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Kant, Maimon, and the Differential Theory of Perception

Salomon Maimon, a Jewish philosopher of Polish-Lithuanian origin, is widely remembered for his intellectual engagement with Immanuel Kant – a debate Kant himself recognized as significant. In a letter to Marcus Herz dated 7 April 1789, Kant acknowledges that “none of my opponents understood me and the primary question [of the first *Critique*] as thoroughly as Mr. Maimon, nor do many possess such keen insight for similarly profound inquiries” (Kant 1986, p. 395, trans. D.F.). Kant’s respectful reference to Maimon highlights the weight of their philosophical exchange, which revolves around two pivotal epistemological issues that Maimon frequently investigated in his works: the essential relationship between mind and world, articulated through the questions “quid facti?” (“What of fact?”) and “quid juris?” (“What of right?”).

The first question, “quid facti?,” asks “What facts exist?” or “To which facts do human judgments refer?” Essentially, it asks whether human cognition can genuinely apply judgments to empirical facts, and if so, by what means? The second question, “quid juris?,” builds on the first and examines the legitimacy – or more precisely, the epistemological justification – by which Kant’s a priori concepts (such as causality and substance) can be applied to sensory intuitions. These intuitions are distinct from the concepts of understanding, as they passively receive what is “given.” In contrast,

understanding actively transforms the “given” into the raw material for judgments. To resolve the apparent incompatibility between sensibility and understanding, Kant introduces in his doctrine of schematism “a third thing, which must stand in homogeneity with the category on the one hand and the appearance on the other” (Kant 2000, A 138 / B 177). This “third thing” is identified as “time” (ibid., A 139 / B 179), acting as a formal mediator between sensory data and understanding. For instance, sensory data becomes comprehensible only if something constant endures as “a being (in time)” (ibid., A 143). However, Maimon remains unconvinced by this solution. He advocates for a more radical resolution, proposing that both understanding and intuition should be traced back to a single, unified foundation.

The two questions, “quid juris?” and “quid facti?,” lead to numerous areas of investigation, which will be further explored in the following sections of this paper. These include the coherence of Kant’s separation of human cognition into *Sinnlichkeit* and *Verstand*, the difference between the form and content conditions of knowledge, the concept of the “thing-in-itself,” and Maimon’s concept of epistemological differentials. Drawing from the calculus of infinitesimals, Maimon uses the idea of infinitely small elements of cognition to theoretically bridge the gap between the sensory and the conceptual – a gap he believes Kant did not overcome. On this path of analysis, Maimon thus aligns facets of Humean and Leibnizian philosophy, which Kant, obviously, would consider incompatible. As a result, Maimon is seen as both a skeptic of empirical knowledge and a metaphysician who, at least from Kant’s perspective, retreats behind the critical approach of the *Critique of Pure Reason*. Gilles Deleuze (2007), alongside Martial Guérout (1929), was one of the few 20th-century philosophers to engage with Maimon’s differential speculations, making them the foundation of his theory of differential immanence.

The Given and Its Myth

Theodor W. Adorno succinctly captures the core issue regarding the relationship between mind and world in his *Negative Dialectic*: “The conceptual

order," he observes, "imposes itself on what thinking wants to grasp" (Adorno 2004, p. 5, transl. changed). Yet, since "objects do not dissolve into their concepts," thought can only produce a "semblance of identity" (ibid., transl. changed). This raises a critical question: do objects that resist conceptual capture exist as genuine sources of reality, or are they merely products of our intuition and thought? This dilemma is encapsulated by the notion of the "myth of the given," which suggests a belief in an immediately available experience that serves as the foundation of knowledge. If the conceptual order strives to penetrate something, then there must be some reality that it aims to grasp.

Wilfrid Sellars both characterizes and challenges this idea of the "myth of the given" (Sellars 1997, p. 33), suggesting that it assumes a strict separation between "given" sensory impressions (or "raw data") and the conceptual frameworks we use to understand the world. The "given" is often assumed to be the non-inferential foundation of human knowledge, apparently presenting our sensory impressions as the basic building blocks of our understanding. Consequently, the human mind supposedly accesses the world through this "given," without interference from cognitive processes or prior assumptions. The origins of this myth can be traced in part to British empiricism, exemplified by Locke's notion of "sensations" and Hume's discussion of "impressions" – both viewed as mechanisms for processing stimuli, which supply the raw material for sensory intuition and the formation of ideas within the human mind. However, for Maimon, a more crucial and influential concept is Kant's notion of the "thing-in-itself." In one of the most well-known quotes from the *Critique of Pure Reason*, this "thing-in-itself" is described as "the entirely undetermined thought of something in general" (Kant 1990, A 253) and as a "something = X, of which we know nothing at all nor can we know anything in general (in accordance with the current constitution of our understanding)" (ibid., A 250). Still, Kant argues, we know at least that this "something" exists, even though its ontological status of existence is not clearly determined. The "thing-in-itself" can be seen as a "limit concept" that neither includes any specific object nor refers to a domain that conforms to any categorical or even spatio-temporal order. Nonetheless, it can be assumed

to function as a source of material experience. After all, where does the red impression I see through my windshield come from, if not from the traffic light at the intersection or that “something = X,” which serves as the source of the traffic light’s redness? If my consciousness were to fabricate “red” autonomously, I might imagine green instead, potentially causing an accident, and thus lose any access to an intersubjective realm of human experience. So, obviously, Kant’s “something = X” aligns with the tradition of the “myth of the given” causing critique from the post-Kantian period of the late 18th and early 19th century onwards. It evokes a “beyond” that is present both in Kant’s dualistic talk of “phenomena” and “noumena,” and in his division of human cognition into sensibility (formally determined by space and time) as the source of material content – and understanding (formally determined through a priori categories). Maimon’s critique targets the issues arising from these dualisms. He emphasizes this in his comments on Kant but also on Carl L. Reinhold, who believed he had resolved Kant’s problem of the thing-in-itself through his concept of “representation” (*Vorstellung*) within his own theory of knowledge. In both cases – in Kant’s notion of the thing-in-itself and Reinhold’s philosophical idea of representation – the same problem arises: Can something that appears to be “outside of consciousness” (Maimon 2024, p. 179) become part of cognition?

Maimon articulates this question in his treatise *On the Categories of Aristotle*. He writes, “How can the understanding, whose function is merely to think general forms or relationships concerning indeterminate objects, think specific objects through these forms whose determinations are not contained in these general forms? What determines it to think of some objects in one form and others in another?” (Maimon 1794, p. 229, transl. D.F.). According to Maimon, the concept of the thing-in-itself does not solve the problem. As something we know nothing about, it eludes any determination of the relationship between the particular and the universal, into which the particular is supposed to merge for truthful thoughts. Interpreting intuitions as providing (particular) material for cognition based on “something = X” only restates the problem of cognition without solving it. In this context, a reader like Maimon faces the same question

as “the Indian man who, when told that the world stands on a pair of *elephants* and the *elephants on a great tortoise*, in his innocence asked, ‘*and what does the tortoise stand on?*’” (Maimon 2024, p. 179). The concept of a “something = X” as part of an interplay with other elements of cognition turns out to be a fantasy arising from the inability to comprehend how various elements in the mind are related as a “whole” without an “other” or “outside.” One conclusion Maimon draws from this is expressed in his critique of Reinhold: “The *original* sensible perception [...] does not represent anything outside of itself.” Or, as Maimon emphasizes, “it [sensory perception] does not represent anything” (ibid., p. 178). If humans nonetheless insist on relating “every original perception as representation,” according to Reinhold, or as “intuition” in its pure forms of space and time, according to Kant, “to a something (outside of consciousness),” then this something is caused “by an illusion of the capacity of imagination” (ibid.) and nothing more. In other words, due to the inability to conceptualize the “whole” of cognition in its dependence on (inner-psyche and unconscious) elemental components, the imagination produces a “given” or “ground” as something external to cognition itself.

Consequently, Maimon’s counter-thesis to Kant claims that the mind does not relate to a transcendent object outside its cognitive relationships but to a thought-object that can be expanded within the psyche through, in part, unconscious elements of cognition – more on this later. Maimon writes, “Kant claims that sensibility and understanding are two completely different faculties. But I argue that an infinite thinking being must think them as one and the same power [*Kraft*] despite the fact that we must represent them as two different faculties in us, and that for us sensibility is incomplete understanding” (Maimon 2010, p. 98). This notion of an eternal being profoundly influenced Maimon’s view of the human mind. Just as, for the infinite thinking being, the world of sensibility is entirely determined by absolute understanding – aligned with Maimon’s “principle of determinability,” where no epistemic gap exists between cognition and its object – so too must human sensibility be reductively traced back to the power of understanding. Only through this reduction is Kant’s two-world doctrine overcome, as sensibility effectively collapses

into understanding. To eliminate any reference to an external “outside,” the cognitive functions of consciousness must locate the elements of cognition within consciousness itself, including the so-called “given.” Thus, what Kant refers to as “intuition” is no longer a sensory faculty distinct from the conceptual nature of understanding, impacted by a mysterious “something = X.” Instead, intuition is itself already conceptually shaped.

Maimon mentions three moments that play a role in the affection of human cognition: “1) we are not conscious of the concepts contained within sensibility [German – *Affizierung*]; 2) with respect to the concepts that we can attain, we must attach them to sensibility in order to achieve consciousness of them; 3) so, for the most part, we come by both these concepts themselves as well as their relations to one another incompletely and in a temporal sequence according to the laws of sensibility” (ibid.).

In addition to emphasizing that sapient beings are not fully aware of the concepts embedded within sensory experiences, Maimon underlines in the quote that human cognition is, by definition, incomplete. Intuitions do not relate to something “given” outside the cognitive faculty, not to an object and its “X.” Rather, intuitions are, as Ernst Cassirer puts it, “themselves the object” (Cassirer 1995, p. 89). The domain of human experience is not an independent reality. It is a “fiction” (ibid., p. 104) arising from the determinations of our thinking, shaped by the categories and principles of understanding, and then imagined to exist “outside” of us. Almost 200 years later, American philosopher Donald Davidson, opposing the Kantianism of Peter Strawson and Willard V. O. Quine, developed a similar critique of both the “myth of the given” and the form-content distinction, leading both Strawson and Quine from Davidson’s perspective towards skepticism (Davidson 1973). According to Davidson, the “ground” or justification of a judgment can only ever be another judgment, not an intuition.

Causality

Kant’s *Critique of Pure Reason* refuted Hume’s comment on causality and argued that the criterion for the truth of our mental ideas as building blocks

of understanding cannot be based exclusively on sensory impressions; it must rely on concepts of understanding, like cause and effect. These concepts do not derive their reality from impressions; instead, impressions are interpreted as *perceptions of objects* and their transformations in time through the application of cause and effect. Maimon, in his “Third Letter of Philaletes to Aenesidemus,” questions the extent to which Kant’s concept of causality, as a “synthetic a priori” rule of reasoning, can be applied. It obviously provides, so much may be granted, a general condition for objects of experience in a broad sense; but is it, modally speaking, truly a *necessary* rule by definition? And what happens when considering individual experiences? “For the mere *perception* that certain things *follow each other* according to a rule still does not imply that they *must follow* each other according to a rule, though this latter is something which belongs to the *essence of causal connection*” (Maimon 2024, p. 188). If causality is assumed as a universal condition for experience, how can the objectivity of human experience be deduced from perceiving causes and effects alone? If this question is not sufficiently clarified, the claim to universality fails.

Maimon reflects on famous examples Kant presents in the first *Critique*, particularly in the “Second Analogy,” to support the transcendental concept of causality. These examples include the contemplation of a house as a purely subjective sequence of representations (*Vorstellungen*) and a ship moving down a river (Kant 2000, B 233–B 256). Kant emphasizes that the perception of appearances always occurs in a sequence. Appearances (*Erscheinungen*) are perceived over time, which does not mean that the sequence of their representations is inherent to the objects perceived themselves. One can contemplate a house from the chimney down to its ground floor or vice-versa. The succession of perceptions is simply a subjective sequence of apprehension. It does not prove that the parts of the house exist in a set order. However, for empirical appearances to carry any truth, there must be, in situations of changing events, a rule for the sequence of perceptions that “makes the order of perceptions that follow one another (in the apprehension of this appearance) necessary” (*ibid.*, A 193). A ship moving downstream creates a sequence of perceptions that, unlike the house, cannot be reversed. The ship is first seen upstream,

then downstream. “I must therefore derive the *subjective sequence* of apprehension from the *objective sequence* of appearances, for otherwise the former would be entirely undetermined and no appearance would be distinguished from any other” (ibid.). Thus, appearances depend on rules of perception, which themselves rely on sequences of events. Without this necessity, even if specific experiences contradict it, humans would be unable to make either true or false judgments about states of affairs. “Therefore I always make my subjective synthesis (of apprehension) objective with respect to a rule in accordance with which the appearances in their sequence, i. e., as they occur, are determined through the preceding state, and only under this presupposition alone is the experience of something that happens even possible” (ibid., A 195).

Now Maimon, contradicting Kant, argues that these “two kinds of succession,” whether of the house or the ship, are “in themselves [...] not [...] distinct from one another and so when someone asserts that the ship actually moves downstream, he does not in fact know what he means by the word ‘actually’” (Maimon 2010, p. 101). Maimon criticizes the lack of distinction between the successive perception of events and the perception of real (actual) events occurring in time. For Maimon, all perceptions, whether called “real” or “apparent,” are successive representations in consciousness. Hence, saying that the ship “actually” moves downstream fails to clarify what is meant by “actually,” as no distinction is drawn between “actual” and “apparent” sequences. A random sequence could appear just as necessary – such as if the boat were moving upstream due to a hidden steam engine. For Kant, the ship’s movement is an empirical fact confirmed by natural laws. He differentiates between subjective sequences (how we perceive things) and objective sequences (how things occur in time). According to Maimon, however, this differentiation does not sufficiently establish the objectivity of human cognition. For Maimon, all perceptions are successive representations in consciousness. Paul Franks gets to the heart of this matter when he writes, “In short, the Humean naturalism envisaged by Maimon accepts [...] the [Kantian] argument that constitutive principles underwrite the justifications without which experience would be impossible, and indeed that they are indispensable

to our current epistemic practices”, but the Humean naturalism at the same time “rejects [...] the argument that our current epistemic practices actually amount to experience, and that the actuality of experience justifies the principles that constitute its possibility” (Franks 2007, p. 54). Franks highlights the nuanced critique of Kantian epistemology from the perspective of Maimon’s Humean naturalism, which accepts the necessity of Kant’s constitutive principles for our cognitive practices but challenges the idea that these principles are justified by the existence of experience itself. This points to a deeper skepticism regarding whether our epistemic practices genuinely constitute “experience” in the Kantian sense at all. This may clarify why Maimon feels compelled to bridge the gaps in human cognition, causing skepticism to get a foothold by invoking the notion of an infinite, divine understanding.

Maimon comments on another example with billiard balls taken from Hume’s *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* (Hume 2007, pp. 20–21). Here, one billiard ball hits another, causing the second ball in the Kantian meaning of causality to move. Maimon, though, argues that when one body “a” strikes body “b,” “we have no means of recognizing cause and effect and distinguishing them from one another,” as Kant would have thought, “for because *a* and *b* move off after the contact with the same degree of motion we can view each one equally well as cause or as effect; or rather, we must view their common motion as the effect of a cause external to both of them because at contact they constitute one body” (Maimon 2010, p. 117). Maimon highlights the moment of collision as one that is impossible to clearly separate into cause and effect in the moment of contact. Once the billiard balls touch and interact, no clear marker determines the cause and the effect. The inertia of ball “b” could be seen as causing ball “a” to move. The impact creates a state in which both balls act as one system that cannot be split into clear successions of cause and effect.

Maimon’s arguments emphasize that cause and effect are not absolute properties of the relationships between states of affairs changing over time, as Kant’s concept of causality might suggest. Cause and effect rely on how we structure relationships between states of affairs; one state of

affair is not inherently the cause of another. Our cognition determines the relationship. Kant may believe he has rescued the natural sciences and their objectivity from Hume's skepticism, but Maimon rejects this claim. Hume's associative mechanisms of the human mind (resemblance, contiguity, cause, and effect) organize empirical truths into sequences of events, but these truths never attain an objective, ontological status like rational truths. For truths about facts (*Tatsachenwahrheiten*) to achieve the same form and content as rational truths (*Vernunftwahrheiten*), they would need to be accessible to an infinite understanding.

Maimon mentions the example of the irrational number, the square root of two (*ibid*, p. 94). Though infinitely indeterminate, its status as a mathematical entity is unquestioned. For a divine understanding, however, this irrational number would also be intuitively comprehensible in its infinite nature. The same holds true for empirical facts from God's perspective. No particularity can evade full subordination to the law of universality, allowing the divine understanding to see the world as its own reflection, i. e., without epistemic remainders. As Maimon sees in Leibnizian metaphysics, this absolute transparency of the principles of the particular and the universal is unattainable for the human mind. Cassirer succinctly expresses this when he writes, "Outside the ideal concept of the 'divine mind,' there is no escape from Hume's skepticism" (Cassirer 1995, p. 96).

With this last comment, Maimon's general project of philosophy materializes, namely to theoretically explore objective cognition using his "principle of determinability" (*Satz der Bestimmbarkeit*) and the dogmatic postulate of an infinite and divine understanding. This divine understanding remains infinitely separate from the human mind. "So we start in the middle with our cognition of things and finish in the middle again" (Maimon 2010, p. 181). The approach of the finite understanding toward the infinite is a task that can never be completed. Maimon's philosophy thus returns to Leibniz's metaphysical idealism through a critique of Kant inspired by Hume. Objective knowledge arises by understanding its fundamental elements and building a complete justification upon them. The contents of cognition from experience cannot meet this demand. My (subjective) perception of the color "red" at a traffic light is not akin to

understanding the concept of a straight line as the shortest distance between two points. Nevertheless, *Tatsachenwahrheiten* must be taken care of. Ultimately, Maimon aims not only to demonstrate the necessary role of a divine being's understanding, but he also wants to explain how human beings access states of affairs. His controversial "differential theory of cognition" is especially important for this.

Infinity in the Particular

The primary focus of the infinitesimal calculus developed simultaneously by Leibniz and Newton is on calculating the extreme rates of change of mathematical functions $f(x)$. One example is calculating the slope or gradient of a curve, which shows how steeply the curve changes direction. In the case of a flat line, the slope is zero. If a straight line rises constantly within a coordinate system, it has the same slope at all points, which can be determined using a "slope triangle." Like a staircase step, the vertical difference (y) is related to the horizontal difference (x). However, the slope of a curve is different – consider a parabola – because no point on this curve has the same gradient. Paradoxically, this includes the very point on the curve one wishes to analyze. If you wanted to "zoom in" on this point metaphorically speaking, you would see that, within this point's boundaries, there are further slope differences and, within those slope differences, even more.

Similar to the famous paradox of the race between the tortoise and the hare – where the hare can never overtake the tortoise because the tortoise moves forward with each step the hare takes – the moment of surpassing can only be determined in an infinitely shrinking slope curve (toward zero) without ever actually happening. Strictly speaking, this moment does not "sensibly" exist but can be mathematically determined. This is achieved by defining the chosen point with a straight line, the tangent. As already noted, this tangent can only be determined approximately, which is done using a secant. The secant (Latin "secare," meaning "to cut") intersects two points on the curve, which converge infinitely toward the targeted curve

point through a differential quotient. Thus, differential theory provides infinitely small quantities that, despite the impossibility of “sensibly” capturing them (from a human perspective), can nonetheless conceptually be determined and must also, from the perspective of God, actually (or materially) exist. For Maimon, this insight reveals a continuum that, despite its infinity or its status as an abstract or virtual “idea of reason” (as Maimon calls the differentials), remains determinable. The individual differential values (dx) and (dy) are undefined (both “approach 0”), but their ratio is not. As Gilles Deleuze points out in his comments on Maimon, the “reciprocal synthesis of differential relations” becomes the “source of the production of real objects” (Deleuze 1994, p. 173) of experience. The matter of an idea is embedded in the “thought-element of quality” (ibid.). A qualitative idea emerges from the quantitative. Deleuze further explains, “[A] principle of determinability corresponds to the undetermined as such (dx , dy) [considered separately, D.F.], a principle of reciprocal determination corresponds to the really determinable (dx/dy) [related to each other, D.F.]; a principle of complete determination corresponds to the effectively determined (values of dx/dy) [within the finished differential calculus, D.F.]” (ibid., p. 171).

The role of differential quotients in the questions “quid facti?” (What is the case?) and “quid juris?” (What is the justification?) becomes evident when Maimon uses the infinitely small changes as a model for how reality (as thought) and mind (as thinking) endlessly relate to and determine each other, with reality being nothing but an effect of thought itself. Alongside differential theory, Maimon draws equally on Leibniz’s concept of “petites perceptions.” In his *New Essays on Human Understanding* and in his *Monadology*, Leibniz explains that human consciousness does not always grasp everything occurring within it. Micro-perceptual, i.e., unconscious processes, form the basis for conscious thinking and perception. (By the way, Kant, for his part, speaks of an unconscious activity of the imagination that “is a hidden art in the depths of the human soul” and “whose true operations we can divine from nature and lay unveiled before our eyes only with difficulty” [Kant 1990, B 181].) We do not directly perceive the minute rustling of individual leaves in the treetop of an oak, which

collectively forms the sound we hear. The rustling is a perceptible object of experience, but the unconscious elements of cognition composing it remain hidden from us – in contrast to a divine understanding. “[T]his ‘outside us’ signifies something in whose representations we are not conscious of any spontaneity, i.e., something that (with regard to our consciousness) is purely passive and not active in us” (Maimon 2010, p. 108). The same applies to the shades of color in the treetops, whose infinite variety of greens are perceived as a single concrete olive-green, for example. As Freud and Lacan have shown, this applies to our thinking at the level of the ego function, since – independent of our understanding – “something always thinks” (Lacan 1970, p. 189). In the flow of unconscious thoughts, we only grasp those that cross the threshold of perception in a way that the cognitive consciousness recognizes, like recognizing a tree that consciousness suddenly identifies, even if the tree initially passed indeterminately on the periphery of our field of vision.

Just as in the infinitesimal calculus, the ratio (dy/dx), despite its infinitude, remains mathematically determinable, so too in individual perceptions (which are thoughts based on unconscious thoughts), it is not the individual elements (thought-perceptions) that matter, but the never-fully-determinable relations between them. These are differences that ‘make a difference’, generating meanings. Meaning arises from the relationships between infinitely small and relationally determinable thought-particles, not from intuitions whose potential sources lie, allegedly, in things-in-themselves. “So, if we judge that fire melts wax, then this judgment does not relate to fire and wax as objects of intuition, but to their elements, which the understanding thinks in relation to cause and effect to one another” (Maimon 2010, p. 184).

This insight suggests what Maimon believes he has uncovered with his differential philosophy: an answer to the problem that our representations and concepts are grounded and limited by external influences (sensory experiences). With the combination of differential theory and “petite perceptions,” he demonstrates that “sensibility” and “understanding” are parts of an internal, virtual process. (This recalls modern theories of consciousness, like Thomas Metzinger’s idea of the “ego” as a flight simulator

or Donald Hoffman's interface theory of perception.) Within this process, sensibility and understanding mutually shape each other in relation to an ever-receding idea of material experience. This means that the structure of our thought arises from internal relations among initially unconscious elements of consciousness, not from a "given" that serves as the ground or reason. "Sensibility thus provides the differentials to a determined consciousness; out of them, the imagination produces a finite (determined) object of intuition; out of the relations of these different differentials, which are its objects, the understanding produces the relation of the sensible objects arising from them" (Maimon 2010, p. 21).

The particular can now be detached from its dependence on Kant's "thing-in-itself" and thus released from the property of sensibility as "given" (Sellars) or as "something = X". Infinitely divisible proto-units of cognition remain and serve as a conceptual principle to reconcile the incompatibility between sensibility (intuition) and mind (understanding). (Whether one could still speak classically of a mind-world relationship in Maimon's epistemology of the infinitely small now becomes, obviously, questionable.) "The metaphysically infinitely small is real because quality can certainly be considered in itself abstracted from all quantity" (ibid., p. 183). From the relations between these infinitely small elements of cognition, objects of experience arise in human consciousness – not through interaction with the sensory matter of the "external world," but through synthetically processed infinities. "For example, if I say: *red* is different from *green*, then the pure concept of understanding of the difference is not treated as a relation between the sensible qualities (for then the Kantian question *quid juris?* remains unanswered), but rather either (according to the Kantian theory), as the relation of their space a priori forms, or (according to my theory) as the relation of their differentials, which are a priori ideas of reason. The understanding can only think objects as flowing" (ibid., p. 22). The decisive argument follows now: "The particular rule by which an object arises, or its type of differential, makes it into a particular object; and the relations of different objects arise from the relations of the rules by which they arise of their differentials" (ibid.). The qualitative aspects of sensation are thus transformed into quantitative terms. The manifold that becomes intuition

is reinterpreted as the (initially unconscious) matter of conceptual thought, just as Maimon reinterprets Kant's "pure intuitions" of space and time. Since space and time arise only as a result of objects of experience being synthesized through differential processes, sensibility is no longer an independent realm but is instead integrated into differential understanding.

Space and time are no longer "pure intuitions" of sensibility but form "a schema or image of the possible diversity of objects" (Cassirer 1995, p. 97). As such, they presuppose "internal differences in the elements to be spatially or temporally connected" (*ibid.*, p. 98, transl. D.F.).

The epistemological problem of "quid juris?" mentioned earlier thus seems resolved, though, *inter alia*, with reference to divine cognitive thinking. The "pure concepts of understanding or categories never relate directly to intuitions but to their elements, which are ideas of reason (differentials) concerning how these intuitions arise and, through them, the intuitions themselves" (Maimon 2004, p. 193).

In conclusion: Maimon, following Leibniz, argues that perceptions, as building blocks of judgments, do not become elements of cognition through external impressions (as "given"). Instead, our thought contains fundamental elements, though they are only infinitely approximable. Maimon calls them "ideas of reason" and "noumena." From these internal, virtual differences, real, perceivable things in the world of human experience emerge within the human capacity of judgment. The relationships between these ideas of reason are the conditions of meaning. What the individual elements (differentials) are is not decisive, as they remain unconscious. What matters is how they relate to one another. "These differentials of objects are the so-called *noumena*; but the objects themselves arising from them are the *phenomena*. With respect to intuition = 0, the differential of any such object in itself is $dx = 0$, $dy = 0$, etc.; however, their relations are not = 0, but can rather be given determinately in the intuitions arising from them. These *noumena* are ideas of reason serving as principles to explain how objects arise according to certain rules of understanding" (Maimon 2010, pp. 21-22).

Human understanding produces the form of the objects of our experience and the objects themselves. Their reality arises from the relations

of infinitely small perceptions that seem to be proto-thoughts. Maimon interprets the matter of sensation – i.e. the raw content that forms the basis of perception – as a composite of differential elements. They are called “noumena” because they have no spatial extension but are potentially sensory since they are determinable differentially. Only through their sum or combination can they lead to conscious experience. In this way, Maimon hopes to bridge the gap between sensibility and understanding with a hybrid concept, while also keeping the gap intact. For if differentials are interpreted as ideas of reason mediating between sensibility and understanding, this works only if sensibility is reinterpreted as an activity of understanding. This theme reappears in modified form in John McDowell’s philosophy, when he redefines sensory intuition as being proto-rational (McDowell 1994). Humans do not derive natural laws from sensory-empirical contents but synthesize the rational manifold according to the greatest possible determinability of the particular under the universal. If the particular is not recognized as a cognitive object according to a thoroughly objective rule, as Maimon’s “principle of determinability” suggests, this shows, for Maimon, that Kant’s synthetic a priori judgments do not prove the necessary validity of the laws of natural science. Thus, he writes in contrast to Kant, “I doubt whether we have experiential propositions, and so I cannot prove their objective validity the way Kant does” (Maimon 2010, p. 100).

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