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## MAIMON, Salomon (1753–1800)

Salomon Maimon was born in Sukoviborg (Lithuania) as Shlomo ben Yehoshua in 1753 and died in Nieder-Siegersdorf (Lower Silesia) on 22 November 1800. Having been educated in the Talmud, he studied Cabala and was attracted by early Hasidism. Maimonides and his *Guide of the Perplexed* in particular, exercised great influence upon Maimon. In order to acquire more secular knowledge, he migrated to Germany in his early twenties. There he assumed his surname in honour of Maimonides. He arrived in Königsberg, but soon moved on to Berlin. After being rejected due to the restrictions imposed on the Jewish population there, he became a wandering beggar. He ended his wanderings in Posen, where he stayed for two years and where he was highly esteemed as a ‘famous travelling rabbi’ (*Autobiography*, p. 205). Maimon finally entered Berlin in 1780. He was befriended by, among other members of the Jewish Enlightenment (Haskalah), Marcus HERZ and Lazarus BENDAVID, and was an acquaintance of Moses MENDELSSOHN. From 1783 to 1785, he resided in Hamburg and attended the Christianeum (a Lutheran grammar school) studying German, English, French, Latin and contemporary sciences. After returning to Berlin, Maimon wrote a critical commentary on KANT’s *Critique of Pure Reason* which was forwarded by Marcus Herz to Kant himself in 1789. Kant recognized its merits and confessed in a letter to Herz ‘that none of my opponents have understood me and the main problem so well’ and that ‘very few could claim as much penetration as Herr Maimon in profound inquiries of this sort’ (*Autobiography*, p. 282). An expanded version of the manuscript was published in 1790 as *Versuch über die Transzendentalphilosophie*. A decade of numerous publications in various fields of philosophy followed. In 1791, Maimon published a Hebrew commentary on the first part of Maimonides’ *Guide of the Perplexed*

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(*Giv'at ha-More*). Maimon contributed to, and later co-edited Karl Philipp MORITZ's *Magazin zur Erfahrungsseelenkunde*, the first journal of empirical psychology in Germany. He wrote two books, a *Philosophisches Wörterbuch* and *Streitereien im Gebiete der Philosophie*, and corresponded with Kant, FICHTE, REINHOLD and GOETHE. He also wrote fictitious letters to Gottlieb Ernst (Aenesidemus) SCHULZE ('Letters of Philaletes to Aenesidemus') as an appendix to his *Versuch einer neuen Logik oder Theorie des Denkens* (1794). His *Autobiography* (1792 and 1793), one of the first modern Jewish autobiographies in German, chronicles Maimon's journey from East to West. It led to his making the acquaintance of his later patron, count Heinrich Wilhelm Adolf von Kalckreuth. In 1795, Maimon followed Kalckreuth to his estate in Nieder-Siegersdorf in Lower Silesia, where he stayed until his death. There he finished his last major work, the *Kritische Untersuchungen über den menschlichen Geist oder das höhere Erkenntnis- und Willensvermögen* in 1797.

Maimon's philosophy may be described as an attempt to combine Spinoza, LEIBNIZ, Hume and Kant into a 'coalition system' (*Autobiography*, p. 280). Such a system was first laid out in his *Versuch über die Transzendentalphilosophie*. In the centre of Maimon's critique is Kant's notion of the 'synthetic a priori'. With this notion, Kant tried both to restrict the knowledge claims of traditional metaphysics and to prove against the empiricists that not all knowledge is either empirical or analytic. Only in geometry, however, did Maimon concede the validity of the synthetic a priori. Restricting transcendental philosophy in this way, he concluded that there was 'plenty of scope left for Hume's scepticism in its full force' and that he consequently had to re-establish 'Spinozistic or Leibnizian dogmatism' (*Autobiography*, p. 280). Maimon's unique combination of 'empirical scepticism', transcendental philosophy, and 'rational

dogmatism' (*Versuch*, p. 232) formed the foundation of his ideas throughout his philosophical career and remained his point of reference.

For Maimon, Kant falls short of refuting scepticism. According to Hume, there is no synthetic a priori since all our synthetic knowledge is empirical, i.e. derived from experience. Kant, on the contrary, claimed that there is indeed synthetic a priori knowledge which makes experience possible in the first place. The synthesis of a priori concepts (categories) and the forms of sensibility (space and time) are thus justified as the necessary conditions of the possibility of experience. Maimon detected in this an ambiguous usage of the term 'experience'. According to Maimon, four possible meanings of 'experience' can be distinguished: '1) a sensory impression, 2) repetition of this sensory impression, 3) the subjective necessity derived from this repetition, and finally, 4) the objective necessity of this sensory impression' (*Gesammelte Werke*, vol. VII, p. 55). For Maimon, Hume used the term 'experience' in the third sense, whereas Kant used it in the fourth. Maimon concluded that Kant had not refuted scepticism because Hume was not obliged to concede that we actually do have experience in Kant's sense and therefore did not have to assume its necessary conditions. Only experience understood in the fourth sense falls under conditions laid out by Kant. That is to say, Kant had not convincingly proven that experience on Hume's understanding of the term presupposes synthetic a priori conditions, nor that we in fact have experience in the fourth sense.

For Maimon, however, the synthetic a priori is a fact in geometry. It is through construction in pure intuition (space) that the imagination carries out the rule a priori and creates its objects: 'All of the concepts of mathematics are thought by us and at the same time exhibited as real objects through construction a priori' (*Gesammelte Werke*,

vol. IV, p. 42). In mathematical construction the understanding has an effect on sensibility through the productive imagination. The evidence which takes hold of us in mathematical construction a priori proves the synthesis of the subject (e.g., a triangle) and the predicate (e.g., 'scalene'). Since synthetic judgements a priori are a fact, they must also be possible. In order to show the possibility of the construction itself, Maimon looked for a synthetic principle which governed this generating procedure a priori. He found it in his 'principle of determinability'. This principle provides us with the criterion of the synthetic a priori: the subject may be thought of on its own, but the predicate is asymmetrically dependent on the subject. For example, in the judgement 'the triangle is scalene', the concept triangle could be thought alone whereas the predicate 'scalene' can only be thought of in connection with a triangle. In this way, the only possible synthetic a priori connection between the subject and the predicate is established.

Nevertheless, there is still a problem facing the synthetic a priori. The actuality of the synthetic a priori is shown in construction and the possibility is formulated by the 'principle of determinability'. But how do we explain the correspondence of understanding and intuition carried out by the productive imagination? Kant, despite holding a dualistic view regarding understanding and intuition, offered a solution with the concept of the original synthetic unity of apperception. It is the 'objective unity of self-consciousness', the 'I think' that accompanies all my representations. For Kant, it is 'one and the same spontaneity', which is the unifying capacity in consciousness, understanding, imagination and intuition. For Maimon, however, the spontaneity of self-consciousness cannot serve as the common root since it is only formal and subjective. A real and objective principle is to be found in the notion of the infinite understanding. He considered the finite understanding and

sensibility – echoing Spinoza's two attributes of the substance of God as well as Leibniz's pre-established harmony – to be expressions or aspects of 'one and the same force' (*Versuch*, p. 103). Maimon had different views at different times as to whether to understand the infinite understanding (which later became the world soul or world spirit) as a constitutive or as a regulative idea, a (necessary) fiction or a (mere) hypothesis.

In his 'coalition system', Maimon sought to avoid the one-sidedness of empiricism, transcendental philosophy and rationalism. Nevertheless, he felt obliged to maintain certain basic insights of each philosophy and to incorporate them into his own philosophy. Just as Kant's philosophy itself could be seen as an attempt to synthesize empiricism and rationalism, Maimon's philosophy could be understood in similar terms. In line with the empiricist tradition, Maimon considered all knowledge of a posteriori objects to be contingent and fallible. True knowledge (synthetic a priori), in contrast, is produced in conformity with his principle of determinability and can be found in mathematics. Moreover, he argued that both empirical and true knowledge ultimately require infinite understanding.

Maimon developed his thoughts on moral philosophy in his articles 'Versuch einer neuen Darstellung des Moralprinzips und Deduktion seiner Realität', 'Ueber die ersten Gründe der Moral', 'Der moralische Skeptiker' and in his *Kritische Untersuchungen* ('Prolegomena zur Kritik einer praktischen Vernunft', 'Ethik nach Aristoteles'). He did not accept the primacy of practical reason and favoured Aristotle over Kant. In a polemical response to Kant's famous first sentence in the *Foundations of the Meta-physics of Morals*, Maimon wrote: 'Nothing can possibly be conceived in the world, or even outside it, which can without qualification be called good, except alone the striving for knowledge of the truth' (*Gesammelte Werke*, vol. VI, pp. 279–80).

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Maimon presupposed, as did Aristotle, a desire to understand, i.e. a drive to make our representations universal. For Kant, morality lies in the claim that the maxim of our action should become a universal law. In order to integrate the Kantian concept of practical reason, Maimon 'widened' the notion of striving for knowledge of truth, since both seek universality. He thus concluded that 'the moral good is good only because it is true' (*Versuch*, p. 218).

Maimon's critique of Kant shaped the post-Kantian debate. Although Maimon's influence on German idealism, especially on Fichte, cannot be overestimated, it did not extend to later developments. One reason is his 'eclectic' approach to philosophy which was at odds with the systematic aspirations of German idealism. Describing his own philosophy as being first peripatetic, then Spinozistic, Leibnizian, Kantian and finally sceptical, Maimon declared that at last he 'observed that all these systems contain something true, and are in certain respects equally useful' (*Autobiography*, p. 288). In addition, Maimon wrote most of his philosophy in the form of the tradition he was acquainted with from an early age, namely the medieval commentaries on the Holy Scripture and the Talmud. He presented his philosophy in commenting upon Aristotle, Maimonides, Giordano Bruno, Francis Bacon, Isaac Newton (in the cloak of Henry Pemberton), Alexander Gottlieb BAUMGARTEN and Kant. This intercultural aspect of Maimon's philosophy as a meeting point of different traditions has only come to be appreciated in recent times.

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**MAUPERTUIS, Pierre-Louis Moreau de**  
(1698–1759)

Pierre-Louis Moreau de Maupertuis, academic, scientist and philosopher who played a crucial role in the exchange of ideas and intellectual influences during the Enlightenment, was born in Saint-Malo (Brittany) in 1698 and died in Basle in 1759. From a young age he was fully dedicated to scientific research, embarking on a career that in its early stages included admission to the Academy of Sciences in Paris (1723), a trip to England where he was in contact with members of the entourage of the recently deceased Newton (1728), and a stay in Basle (1729), where the BERNOULLIS had created the most active mathematical and physical-mathematical research centre of the day.

After completing his apprenticeship, Maupertuis was decisively involved in the most important scientific debate of the first half of the eighteenth century, between the followers of Newton and the followers of various currents of Cartesian physics. During that period Maupertuis produced a number of works devoted to mathematics, cosmology and geodesy. He met with recognition and fame after successfully leading an expedition to Lapland in 1736 to measure the length of a degree of a meridian at that latitude. This measurement was decisive in proving the flattening of the Earth at the poles, thereby confirming Newton's theoretical forecasts. When the journey was over the discussions and controversies continued, and Maupertuis was assisted among others by the marquise de Châtelet and VOLTAIRE. His fame was such that he was summoned by FREDERICK II to the court in Prussia. He

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