Maimon’s biographers”<sup>22</sup>—still stands true today, and the same can be said of Maimon’s explicitly philosophical considerations developed within the text’s second segment.

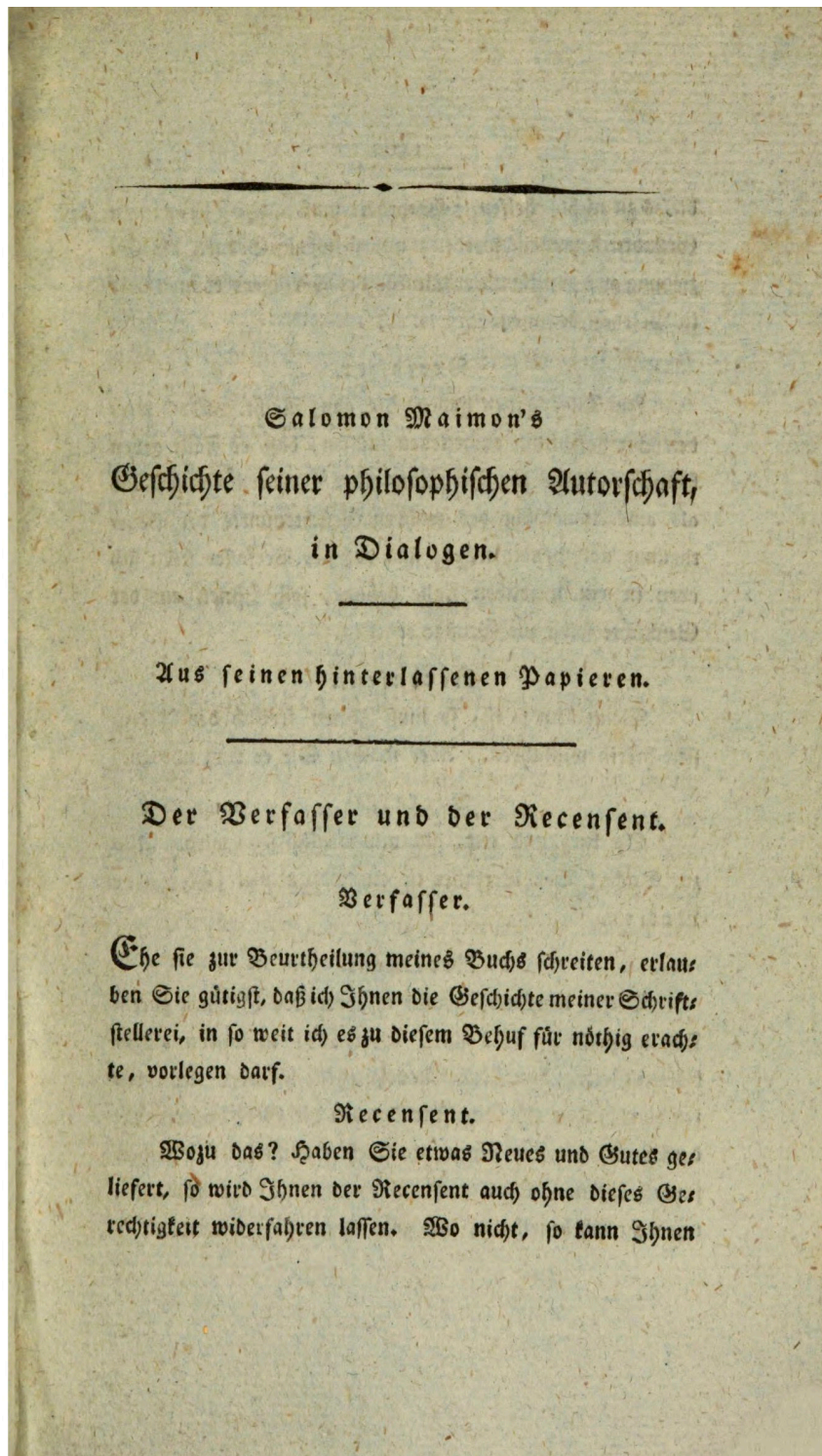
In sum, along with a number of Maimon’s late essays that have recently received thorough treatment in an exciting new edition,<sup>23</sup> Maimon’s “History in Dialogues” is long overdue for scholarly treatment, and for several reasons.<sup>24</sup>

### For Ada Rapaport-Albert (1945-2020)

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21. See at least: Samuel Atlas, “Maimon’s Philosophy of Language Critically Examined,” in *Hebrew Union College Annual* 28 (1957), 253-288; Liliane Weissberg, “Erfahrungsseelenkunde als Akkulturation: Philosophie, Wissenschaft und Lebensgeschichte bei Salomon Maimon,” in *Der ganze Mensch: Anthropologie und Literatur im 18. Jahrhundert*, ed. Hans-Jürgen Schings (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1994), 298-328; and Gideon Freudenthal, “Interkultureller Kommentar als Methode systematischen Philosophierens bei Salomon Maimon,” in *Aschkenas* 18/19:2 (2008/9): 529-544.
22. See Atlas, *From Critical to Speculative Idealism*, 3.
23. Salomon Maimon, “*Apiqoros*”: *The Last Essays of Salomon Maimon*, trans. and ed. Timothy Quinn (Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College Press, 2021). For other recent translations of Maimon’s shorter writings, see also Michael Nance and Jason M. Yonover, “Salomon Maimon’s ‘On the First Grounds of Natural Right’ (1795),” in *British Journal for the History of Philosophy* 29:1 (2021): 146-156 and Salomon Maimon, “Salomon Maimon’s ‘On the First Grounds of Natural Right,’” trans. Michael Nance and Jason M. Yonover, in *British Journal for the History of Philosophy* 29:1 (2021): 157-172 as well as Timothy Franz, “The Place of the World-Soul in the Development of Maimon’s Thought,” in *Graduate Faculty Philosophy Journal* 41:2 (2020): 515-29 and Salomon Maimon, “On the World-Soul (*Entelechia Universi*),” trans. Timothy Franz, in *Graduate Faculty Philosophy Journal* 41:2 (2020): 531-50.
24. I am grateful to Florian Ehrensperger, Daniel Elon, Timothy Franz, Warren Zev Harvey, Rima Hussein, Yitzhak Y. Melamed, Paul Reitter, Yoav Schaefer, Peter Thielke, Rochelle Tobias, and Liliane Weissberg for their comments on this introduction and the following translation. I am also indebted to the Stulman Program in Jewish Studies at Johns Hopkins University and the Maimonides Centre for Advanced Studies in Hamburg, which provided me with material support needed to carry out this project.





*Neues Museum der Philosophie und Litteratur* 2:1 (1804): 125. Photo: Bayerische Staatsbibliothek München, Ph.u. 57-2, urn:nbn:de:bvb:12-bsb10045292-8.

Salomon Maimon's  
History of his Philosophical Authorship,  
in Dialogues

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*From his posthumous papers*

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*The Author and the Reviewer*

*Author*

Before you proceed to judge my book, it would be most kind of you to allow me to present the history of my writing insofar as I deem this to be necessary here.<sup>25</sup>

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25. JMY: For the original German, see GW 627-648. Page references in square brackets throughout the translation refer to this edition of the text. With some exceptions, emphasis in letter-spacing (*Sperrung*), characteristic of the Fraktur family of fonts, has been converted to italics, as has any use of Antiqua-style print for Latin text. Footnotes beginning "JMY:" are of course my own, while other notes are from the initial publication. Notes in the original were tagged "Editor's note"; I speculate that they are added by Bouterwek, not Maimon, and have in any case removed this locution throughout for the sake of clarity. (I have also removed a final remark indicating that the journal would follow up with a further publication—on this, see §2 of my introduction preceding this translation.)

*Reviewer*

To what end? If you have delivered something new and good, then the Reviewer will give it its due with or without this. If not, then such a history cannot [628] be of any help to you. Truth must be judged on *objective* grounds; the Author's birth can come into consideration here just as little as his education [*Erziehung*] and other circumstances.<sup>26</sup>

*Author*

Generally, you are quite correct. Yet you will hopefully admit that there can be cases where this would be necessary in preventing any misunderstanding, and as an indication of the Author's true point of view. That the Author finds himself in just such a case should become sufficiently clear to you from what follows.

*Reviewer*

If it is so for the Author, then the Reviewer must certainly accommodate you. But make it short and sweet!

*Author*

As short and sweet as I will be able to make it. So: to work! The Author is a man of the *Jewish nation*.

*Reviewer*

You could, I think, quite rightly leave out this fact. We are in our enlightened times—good God!—beyond prejudices based upon religion. We give the Jew,

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26. JMY: Compare Benedict Spinoza, *Theological-Political Treatise*, trans. Michael Silverthorne and Jonathan Israel, ed. Jonathan Israel (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2007), 111: "Euclid, who wrote nothing that was not eminently straightforward and highly intelligible, is easily explained by anyone in any language. In order to see his meaning and be certain of his sense there is no need to have a complete knowledge of the language in which he wrote [...] nor does one need to know the life, interests and character of the author," etc. I am grateful to Zeev Harvey for emphasizing the potential relevance of this passage. See also Spinoza, *Theological-Political Treatise*, 263, Annotation 8.

as a writer, his due to the exact same extent that we would the Christian. Are not Mendelssohn's writings judged in an unbiased manner, and duly appreciated? [629]

*Author*

I cannot argue with you about this fact. Yet it should be noted first that Mendelssohn belonged to a ruling party in his time; second, that he knew how to combine the *utile* with the *dulci* in a splendid manner within his writings;<sup>27</sup> and third, that he was very *diplomatic* [*politisch*], and navigated certain persons and things very smoothly—all of which may not be the case with the current Author.

*Reviewer*

Well then! Of the Jewish nation!

*Author*

Born in *Lithuania* in Poland—namely, in a colony of this [Jewish] nation that was chased away from Germany at a time of religious persecution and found refuge in Poland. (Such is evident from this nation's language, which is, in all its depravity, a mixture of the oriental as well as the Slavic languages—with the German language as a foundation.)<sup>28</sup> The noble Poles that made this refuge

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27. JMY: See Horace's *Ars poetica* in *Satires, Epistles, and Arts poetica*, ed. and trans. H. Rushton Fairclough (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1942), 478f., lines 343f. "[O]mne tulit punctum qui miscuit utile dulci, / lectorem delectando pariterque monendo [He has won every vote who has blended profit and pleasure, at once delighting and instructing the reader]." Compare also with Kant's gloss on the power of Mendelssohn's writings in Immanuel Kant, *Correspondence*, trans. and ed. Arnulf Zweig (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1999), 202. "Few men are so fortunate as to be able to think for themselves and at the same time [...] put themselves into someone else's position and adjust their style exactly to his requirements. There is only one Mendelssohn" (AA X 345).

28. JMY: Maimon has here defined Yiddish, of course. Although his account may seem harshly critical, one must compare Maimon's critical comments with Mendelssohn's in the introduction to his translation of the Pentateuch, where he speaks of "a language of stammerers." I am grateful to Yoav Schaefer for drawing my attention to this passage; see Sander L. Gilman, *Jewish Self-Hatred: Anti-Semitism and the Hidden Language of the Jews*



available also benefitted from the circumstance. Poland has solely this colony to thank for the small amount of industry, commerce, and trade to be found in this land. Its other inhabitants are either the original owners of the land—the actual Poles, gentlemen that need not do anything—or they are, as is evident from their names and many words of their language, Greek [630] slaves, who are strictly condemned to tilling fields.<sup>29</sup>

*Reviewer*

And to what end do you explain these intricacies?

*Author*

So that you get to know the *Author's mother tongue*. It is, as can easily be seen from the foregoing, a medley of the Hebrew, Greek, German, and Slavonian languages, such that the root words of one language frequently do not follow the rules of the other language—indeed, sometimes no rules are followed whatsoever. One can easily imagine, then: the extent to which such a language is not able to express fully determinate concepts in a concise manner; how one can only bit by bit unravel the sense of a discourse through hypotheses and tests; and how entirely unfit such a language is for the delivery of something scientific (where what matters is clear and fully determinate concepts).

*Reviewer*

Sadly enough! [631]

*Author*

Although advances or obstacles in the culture of the language always occur in equal measure with advances or obstacles in the culture of the sciences (in that they reciprocally influence each other),<sup>30</sup> with regards to this nation the latter

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(Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1986), 102 for some discussion.

29. The original inhabitants of Lithuania [*Lithauen* oder *Littauen*] are *Letts*, clan relatives of the Letts in Livonia and former Prussia. The descendants of these Letts are farmers or serfs in Lithuania. The nobility or class of contemporary landowners in said place is Polish.

30. JMY: Although for the contemporary English reader “science” means “natural science,” in



is to be regarded as a cause and the former as an effect. The Jewish nation has neglected the culture of the language because it has neglected the culture of the sciences. Such neglect has its ground in this nation's religious concepts, which declare as pointless all *profane* sciences (which determine things from the nature of the faculty of knowledge and its relations to the objects of knowledge). The culture of just one single so-called science, namely that of this nation's religious laws, was made obligatory for it. This science has as little requirement for fully determinate concepts (and principles deduced directly from these) as it does secure methods, according to which everything else might be deduced from such principles. The deficiencies of this science, then, arguably correspond to the deficiencies of the language in which it is presented, as will become more evident in the following. But concerning the *education* of the Author, this was—

*Reviewer*

Most miserable, one would expect. [632]

*Author*

Not so fast, Herr Reviewer! The *general* as well as the *particular education* of this Author was, against all expectations, more good than bad.

*Reviewer*

What do you mean by general and particular education?

*Author*

By *general* education I mean the education of any particular human being to help them become a human being as such. This education consists partly in clearing away obstacles, and partly also in carrying forward the development of all human skills and natural abilities, without consideration of the disparity between subjects. Where nature has become more complex [*eingewickelt*], culture can certainly develop [*entwickeln*] further as well. But the purpose of this general education is to develop as much or as little as can be developed.

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Maimon's time—and still today—the German "*Wissenschaft*" employed here can refer to many scholarly pursuits.

The disparity that emerges between subjects of such education is not the consequence of this education, but rather of nature itself. This seems to be the only type of education that recent pedagogy takes into consideration.

By *particular* education, however, I mean the education of any particular human being to become that which nature seems to have determined his particular natural abilities to be. The consequence of this is that not every natural ability is developed in equal measure. The educator mainly focuses [633] his attention on that which is most prominent, most distinguished, in a marked way; then, he subordinates everything else to this educational plan. He acts thereby in the place of nature, and makes its purpose his own.

The difference between these two types of education as regards their consequences is obvious. The general education is best for those subjects who are not distinctive as far as their natural abilities are concerned. By contrast, the particular education is undoubtedly most excellent for those who seem to have been chosen by nature, determined for particular purposes. The former type of education makes the human being more sociable; the latter, however, makes him more useful. Whether this or that human being would gain (would become more perfect) from general or particular education is at times very uncertain. Humanity, however, will surely always gain (make advances toward perfection) more from particular rather than general education.

*Reviewer*

And how did things go for the Author in this respect?

*Author*

The *moral* education of the Author was partly good, but also partly bad. By moral education I do not mean education to become moral (determining the will according to the practical law of reason) because education to become moral would in fact make morality impossible. [634] Whoever acts according to the moral law out of habit, or following the example of others, cannot, for just this reason, be determined by the law while acting. Thus, I understand by moral education merely: 1. education for legality; 2. education for purposiveness in actions; and 3. education for the free development of [one's] powers, considered

as an end in itself. Now, the Author was made aware of the moral law early enough, and led through punishments and rewards towards *legality*. In this respect, things went well. However, he was almost entirely neglected as regards the prudence [*Klugheit*] needed for purposiveness, and very much stunted with respect to the free exercise of his powers.

*Reviewer*

Please clarify what may have transpired here.

*Author*

Of course. Prudence presupposes not only conviction regarding the general principle 'nothing without sufficient reason [*Grund*],<sup>31</sup> but also insight into the particular relations of things as cause [*Grund*] and effect of each other. Yet, how should prudence develop for human beings who are not only to a great extent deficient in insight into the relations of particular things as means and ends—due to a lack of knowledge and science—but additionally do not even acknowledge the above principle in its universality?<sup>32</sup> They instead believe that there can be natural [635] phenomena that have no sufficient reason in nature, and clarify any natural phenomenon whose reason they do not know as an immediate effect of the divine will, or of the divine's subordinates—good and bad spirits affecting nature. How should prudence develop among these human beings who are furthermore deprived of psychological knowledge concerning the motives of human actions (knowledge that is most necessary in order to affect humans purposively)? For these human beings who foist the empirical, negative, psychological freedom (absolute determinism) upon pure, positive, moral freedom (possible determination of the will through reason)? Such an

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31. JMY: Maimon glosses here the Principle of Sufficient Reason, distinguished explicitly by Leibniz but already present among additional thinkers with whom Maimon would have been familiar, for instance Spinoza. For an overview of the history and contemporary relevance of this principle, see Martin Lin and Yitzhak Y. Melamed, "Principle of Sufficient Reason," in *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta (2016).

32. JMY: Maimon does just that in A 170. "The world may be, in terms of time, *finite* or *infinite*; still, everything in it (as consequences of the highest wisdom) must be explainable through *the principle of sufficient reason*. How far we can actually get in achieving this [explanation] is beside the point."

education is most obstructive with respect to that morality [*Sittlichkeit*] which requires prudence (to conform to other humans)—and with respect to the blessedness, if not also morality, that depends upon this.

*Reviewer*

But these obstacles may be swept aside by acquiring more proper concepts and principles; and with greater knowledge, the consequences of these obstacles may be avoided.

*Author*

Yes, if this happens *early* enough! But if, in contrast, such false ideas have already become deeply entrenched through a long period of habit, and pass over, so to speak, into sentiments, then one who later achieves the more proper knowledge is all the more unhappy. One is in a constant conflict, unsatisfied with oneself. One quarrels [636] constantly, partly with oneself and partly with that coincidence or destiny which one regards as the cause of the evil that is now irrevocable. And the contrast between oneself and other human beings—who are not, by nature, gifted with better abilities, but who are more fortunate—amplifies this unpleasant feeling a great deal. This is especially so when these other more fortunate persons are partly uninformed, partly unfair in their judgments (as happens more often than not), and either do not notice the development of the given human being progressing by imperceptibly small steps, or do not want to notice it—“it” being that which these more fortunate persons have obtained from others bit by bit in an unseen manner (their mother tongue, for example, or certain mechanical operations, for instance writing, as well as certain bodily movements, such as dancing, and so on). This all seems very easy to them, and they are endlessly astounded by the adult who either cannot or cannot without difficulty master that which they have so easily mastered in their childhood. But more on this later.

*Reviewer*

And what transpired, then, regarding the development of the Author’s abilities?

*Author*

His *physical education* (which aims at acquiring certain bodily dexterities) was entirely neglected. He received a so-called *intellectual* education, which, however, was limited to a sort of learning that is peculiar [637] to his nation. His higher faculties of knowledge were thus exercised, though in an insufficient manner. He had some vague ideas about the sciences due to particular coincidences. In this way, he received, for example, some confused and disjointed knowledge of the *mathematical* sciences. He thought he was grasping propositions by means of the *understanding*—propositions whose truth previously the *imagination* alone had allowed him to see. And this could not have happened otherwise considering the way things were. For example, coincidence placed an astronomical work into his hands before he had even set eyes onto something from Euclid,<sup>33</sup> or a similar work of elementary geometry. And indeed the works he received in a coincidental manner were not, say, *textbooks*, but rather for the most part *treatises* that presupposed familiarity with the former—fragments or, on occasion while conducting biblical exegesis, some given hints and allusions to certain knowledge that is presupposed of the reader, and this from poor translations of the Arabic (in which these writings were composed) into Hebrew, a language that is too poor to be used for a scientific presentation. The Author had not the slightest idea of *works of taste* late into his ripest years.

*Reviewer*

How then did he finally reach scientific knowledge? [638]

*Author*

You may sufficiently learn about particular occasions in this development, and the means the Author made use of, in his autobiography [*Lebensgeschichte*]. Here the Author wishes to restrict himself merely to the particular *methods* that he needed to embrace for this purpose.

After having wasted his best powers a long while, in constant battle with deficiency and obstacles, and pining in vain for scientific knowledge in his

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33. JMY: Maimon specifies at A 17 that the astronomical work in question is David Gans's *Nechmad ve'naim*.



fatherland, he came to Germany in his 28th year—at an age when one tends to neglect the means out of impatience to reach the end that one has long hoped for. Thus he learned to *read and write German*: not in the usual way, but rather as a genius would, through a sort of deciphering. He proceeded just as rapidly according to his fixed plans, without determined order, to study the sciences. He rushed to the primary sciences and neglected the auxiliary sciences. Only when he noticed that he could not progress in the former without the latter did he follow the path back to the auxiliary sciences. Thus, he had to return to logic from metaphysics, to pure mathematics from applied, and so on. In this way he advanced, bit by bit, towards fulfilling his wish.

#### *Reviewer*

This rapid and somewhat violent procedure of acquiring knowledge, not through a sort of capitulation [639], but rather by conquering, so to speak, with storm, must have brought forth major tremors in the Author himself, and important revolutions in his system of thought.

#### *Author*

Certainly. The Author believes he is able to indicate *three primary epochs* amid these revolutions, which were brought about by *three important teachings* that he received at different times from three great men.

From *Maimonides* he learned the difference between literal and non-literal expression in language, and that one must take in a figurative sense those passages in the Holy Scripture whose literal sense is against reason. This brought about for the Author a very important revolution, in that through this balancing out of reason and belief [*Glaube*], the former was freed from the shackles that the latter sets upon it. Reason could now proceed unhindered along its way to perfection, and belief could become ever more reasonable. Thus, this revolution concerned primarily the Author's *religious concepts*.

From *Wolff* the Author learned the formal difference between concepts (obscure, clear, distinct, and so on). This shed new light upon the Author's system of thought. Only now did he discover that, of the entire supply of concepts that he had assembled up until this point, almost none satisfied the

requirements for a thoroughly distinct concept, a lack which the Author tried to amend by defining these concepts into [640] formal perfection. Admittedly, such explications were, due to the Author's lack of exact linguistic knowledge, not seldom capricious and linguistically inadequate.

Finally, from *Kant* the Author learned the difference between merely formal and real knowledge, and that the former is not sufficient to determine the latter. This had the negative advantage of restricting supposedly real knowledge, determined through mere explications, to terms of a possible construction.

*Reviewer*

Did not the Author drive the doctrines above further than their originators may have intended?

*Author*

Certainly. The so-called *harmony between belief and* (theoretical) *reason* is, according to the Author, nothing other than the complete *negation* [*Aufhebung*] *of the first by the second*.<sup>34</sup> For example,<sup>35</sup> if 1. the transcendent concept of language [*Sprachen*] involves nothing more than 'being the cause of the genesis of certain representations in another,' and if 2. God as a pure spirit has no speech organs, nor can speak in the literal sense of the term [641], then 3. the expression "God spoke to Moses" can mean nothing other than the following: 'There arose in Moses representations (through mediated searching [*Mittelbarsuchen*] that reason does not allow to be thought away), whose first cause was God, i.e. the cause of all things.' However, God speaks in this way to every human being; what remains here for belief as far as the particularity of this speaking is concerned?

Initially, the Author's *frenzy of definition* [*Definitions-wuth*] was quite pronounced. Everything, even the most familiar things, had to be defined. But later on this frenzy subsided considerably (through the Kantian epoch).

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34. One sees distinctly enough from this context—indeed, so long as one does not read cursorily—that the Author is speaking only of *belief in revelation*. Nonetheless, it is perhaps worth drawing attention to this.

35. JMY: I add the Arabic numerals 1. - 3. in this case, for the sake of clarity.

*Reviewer*

Yet one should think that the third doctrine, i.e. Kant's, cannot be driven further; and since the Author acknowledges the difference between merely *formal and real knowledge*—in that the former refers to an object that is indeterminate according to its content, while the latter refers to a determinate (*a priori* or *a posteriori* given) object—accordingly, nothing can be attributed by formal knowledge to a given object other than that which must analytically befit an object as such (that which, by virtue of the form, is the general, i.e. that which must also be found in every particular). By real knowledge, however, it [the object] is determined synthetically (by the necessary connection of those characteristics that are to be attributed with the determinate essence according to its content). Now, aside from the form of thought, there is however nothing other than intuition that can determine an object according to its content. [642] Possible intuition is thus the material *condition of a real object* as such.

*Author*

The Author believes that the business of a critique of the faculty of knowledge is, even following this, still far from *complete*. The question here concerns a *synthetic principle of all synthetic knowledge*. Possible construction (presentation in an intuition) is, however, not a synthetic principle through which new synthetic knowledge can be determined; rather, it is merely the general condition of possibility of synthetic knowledge as such. The representation of space, as the condition of all geometrical objects, provides little in the way of a synthetic principle through which one can further one's knowledge of such objects (in that the representation of space as such is indeed a material but nonetheless analytical condition—space as such must be contained in any determinate space—while in contrast the axioms and postulates that are actual principles of geometry do further this science through their manifold connection). Likewise, possible intuition as such is not a synthetic principle, but rather an *analytical condition* of any given intuition. Similarly, the principle of all empirical knowledge—*possible experience*, the necessary connection of appearances—is not a synthetic, but rather an [643] analytical, indeed even an identical principle. If experience (knowledge of a necessary connection of appearances) should be possible, then this necessary connection must be supplied mentally [*hinzugedacht*] according to some logical form. Thus, the prospects of such principles are looking rather

poor. They are *absolutely necessary* and *universally valid* merely because they are identical, and thus they say nothing at all.

*Reviewer*

But since, however, the Author must confess that we are in possession of synthetic knowledge, he must acknowledge these to be principles that, even if they do not *further the grounds of knowledge*, at least ground these grounds.

*Author*

This *fact*—that we are in possession of synthetic knowledge—certainly has its validity so far as synthetic *a priori* knowledge (of mathematics) is concerned. Neither can the ground of knowledge (the material condition of possibility of this knowledge) be denied through possible construction. In contrast, so far as empirical knowledge (the appearances of nature) is concerned, *possible experience* is not only, as has already been remarked, *tautological* in itself; furthermore, it is also of no use whatsoever after David Hume, because the fact [*Factum*] that we are in possession of necessary empirical knowledge can be doubted. [644]

*Reviewer*

But since the Author concedes the indispensability of a critique of the faculty of knowledge generally, thus I wish to know the manner in which he seeks to better these deficiencies of the Kantian critique.

*Author*

Like Kant, the Author takes off in his critique from the question: "How *are synthetic propositions possible?*" But, because the Author *doubts* what is assumed as *fact* in the second of two questions that follow from this one, his initial query is not divided into the following pair of questions found in the Kantian critique: "How are synthetic *a priori* propositions possible?" and "How are synthetic *a posteriori* propositions possible?"

Rather, for the Author there is *another pair of questions*: 'How are synthetic *a priori* propositions possible through which the possibility of objects

is determined (e.g., “space can be enclosed within three lines, but not two”)? and ‘How are synthetic *a priori* propositions possible through which predicates are attributed to possible objects, predicates which are not immediately known in the construction of these objects (e.g., “the sum of an angle in a triangle is equal to a pair of right angles”)?’ *Objects a priori* are cognized through synthetic judgments, and by these means the possible connection among cognizable aspects in the intuition is determined. (For example, the triangle is determined as a possible object *a priori* through the judgment ‘space can be enclosed within three lines.’) And conversely, the possible objects that are in themselves already cognized determine in turn new judgments, wherein they appear as subjects.

The [645] first question is thus: ‘What is the *general criterion* to be established as a principle—not, precisely, for the material truth (concerning which a general criterion is impossible), but rather merely for the *possibility of the first judgments*?’ That, for example, space cannot be enclosed within two, but indeed within three lines, cannot be judged according to any given general criterion, because the material truth of this proposition is grounded in what is particular concerning these representations, a general criterion of which contains a contradiction. But a general criterion of judgment can and must certainly be specifiable indicating 1. that space can be limited by lines (may it be two, or more than that)—therefore making a geometrical figure possible at all—and 2. that the predicate of *sweetness* cannot be attributed to space, thus making a *sweet* triangle impossible.<sup>36</sup> What then is this criterion? The Author answers this question by establishing the *Principle of Determinability* [*Satz der Bestimmbarkeit*] as such a criterion (in his *Logic, Critical Investigations*, etc.).<sup>37</sup>

The second question is: ‘How can *propositions* whose *truth* is not immediately cognized through the *construction of an object* relate to the object?’ The answer to this question is: ‘through a possible *reduction*, insofar as one observes that just the same given elements [*Stücke*] are simultaneously

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36. JMY: I add the Arabic numerals 1. and 2. in this case again, for the sake of clarity.

37. JMY: Referred to here are Salomon Maimon, *Versuch einer neuen Logik oder Theorie des Denkens. Nebst angehängten Briefen des Philaletes an Änesidemus* (Berlin: Ernst Felisch, 1794) and Salomon Maimon, *Kritische Untersuchungen über den menschlichen Geist oder das höhere Erkenntniß- und Willensvermögen* (Leipzig: Gerhard Fleischer, 1797). Both are reprinted in the *Werke*, but neither has yet been published in translation.



contained in different objects.' One carries over the elements that are sought after, from the objects in which they are given, to those objects in which they are sought after. As much as one cannot immediately deduce from the [646] concept of an isosceles triangle that the basal angles are equal, one also cannot do so from its construction; rather, this can be deduced only by means of a reduction, according to which the angle opposite the base is observed both in the given isosceles triangle and simultaneously also in two triangles wherein this angle's enclosing sides (taken individually) are equal. The two equal sides in these other triangles are thereby cognized as analogous to those in this first isosceles triangle. The general *material* condition of possibility of a material first arises whatsoever through the Principle of Determinability; but through the Principle of a Possible Reduction, however, the form (when it is not addressed immediately) that befits the given material becomes possible, determined *a priori*.

#### *Reviewer*

It appears that the Author postulates *yet another principle* in addition to the principle concerning all synthetic knowledge *a priori*, namely possible *construction*, established by Kant. Where, now, should one stop with this postulation?

#### *Author*

Since Kant stated no general criterion according to which one can judge the possibility of a construction before the actual construction, thus this possibility can merely be cognized through the actuality which, in view [647] of the empirical objects that are to be subsumed under it, is certainly valid *a priori*. But in itself, this possibility is not *a priori* cognizable before the mathematical actuality.

Now, however, one cannot deny the *fact* that we are in possession of synthetic knowledge that relates strictly *a priori* to the possibility of a construction before its actuality. We cognize, for example, the possible construction of an equilateral triangle merely through its actuality, just as we cognize the impossible construction of a rectangular equilateral triangle through negation of a construction opposed to this one. That nonetheless the latter as

well as the former is at least in this sense a real object—and that in contrast a *virtuous triangle* is immediately, without one first testing its construction, or rather the construction opposed to it, cognized as a merely logical (in that it contains no contradiction) yet not real object—is based not on actuality, which does not obtain in either case, but rather on the Principle of Determinability. ‘Equilateral’ as well as ‘inequilateral’ (scalene), ‘right-angled’ as well as ‘oblique-angled,’ are possible determinations of the triangle, only that ‘equilateral’ and ‘right-angled’ cancel each other out when in the exact same construction. In contrast to this, virtue is just as little a possible determination of the triangle as vice. An equilateral triangle is for example a positive quantity, and a right-angled triangle is also a positive quantity opposed to the former; taken together, they constitute a [648] *nihil negativum*. A virtuous triangle, however, is a *nihil privativum*.<sup>38</sup> The Principle of Determinability is therefore the highest principle through which possible construction is determined *a priori*, prior to its actuality.

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38. JMY: See the critique of Lazarus Bendavid in Salomon Maimon, *Essay on Transcendental Philosophy*, trans. Nick Midgley, Henry Somers-Hall, Alistair Welchman, and Merten Reglitz, ed. Midgley and Welchman (London: Continuum, 2010), 152 where Maimon also utilizes this distinction. See also Kant’s table on the concept of nothing at Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. and ed. Paul Guyer and Allen Wood (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1998), A292/B348 where Kant specifies: *nihil negativum*=“Empty object without a concept,” and *nihil privativum*=“Empty object of a concept.”