

Article

The Systematic Unity of the Theoretical and Axiotic in Salomon Maimon's Late Philosophy

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Abstract: By a close reading of Salomon Maimon's 1794 *Essay on a New Logic or Theory of Thinking*, this article shows, first, how Maimon radically criticized his previous metaphysical systems while painstakingly reestablishing Kantian transcendental philosophy on a theory of reflexive cognition. Second, it shows how he employed this theory to ground innovative accounts of both formal and transcendental logic, including a reformulation of Kant's schematism. Third, it shows how he employed it to ground his axiotic philosophy. Specifically, he argued that his reflexive theory of cognition constituted the necessary condition for the theories of Kantian morality, natural rights, works of art, and finally for a metaphysics according to which God creates the world ex nihilo. Maimon's achievement is impressive and unique. It is a theory of the systematic unity of theoretical and axiotic philosophy that rivals other Enlightenment systems and, if anything, anticipates later works of Hans Wagner and Werner Flach.

Keywords: Maimon; Kant; reflection; logic; cognition; ethics; metaphysics; religion

1. Introduction

This article is a study of the systematic unity Salomon Maimon (1753–1800) achieved in his late philosophy. "Late philosophy" refers to Maimon's *Essay on a New Logic or Theory of Thinking* (1794), arguably his highest achievement, and the axiotic works that coalesced around it.¹ These include the "Attempt at a New Presentation of the Principle of Morality and a Deduction of its Reality" (1794),² "On the First Grounds of Natural Right" (1794/5),³ and the *Critical Investigations into the Human Spirit* (1797). The term "systematic unity" refers to the underlying theme of the *New Logic*, namely the development of an enlightened wholeness of human cognition. According to this theme:

The end of the division [of human cognition into different sciences and disciplines] is the perfection of every part; however, this perfection may not be advanced further than what the perfection of the whole demands. (V xiii)⁴

In the Preface to the *New Logic*, Maimon argues that philosophy, by attaining systematic unity, reveals the true form of reality. Philosophy is the "divinity that rules in all human cognition" in that it grasps the true form of divinity and does not "derogate" it (V xviii–xix). But to serve this revelatory function, philosophy cannot be a mere part of the division of human cognition into definite disciplines. It must be the very medium in which the division is made. Most essentially, for philosophy to be this immanent medium, logic itself must be seamlessly integrated into the division. Thus, the method of philosophy can only be a *spontaneous reflection* of thought from within its manifold activities:

"...one does not need to let all possible objects pass muster in order to bring out the laws of thinking common to them, but only *reflection* about that which belongs to the *possibility of an object of thinking* in general is sufficient for that purpose". (V 10)

Maimon finds that the point of unity and distinction between logic and cognition in mathematics and natural science is the free reflection of thought on itself. But "metaphysics,



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morality, and aesthetics" (V xviii) are also brought under this reflection. Strikingly, this means that logic, scientific cognition, moral and political philosophy, aesthetics, and metaphysics (philosophy of religion) form a system. No part can be conceived apart from the whole, and the whole cannot be conceived without the parts. To what degree did Maimon attain this wholeness? This article will attempt to show (1) how the *New Logic* is the culmination of Maimon's philosophy, (2) how it is a theory of reflexive cognition, (3) how reflection grounds a new account of formal logic, and (4) how it grounds a new account of systematic cognition. It will then show how this theory of reflexive cognition also (5) serves to ground Kantian ethics, (6) a theory of natural right, and (7) a new foundation for both metaphysics and aesthetics. The thesis is that Maimon's metaphysics is not a first but a final philosophy that cannot be understood apart from the systematic unity of these theoretical and axiomatic disciplines, and they cannot be understood apart from their culmination in it. Interpreters such as Baumgardt (1963), Posesorski (2017), Pollock (2020), and Quinn (2021) have found Maimon's axiomatic philosophy to be ultimately unified by skepticism regarding Kantian ethics. This article responds that we first need to understand Maimon's late philosophy before making any such estimation. Certainly, Maimon's theories of logic, cognition, morality, etc. demand more specialized treatments. But without having reconstructed Maimon's major accomplishment, *philosophy as the reflexive medium of the systematic unity of the human sciences, culminating in a scientific metaphysics*, we will simply not understand the point of these more specialized treatments.

2. The Development of the *New Logic*

Hermann Cohen suggested that Maimon's merits run deeper than commonly supposed.⁵ The most common supposition has been that he introduced one characteristic Maimonian line of thought with his 1790 *Essay on Transcendental Philosophy*.⁶ But this was only the first of three profoundly different metaphysical systems. These systems came about in the following way. In 1790, Maimon committed himself to Kant's revolutionary *Critique of Pure Reason*: "I maintain that Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* is, in its way, just as classical as the work of Euclid's and just as irrefutable. (II 338)" He found Kant's transcendental deduction to be "completely satisfying" (VI 424). But he argued that it needed to be extended, for Kant had answered the question "*quid juris?*" (how can we justify the use of the a priori categories of our cognition on objects?) in a way which justified the categories for cognition of a posteriori experience. But Kant had not justified the categories for cognition of the kind of experience that is determined a priori, by which Maimon meant the experience involved in the scientific cognition of the world that was first practiced by Isaac Newton and that, as Kant later noted in the *Opus Postumum*, does not deal with empirical propositions but with "an effect [e.g., inertia; gravity] which does not occur on the senses, but only on the object of pure intuition".⁷ This meant that Kant's a priori concept of experience was all too reliant on certain theoretical facts of experience assumed uncritically and a posteriori. Maimon was not merely skeptical, however. He modeled three ambitious systems as solutions to this problem.

The *Essay on Transcendental Philosophy*, Maimon's first book in German, was the first such attempt. He hypothesized that if the Kantian finite subject of cognition was directed to and subsumed under the absolutely infinite intellect of God, who creates the cosmos by determinately representing it, the question could be answered. However, this resulted in two distinct registers for the categories, the finite and the infinite, the existences or ontological senses of which Maimon could not unambiguously reconcile. Thus, his argument ended with an antinomy: "our understanding can and must be regarded in two opposed ways: (1) as an absolute [understanding] (unlimited by sensibility and its laws), [and] (2) as our understanding, in accordance with its [sensible] limitation. So, the understanding can and must think its objects according to two opposed laws" (II 226-7). For a brief time, Maimon held up that antinomy as characteristic of our cosmic situation: at the intuitive level (in both the sensible and intellectual senses of intuition), we live saturated by the divine which, at the discursive intellectual level, we are powerless to conceptualize. But because Maimon

could not answer the *quid juris* by this means, his theory did not represent an advance beyond Kant's. He recognized it as a failure.⁸

Later in 1790, he published an article in the *Berlin Journal of Enlightenment* called "On the World Soul (*Entelechia Universi*)". There, Maimon depicted the aforementioned anti-nomy as *alive*. He ascribed Johann Blumenbach's hypothetical life-force (*Bildungstrieb*) to it. This gave to the cosmos the structure of the force of life. This force is, according to Blumenbach, a definite structure that characterizes all life-forms insofar as they consume foreign objects, transform them by digestion into themselves, and live—sustaining themselves as individuals and propagating the species—while also being consumed or reintegrated and dying back into the environment in turn. Maimon used this model to portray the world as a dialectical structure in which ontologically different kinds of beings, i.e., lifeless matter, organic matter, and thinking beings, could arise. This in turn made possible the chain of intellectual forms exhibited in the history of human philosophy as a living process of negation of negation, which, when taken as a whole, is the achievement of the "cognition of the absolute".⁹ Maimon's work anticipates much of German Idealism, most of all Hegel's *Logic*. However, he almost immediately suspected that his *World-Soul*, however profound, could not pass as scientific cognition by the standards of a proper critical philosophy. He voiced this suspicion in the *Magazin zur Erfahrungsseelenkunde als ein Lesebuch für Gelehrte und Ungelehrte* in a 1793 commentary to Jacobi's German translation of Giordano Bruno's *Cause, Principle, and Unity*¹⁰ by stating that he would take the concept of the world-soul and "separate the well-grounded from the enthusiastic therein as if through a chemical operation" (IV 616).¹¹ Evidently, Maimon did not accomplish that goal in his commentary on Bruno. He saved that honor for his *Essay on a New Logic*.

Sometime probably around 1793 Maimon began to study logic more intently. His literary remains once included a commentary on Kiesewetter's Kantian logic (Kiesewetter 1791; Kuntze 1912, pp. 15, 26), which he evidently found completely unsatisfying. Maimon wrote to Kant on 2 December 1793 and indicated his surprise that, although the critical philosophy had rightly supplanted metaphysics as first philosophy by discovering a method for scientific certainty in philosophy, "no logic according to the demands of this *Critique* has been developed" (VI 442–43). Maimon believed he could systematically "correct", "extend", and "order" a science of logic and, moreover, make this grounding of logic into the grounding of critical philosophy. First, he could correct logic, although not by simply abstracting logical rules of inference from their use like Kiesewetter had done. That would be circular and retain empirical impurities; there would not be a logic justified a priori, which its formal validity requires. Instead, he could conduct an a priori "reflection on the capacity of cognition", which would reveal the simplest logical forms, principles, or rules of inference for all possible cognition. Second, he could extend logic by reducing, by means of that reflection, all complex forms to the simplest logical forms, principles, or rules of inference. Third, he could give logic a systematic order by grounding in the reflection the three basic operations of thought, namely conceiving, judging, and inferring, so that they would not be isolated but systematically related to each other. This would establish "a logical tree [*Stammbaum*] which one could with right [*mit Recht*] call a tree of knowledge [*Baum der Erkenntnis*]". Thus, a reflection on possible cognition should be, for Maimon, the speculative¹² origin of formal logic, on the one hand, and of the transcendental logic of possible cognition, on the other hand. This would set Kantian critical philosophy on a new, more explicitly reflexive footing.

With the letter, Maimon included his recent text, *The Categories of Aristotle, Clarified by Remarks and Presented as a Propaedeutic to a New Theory of Thinking*. As evident from the title, this work was only a propaedeutic to the actual correction, extension, and ordering of logic that Maimon conducted in the *New Logic*.¹³ A good way to understand the latter work is as the test of the *World-Soul* that Maimon promised in the commentary on Bruno, for the *World-Soul*, like Hegel's *Logic*, implies both an objective logic of the cosmos and a subjective logic of the finite cognition that arises within it. To discover and separate what is poetic, or a product of aesthetic creation, from what is philosophical in the *World-*

Soul would mean conducting anew a rigorous subjective logic as an a priori reflection on cognition. This is also to say that Maimon had developed with his *Essay* and *World-Soul* a post-Kantian dogmatism. Thus, just as Kant stood in relation to Wolffian metaphysics, Maimon in 1794 stood in relation to the much more complicated post-Kantian version of Wolffian metaphysics he himself had outlined in the *World-Soul*, and which seems to have very much anticipated Hegel's *Logic*. As Gideon Freudenthal has said, it is impossible for the historian to seamlessly integrate Maimon into the orthodox reading of German Idealism without doing violence to Maimon (Freudenthal 2003, pp. 16–17). Conversely, it is impossible to grasp Maimon without seriously disrupting the orthodox interpretation of German Idealism. But for the more limited goal of this article, we need to understand Maimon's development of a theory of reflection in the *New Logic* to grasp the unity of the theoretical and axiomatic it establishes. For when he says, in the "Attempt at a New Presentation of the Principle of Morality and a Deduction of its Reality", parodying Kant, that "there is nothing at all in the world or even outside it which we can think possible to believe that it is unconditionally good except *striving after cognition of the truth*" (VI 280), he is valuing a concept of both striving and truth that follows from the *New Logic*. His axiomatic philosophy, or theory of value, depends wholly on the *New Logic*. It is based on the reflexive structure of the latter and is oriented to the kind of metaphysics and theory of religion sanctioned in it.

3. The Reflexive Foundation of the *New Logic*

Maimon's works were written not just to be read, and not just to be interpreted, but to be reconstructed. He stated this explicitly in the *World-Soul*, where he developed his system via sequences of oppositions, the significance of which he left up to the reader: "The thinking reader himself must infer the result of this comparison" (Maimon 1790, p. 48; 2020, p. 533).¹⁴ And he stated it explicitly in the *New Logic*: "I think *determinately* and *systematically* enough, but I do not always express my thoughts *determinately* or *systematically* enough, and occasionally leave *gaps* in the *presentation* whose *filling in* I cannot expect from every reader" (V xxv–vi). This resulted not only from his position between two cultures (Freudenthal 2003) but from his position as a Jewish philosopher between the Enlightenment and the Counter-Enlightenment (Librett 2000), so that he left blatant philosophical contradictions in his texts, like Maimonides, for the thinking reader to resolve, and also simply plagiarized. His culturally inherited style of commentary, brought into a radically new context, became an explicit theft of material for new construction, as in the *World-Soul*, the text of which was largely a patchwork of Blumenbach and Leibniz, and in the "Attempt at a New Presentation of the Principle of Morality and a Deduction of its Reality", which took many pages from Kant's *Groundwork*, substituting for Kant's "good will" the "striving for cognition of the truth", to make a serious point by a kind of respectful parody. This was also a result of his personality. In his *Autobiography*, he described himself as talented in drawing as a youth, but never patient enough to finish a work (Maimon 2018a, p. 35).

Here, therefore, is a reconstruction of the argumentation of the *New Logic* as a response to its provocative and seeming contradictions and lacunae.

First of all, we may take the work to begin with the question of truth: what makes a thought, as a cognition, true? Maimon, as we know, intended by a "*reflection* on the capacity of cognition" to ascertain the basic principles of formal logic not by abstracting them from any empirical, mathematical, or metaphysical use, but by reflecting on the conditions of the truth of any possible cognition whatsoever. However, this reflection would, at the same time, ascertain the basic principles or categories of transcendental logic. "General [formal] logic must certainly be separated from transcendental [logic] but treated with respect to it" (VI 442). He described it as "an interweaving of general [formal] with transcendental logic" (V vii). Thus, he intended to carry out a speculative reflection of thought on itself which would constitute the origin of both the principles of formal logic, on the one hand, and transcendental logic, on the other hand. Moreover, this would make philosophy a "constitutive science" that grounds the "synthetic [*a priori*] propositions" of "mathematics"

and “natural science”, (V xix) and those of the axiomatic sciences of aesthetics, morality, and philosophy of religion (V 225). How could he carry out this program?

In reflecting on possible cognition or “any actual thinking”, (V 7) Maimon discovers that thought has a distinct structure. We distinguish these five elements or moments:

“(1) the *subject* (who thinks); (2) the *object of thinking* (what is thought about), (3) the *thought object* (brought forth by thinking), (4) the *action* of thinking in general, (5) the particular way of it”. (V 65)

In any thinking whatsoever, we must be able to be reflexively conscious of ourselves as thinking something about something. Thinking always involves a subject, an object, an act (of affirmation or negation), and a thought which we establish as true or false about the object. No thinking can do without any of these elements, and they are all reciprocally related to each other. Even when the object of thought is itself a thought, we can distinguish it from the thought that is about it, and that can ascertain it as a true or false thought: in other words, one must be able to determine if one’s hypothesis is true or not. In Maimon’s example, a subject (1) may affirm (4, 5) that a given triangle (2) is a space enclosed by three straight lines (3). Importantly, any such thought contains its reflection; it is already reflexive, in that it falls together with the subject (1) affirming (4, 5) that the *thought that the triangle is a space enclosed by three straight lines* (3) is a *true thought* of the given triangle (2). This quite special reflexive structure of thought allows Maimon to derive both the principles of formal logic and the principles or categories of transcendental logic from it. For, on the one hand, in any cognition, *thought relates to itself* while relating to the object. The principles of formal logic follow from an analysis of thought’s relation to itself. And, on the other hand, in any cognition, thought relates to its object. The principles or categories of transcendental logic follow from an analysis of this relation to the object which is not itself a thought. Thus, the principles at the basis of formal and transcendental logic are entirely the same. They are only analyzed differently as the formal principles of logic or the categories of transcendental logic. It follows that Maimon needs only one basic speculative reflection of thought on itself. He carries it out in Chapters 1 and 2 of the *New Logic*. He analyzes the formal aspects of the resultant principles in Chapters 3–7. And he analyzes their transcendental aspects in Chapters 8–13.

Before proceeding to the reflection, it is necessary to point out that Maimon argues for a division of all cognition into a hierarchy of pure, applied, and practical cognition (V 1–3, 145–49, xxx–xxxiv). He first proposed this division in 1792, in the *On the Progress of Philosophy, in Answer to the Prize-Question of the Royal Academy of Berlin for the Year 1792: What Progress has Metaphysics Made Since Leibniz and Wolff?* In his most useful example (V xxxi) of this division, we are in the realm of practical science when we observe that the planets “in fact move in an *ellipsis*” around the sun and theorize about this fact (like Kepler and Newton) by “the actual subsumption of it under the *a priori* determined *objects of pure mathematics*”. But this presupposes the possibility of the higher realm of applied science, in which we have the greater theoretical freedom to study consequences of thought experiments. We “can equally well apply theories of other curved lines to the movement of the planets, i.e., under the presupposition that the planets move in corresponding ways”. But this in turn presupposes the highest realm of pure science, where we can freely construct pure mathematical objects according to axioms. The point is that, starting from a practical science, we can reflect on the truth or falsity of our individual claims about reality, but in the same reflection we can move to applied science to evaluate the axioms of our science and then to pure science to evaluate the formal properties of these axioms or even, as Maimon does, reflect on the highest principles of the truth of all thought. Thus, from the practical level to the pure, reflection is always a reflection on element number (3) in Maimon’s outline of thought: the thought-object. It proceeds from the practical question of “what makes this particular thought true?” to the philosophical question of “what makes any given thought true?” Reflection on the thought-object in general is universally valid for all thought. But this means it is also a *reflection on reflection*. In the course of reflection, we also ask whether any given philosophical theory, as a theory of reflection, is capable of

establishing a priori what it means for a thought-object to be true of an object of thought. Thus, the *New Logic* can test, e.g., the *World-Soul* as a philosophical theory. Importantly, Maimon grounds this three-fold division of pure, applied, and practical scientific cognition in the reflection itself a priori. But it is important to understand it ahead of time to grasp the breadth of the question: what ultimately makes any thought, as a cognition, true?

Now, the reflection. Maimon advances as the first principle of cognition what he calls, using terminology from Baumgarten, “metaphysical truth” (V 18). A thought stands in a relation to an object, which it is a thought of. The thought posits the object as having a determinate content that makes it what it is, for the thought can only be true of that object by joining the manifold terms or determinations of thought (representations or concepts) that stand for the content of that object so that “they are not merely *thought* as components of the manifold connected (by absence of a contradiction) in the object but rather *cognized* (from grounds lying outside of the capacity of cognition)”. In other words, Maimon means that a thought must state what the object is in itself: a thought is true if the object is what a judgment “A is B” says it to be. For example, the judgment “a decahedron is a regular figure” is false, since a decahedron, in itself, is not a regular figure. Thus, in any thought “A is B”, there is a subject-term A that refers to the object of thought by positing it, and there is a predicate-term B that determines it. We might follow Hans Wagner, a 20th-century Kantian philosopher Maimon very much anticipated, and call this principle of “metaphysical truth” the “principle of identity”, in that it calls for the “synthetic” or “speculative” identity between what the object is and what the object is posited as being by the identity between A and B.¹⁵

The second principle of thought is obviously the principle of contradiction. For if there must be identity between the terms A and B for expressing the identity of what the object is with what it is posited as being, there cannot be any contradiction between those terms. But this gives rise to an *aporia*. On the one hand, each term of thought A, B, C, etc., refers to a distinct objective content. In order to do so, each term excludes the other. “Figure” and “regular” are not the same, and must not be the same, and so on for every term. It is necessary that “A and B . . . exclude each other in one and the same consciousness as objects of consciousness in themselves” (V 12). Thus, each term contradicts the other. However, no term joined in a judgment can contradict any other term. In “A is B”, we must have identity, not contradiction. Maimon arrives at this crucial *aporia*. In Wagner’s terms, he arrives at the dual principles for every judgment of “excluded contradiction” and “demanded contradiction”.¹⁶

Maimon introduces what he calls the “principle of determinability” to resolve this *aporia*. This is a principle he had used in an ad hoc fashion in the *Essay on Transcendental Philosophy* in 1790, and it can even be said to have played a different role in the *World-Soul* (Ehrensperger 2006, p. 139). But it finally finds its proper role here. He defines it as comprised of two principles that specify what, in a judgment capable of being true, counts as a subject-term and what counts as a predicate-term (V 20): it “divides in turn into two other principles: (1) into a principle for the *subject* in general: every subject must be a possible object of consciousness, not only as subject, but also in itself; (2) into a principle for the *predicate*: every predicate must be a possible object of consciousness not in self but as predicate (in connection with the subject)”. In other words, the subject-term A is already a concept or representation of an object which is posited determinately. Maimon calls it a determinable. But the predicate-term B is not a concept or representation of an object by itself. He calls it a determination. But when B is joined to A, “A is B” is a judgment that determines a new or not-yet-cognized object. Thus, judgments relate concepts to each other as determinables and determinations. To use contemporary language, this resembles the relation between function and arguments in a way illustrated by the following examples. In the judgment “this figure is three-angled”, “figure” is a function that can take the argument “three-angled” to give the value or object “triangle.” In “this triangle is right-angled”, “triangle” in turn is a function and “right-angled” an argument, giving the value or object “right triangle.” In the judgment “all men are animals”, the function “animal” takes the

argument “men”, standing for how animality is determined for “human beings” or “homo sapiens.” The principle of determinability makes thought *functional* in that a determinable or function, given a determination or argument, cannot yield two distinct objects. Moreover, a determinable is like a *one-to-one* function; given two distinct determinations or arguments, it cannot yield the same object but two distinct ones. We can see how this principle resolves the *aporia* of the principle of contradiction by how it implies two further principles as corollaries.

Maimon’s 1797 works argue that the principle of determinability implies the principle of excluded middle. For the principle of determinability ensures that is “not from every pair of possibly opposed predicates [that] one must be attributed to a subject given as an object, but only from such which stand with the subject in a relation of determinability” (VII 204). That is, given a judgment, a determinable *must* be determined, and this must occur only in the context of determinability-relations. In this context, in a judgment “A is B”, “A” must be a (one-to-one) function and “B” a possible argument of it. Therefore, a judgment involving a determinable “A” and a determination “B” cannot both affirm (“A is B”) and deny (“A is not B”) simultaneously, and thus determine and not determine an object. Nor can it neither affirm (“A is B”) nor deny (“A is not B”), and thus have no object-determining significance whatsoever. As we will see, Maimon means to show by these principles that we make *all possible terms* stand in such functional relations of determinability with each other, whether immediately or mediately via relations between judgments in the whole of cognition.

The principle of determinability, as excluded middle, then implies Kant’s principle of infinite or limitative judgment, which Maimon claims to improve upon by rooting it in his reflection (e.g., V xxi-ii). It requires that any affirmative judgment “A is B” implies the infinite judgment “A is not not-B”, where not-B means any other possible determination or predicate of A, e.g., C, D, E, etc., in possible objects AC, AD, AE, etc. To say “a figure is three-angled” must mean it is *not* four-angled or five-angled, etc. And a negative judgment “A is not B” implies the infinite judgment “A is not not-B”, where not-B means again some other possible determination or predicate of A, e.g., C, D, E, etc., in possible objects AC, AD, AE, etc. To say “a figure is not three-angled” must mean it *is* four-angled or five-angled, etc. This means that any affirmation “A is B” has as its condition the denied “A is not B”, since it depends on “B being determined as not “not-B” (it is not C and not D and not E, etc.). And any denial “A is not B” similarly has as its condition the denied “A is B”, since it depends on “not-B” being determined as not B” (it is C or D or E, etc.). This resolves the *aporia* of contradiction. Affirmation “A is B” demands the contradiction “A is not not-B” and excludes the contradiction “A is not B”. Thus, the principles of excluded middle and limitation are corollaries of the principle of determinability.

With this set of organically related principles, the reflection establishes the structure of all valid cognition. By beginning with relations between the terms of judgments, it determines the structure of judgments and of the (inferential) relations between them. To begin to see this, consider how, when we make judgments, concepts come into subordinate relations (higher and lower) with each other. First, what occurs when we are compelled to judge about an object that *neither* “A is B” *nor* “A is not B?” Maimon mentions (e.g., V 22-3, 158, 329, 436) the kind of situation in which the concept of a geometrical figure is neither sweet nor not-sweet (e.g., not sour, bitter, or any other taste). There is no immediate relation of determinability here between “figure” and “flavor”; Maimon specifies this with the symbol \circ , as in “A \circ B”. This violates the principle of excluded middle: the judgment neither affirms nor denies. However, we resolve this violation by subsuming the concept of “geometrical figure” under the higher concept of “(non-sensible) concepts in general”, which is precisely where Maimon situates it throughout the text. We then positively relate this higher concept of “(non-sensible) concepts or thought-objects” to another higher concept, coordinated with it, of “sensible objects”, i.e., the concept of objects that can be sweet or not. The predicates “sweet” and “not-sweet” fall under it, instead. Nothing under it is neither sweet nor not-sweet. Thus, cases of “neither-nor” mean that

we subordinate the predicates in question as possible determinations under new higher concepts that we coordinate with the previously assumed ones.

Second, what occurs when we are compelled to judge about an object that *both* “A is B” and “A is not B”? Maimon’s example is the determination of the concept “figure” as both “three-sided” and “three-angled.” By Maimon’s principles, “figure” cannot be determined by both determinations at the same time. But we do make this judgment, violating the principle of excluded middle. Yet we also resolve this violation according to principles. Maimon argues that to construct a triangle, a spatial figure of three lines, in intuition reveals that the figure must have three angles. He counts this as analytic intuitive cognition, “because the three angles result from the development of what is contained in the triangle itself”, (V 29) whereas the additional construction of a specific angle, like a right angle, is synthetic since it depends on another rule and its construction. Therefore, as determinations of the concept of figure, “three lines” and “three angles” are analytic; they imply each other. With this, Maimon preserves the status of the determinable concept as like a one-to-one function, for the different determinations serve as the same argument of the function, thus determining the same object. He also preserves our ability to conceive of, e.g., an isosceles right-angled triangle, since, given the “mediate determinable (the triangle)” (V 188) in which three angles and three lines are analytic, we can determine “right-angled” of a triangle’s angles and “isosceles” of its lines. Thus, in such cases of “both-and”, we identify the two determinations with each other.¹⁷

These two examples show how, according to Maimon’s principles, cognition is an interrelation of subordinated and coordinated concepts by means of judgments and (as we will see) inferences. The principle of determinability is a kind of meta-principle for the organic relation of the principles of identity, contradiction, excluded middle, and limitation. With the resolution of the *aporia* of contradiction, the reflection ends. The reader can begin to grasp how all acts of thinking, which means all judging and inferring, produce thought-objects or concepts of objects which are intended to be true of objects given to thinking, and are determined as true or false according to the principles of thought alone. In reflection, thought determines itself as a capacity absolutely independent of any given object. Maimon then derives both formal and transcendental logic from these principles.

4. Formal Logic

Maimon grounds formal logic as an autonomous science on this reflection. Formal logic is a complete or adequate science when it is comprised of rules of inference that are valid only for their object. In contemporary terms, the rules of inference constitute the syntax of formal logic, while the object to which we apply logic constitutes its semantics; the semantic account of the object tells us what the syntax *means*. The semantics may also assure us that the syntax is valid for, and only for, its object. For Maimon’s *New Logic*, like Kant’s *Critique of Pure Reason*, the object of formal logic is *thought in general*. This makes sense: we use formal logic to evaluate whether or not we are thinking in a formally correct way; we hold that all thought used in cognition must be, at the very least, formally valid. By finding the principles of all thought in reflection, Maimon outlines a semantics of thought as the object of logic. The syntactical rules of valid inference follow from an analysis of that semantics. In this way, Maimon answers Kant’s requirements for the science of formal logic: it should (a) present the syntactical “formal rules of all thinking” (Bviii-ix), (b) prove the formal correctness or validity of “what is formal” in any use of the “understanding and reason” (A53/B77) on any kind of object, and c) be “a proven doctrine, [so that] everything in it must be completely *a priori*” (A54/B78).¹⁸

Here is Maimon’s semantic account of thought. Consider any thought “A is B” in terms of the principle of determinability. The subject “A” must already be, by itself, “an object of consciousness” in that it must refer by itself to an object of thought. This means that “Ax is A” is true. In Maimon’s logical symbolism, “x” is the universal quantifier, so that statement means “A, determined in any way possible, is A”. This thought is always presupposed by “A is B”. Together with “A is B”, it implies “ABx is A”, which in Maimon’s

symbolism means “AB determined in any way possible is A”, or in more ordinary language, “All A is B”, or “B is predicated of all A”.¹⁹ In other words, Maimon’s principles mean that any thought “A is B” is characterized by *relations of reflexivity and transitivity*. For A is reflexively predicated of itself, as we see in “Ax is A”. And we analyze “ABx is A”, taking x to be C, to mean “All A is B, All B is C, therefore “All A is C”. Thus, the semantics of any thought of the form “A is B” mean that it is reflexive and transitive, whatever its object happens to be.

This semantics is sufficient to ground the basic syntactic rules of inference of Aristotle’s syllogistic. As we know from the *Prior Analytics*, these basic rules consist of two perfect universal inferences of the first figure, *Barbara* and *Celarent*, and three immediate inferences. Aristotle uses these three immediate inferences to reduce the syllogistic moods of the second and third figures to *Barbara* and *Celarent* of the first figure (and he reduces *Darii* and *Ferio*, the particular moods of the first figure, to moods of the second figure, which can be in turn reduced to *Barbara* and *Celarent*). We have already seen *Barbara* in the deduction of “All A is B, All B is C, therefore All A is C”.²⁰ But according to the reflection, thought involves negation as much as it involves affirmation. Hence, any thought “A is B” necessarily implies “A is not not-B”, e.g., “A is not C”. This presupposes “Ax is A”, too. And it implies “ACx is not A”. This latter yields the inference “No A is C, All C is D, therefore No A is D”. This is *Celarent*. Thus, we derive the first two universal perfect moods from the reflection. The three immediate inferences also follow (V 78-9). First, a universal negative judgment “Ax is not (non-A)” means “(Non-A)x is not A”. This means that saying “A determined in any way is not non-A” is the same as saying “Non-A determined in any way possible is not A”. Second, a particular affirmative judgment “An + B” means “Bn + A”. For Maimon, this means that saying “A determined in some way is B” is the same as saying “B, as that same determination, is A”. Third, any universal affirmative judgment “ABx is A”, or “AB determined in any way is A”, cannot mean “Ax is AB”, or “All A determined in any way is AB”, since x could stand for Not-B. Thus, “AB determined in any way is A” must be the same as “All An is AB”, or “A determined in some way is AB”.

These rules of inference are all Maimon needs to account for the syllogistic moods that Aristotle counts as valid and rule out the syllogistic moods he counts as invalid. Since this article outlines Maimon’s *New Logic* for the purpose of showing how it is the backbone for his axiomatic philosophy, it is not necessary to follow how he does this in any more detail. However, it is important to show how he ensures that any thought, directed to theoretical cognition, whether pure, applied, or practical, must have the full weight of the science of formal logic behind it. There is true innovation in this argument. Normally, logicians in the metaphysical tradition from Aristotle to Kant justified the formal validity of logic with an “orthodox *dictum* semantics”. This simply means that a universal affirmative judgment “All A is B” is true if and only if everything that falls under the concept of A also falls under the concept of B.²¹ Kant considered this semantics obvious and developed a version of it in the *Critique*. But this semantics comes with theoretical problems. One is that statements like “All bodies that are not acted on by any force are at rest” can only be true because all of the actual bodies that are not acted on by any forces are the same ones that are actually at rest (Van Cleve 2016, p. 128). However, the physicist would require this universal judgment to be true without any such bodies actually existing. Therefore, it is a major advantage of Maimon’s semantics that such a statement can be true under conditions that do not imply the existence of such bodies. The statement “all bodies that are not acted on by any force are at rest” is true not if all such bodies are actually resting somewhere, but, as we will see, if the consequences theoretically derived from this statement help to scientifically explain reality as a whole without, again, implying that there exist bodies independent of all forces. The attempt to ground the syntax of the syllogistic on relations of reflexivity and transitivity, instead of on relations of subordination in the orthodox *dictum* semantics, dates back to antiquity. It has been called (in a context distant from Kantian philosophy) the heterodox *dictum* semantics.²² It has never yet been noticed that Maimon arrived independently at this innovation.

5. Transcendental Logic

Maimon begins the *New Logic* with the question of truth: what makes a given thought, as a cognition of an object, true? His reflection on thought yields principles of possible truth. This reflection is a universal exercise of thought, showing the basic way all thought relates to itself while relating to its object. Reflexivity is characteristic of all thought from its highest point to its practical applications. This is the theme of Chapters 1–2 of the text. Then, Maimon analyzes the relation of thought to itself to obtain the syntactical rules of thought. This establishes the inferential form that all thought capable of being true necessarily implies. Formal logic is the theme of Chapters 3–7.²³ Maimon next analyzes the same principles in terms of the relation of reflexive thought to the object of thought. This analysis yields the principles of transcendental logic, which we know from the *Critique of Pure Reason* to be the categories and their schematism. This is the theme of Chapters 8–11. The final Chapters 12–13 concern metaphysics, which Maimon establishes as an autonomous science on the basis of the system of cognition established in Chapters 1–11.

But Maimon's transcendental logic cannot, like formal logic, follow from a mere analysis of a relation, for it immediately encounters another *aporia*. This *aporia* is that, in order to know a priori what makes any given thought, as a cognition of an object, true, we need to have an a priori account of what an object of thought, in general, is. We need to grasp objectivity a priori. However, this seems impossible, for we realize that "Every cognition whatsoever consists of *matter* and *form*" (V 115). That is, every thought-object has formal and material moments. The form of an individual thought-object is characterized by the principles of thought and the syntactic rules they imply. But its matter is provided by the given object of thought, insofar as the object is determined in itself, outside of the mere form of thought. As it stands, we have a priori cognition of the form of thought. But it seems we can only have a posteriori cognition of all objects of thought, for any cognition "that is first determined by the actuality of the object is a *posteriori* or *empirical* cognition" (V 116). This is Maimon's problematic in Chapter 8. We can put it another way by saying that we have a *necessary condition* of all possible cognition in formal logic. According to the form of cognition, we know that if we have certain true premises, the conclusion *must* be true. Maimon has derived the a priori system of formal validity from the principles of true thought. However, this entire system cannot stand if we do not have an account of *truth itself*, or if we do not know what it means for any premise to be true, in the first place. How can we obtain a priori principles of *real* truth? To answer this, Maimon needs an a priori account of objectivity, or objective truth.

Maimon directs himself to solve this *aporia* in Chapters 8–11. The solution breaks down into two interrelated parts. Chapters 8–9 constitute a doctrine of the schematism of cognition. Chapters 10–11 constitute a doctrine of the categories of cognition. It is curious that the schematism precedes the categories. But Maimon differs from Kant in that he does not schematize the categories, but he schematizes the systematic application of the form of thought to given objects. This results in the aforementioned division of pure, applied, and practical cognition, which Maimon also calls a division of pure, applied, and practical mathematics, in which the principles of applied and practical mathematics together constitute the principles of (post-Newtonian) natural science. This schematized system is *the* a priori system of objective cognition—it answers the *aporia*. But it raises another problem, for it implies that the objects we cognize objectively are in fact real and ontologically distinct objects determined in themselves, independently of thought. What, then, justifies our cognition of them? To answer this question, Maimon derives the categories as concepts of objects that originate in thought but that also characterize ontologically distinct objects in a way that allows us to build up cognition of nature in itself. He then conducts a transcendental deduction of those categories in order to justify our systematic cognition of ontologically distinct objects.

First, Maimon's schematism. He uses the term "schematism" only once to refer to his own schematism in the *New Logic*. At the end of Chapter 11, Maimon says: Kant concluded his transcendental deduction of the categories with their "*schematism* under

determinations of the necessary form of intuition. Likewise, I adopt this schematism, but develop it from the *principle of determinability*" (V 195). Initially, this is entirely unclear to the reader. However, Maimon must be referring to Chapters 8–9, for only there can he be said to develop, from the universal principles of thought, a priori schematisms of how we intuitively present sensible objects for systematic and objective cognition of them. In fact, he develops three such schematisms, in this order: schematisms of empirical cognition, of pure mathematical cognition, and of natural scientific cognition. We begin with empirical cognition. Again, the speculative reflection on thought tells us that the first effort of thought is to judge "A is B" with the intention that the identity between the terms will reveal what an object is, in itself. However, if the object is empirically given, then the judgment must determine itself in a definite way in relation to that object. Given a piece of metal, for example, we take certain conceptual representations like "specific gravity", "dissolubility in *aqua regia*", and "yellow color" (V 17) and unite this plurality into a conceptual totality we call "gold". However, we do this only so far as we have had sensations of these real qualities that we have associated with each other inductively over time. This process must be reflected in the schematism of empirical experience. Indeed, we can use an invention of the philosopher Werner Flach to schematize the form–matter relation of all empirical cognition in the following way: T^t/M^m . The "T" stands for the totality of conceptual determinations in a concept, e.g., "gold". The "M" stands for the manifold of intuition by which sensible objects are given or presented. The "t/m" means the relation of heterogeneity between the concept- and intuition-determinations.²⁴ The superscript characters are "relativity indices".²⁵ In examples like the schematized concept of gold, the totality "T" is given a superscript "t" because its conceptual determinations are joined in an isolated way, meaning the concept has no immediate *logical* implication for the manifold. It simply parallels the intuitive manifold as an association of sensible properties found together over time, meaning that the "M" is also given a superscript "m". This is the a priori schematism of empirical experience in which we make subjective judgements of perception.

But how can we bring such subjective cognition to objectivity? This question refers us to the schematism of pure mathematics. We return to the speculative reflection. We know that for any judgment "A is B", the condition of it being true, which means being true in relation to the context of the whole of our cognition, is the principle of determinability. This principle, as a meta-principle for all the principles of thought, already determines the *form* of truth. It does so not just by being the source of the formal syntax of thought, as we have seen, but also by being the source of the schematism of pure mathematics, for consider what occurs if the judgment "A is B", in which A serves as a function and B serves as an argument, is true. This means that, if there is something corresponding to B in intuition, then there must be something corresponding to A of which it is a manifestation. Therefore, the conceptual totality completely determines the intuitive manifold, and the intuitive manifold is in turn completely determined by the conceptual totality. This gives us another schematism, which is also Flach's invention: T^m/M^t . Consider Maimon's example of the right-angled isosceles triangle. We unite its conceptual determinations into the totality "right angled isosceles triangle" according to the principle of determinability so that it logically implies the complete determination in a possible construction of the intuitions in the sensible manifold (putting objections to the correctness of Euclid's axioms by mathematicians like Peano aside; Russell [1910] 1949, p. 94). And the manifold is ordered reciprocally according to the totality. Obviously, no set of mathematical or geometrical axioms follows from this schematism; it is the schematism of pure mathematical cognition in which axiom-systems are possible. In Maimon's words, the "*matter and form of the a priori determined objects of mathematics determine each other reciprocally and so are inseparable in the cognitive capacity; the relation between determined objects of mathematics presupposes the objects between which they are encountered, and these [objects] in turn presuppose this relation without which they cannot be these objects*" (V 115). Moreover, this schematism of pure mathematics "remains always true and must be placed at the ground of any *theory*

of the cognitive capacity" (V 116). Maimon means that we *project* the schematism of pure mathematical cognition so as to underlie all possible empirical cognition. Thus, the pursuit of truth initiated by any judgment means that we mean to bring empirical cognition into an order of determinability susceptible to mathematization. In fact, we would not even have empirical cognition if we did not intend this. Thus, there is never any *purely* empirical cognition, since we always already judge what we have associated as if the terms are in relations of determinability, which makes it possible to improve our cognition.

What, then, is the schematism of the a priori method by which we bring empirical cognition from subjectivity to objectivity? Currently, we observe a complete disparity in the schematisms of mere empirical experience and pure mathematical cognition. The former lacks all reciprocity between conceptual and intuitional determinations, while the latter implies complete reciprocity. The obvious answer is to join these two schematisms to represent the natural scientific method of applying mathematization to the empirical so that it becomes objective cognition. This concept of natural science is precisely that which justifies Maimon's distinction between mere thought and cognition which has been in play all along. In thought, we "merely suppose the relation of determinability in the manifold given to thinking". But in cognition, we "really have insight into [*einsehen*] this relation" (V 131). To begin with an example, imagine if we developed an initial theory of what gold is, which we believed to determine a priori the outer appearance or behavior of all actual gold. It would have to be a theory with a conceptual form dictated by the principle of determinability: every single one of its conceptual terms would have to be ordered according to that principle. However, any such theory is necessarily finite, for it is limited by the necessarily finite number of determinations by which it orders intuition. It conditions itself to be finite in this way. Therefore, the schematism of natural scientific cognition coincides with Flach's expression for it: T^m / M^m . We determine the conceptual totality to order, according to its logical stipulations, the intuitive manifold. This transforms our account of reality from what we naively associate into a determination of what reality truly is. Yet we can never fully achieve this goal, for a complete scientific theory of reality would have to be infinite. It would have to be absolutely infinite since it would be unconditioned. This is an a priori impossibility for us. As Maimon says, "We can only ever further approximate this completeness, but never fully reach it" (V 134).

Maimon then explains how we can, under the schematism of scientific method, achieve ever more objective cognition. First, it is important that the schematism of natural science is a schematism of *scientific theories*. A scientific theory explains the determinations of objects we perceive in terms of theoretical entities or theoretical characterizations of objects that we may not immediately perceive. "There certainly may be *empirical objects* that are not represented in *time* and *space* but are mere *conditions of the possible representation of a difference among them*" (V 137). It is the cognition of how "the *outer relations* [which we perceive] are determined by the *inner marks* [which we do not directly perceive but which are the theoretical entities which determine our perceptions]" (V 134). This in turn means that theories determine a priori the conditions for their possible correction and improvement. For example, our first rudimentary theory of gold is open to specific falsifications. It is supposed to determine what gold is in *all* of its appearances. This allows us to notice, e.g., that some gold scratches copper while some does not. If our theory does not explain this difference, then our theoretical account of the inner properties of gold is incomplete. "This guides us to seek the marks missing from the *concepts* and yet nevertheless contained in the *objects* by which the diversity of the *outer relations* can be explained" (V 135). We should then be able to, e.g., differentiate real gold from fool's gold. Maimon follows his principles stringently here. Even when we are confronted with completely identical objects like water-droplets (ibid, 196ff.) or (we can add) hydrogen atoms, the mere fact that they manifest in different locations in space and time makes us realize that our concepts are incomplete. We do not possess adequate theoretical explanations of their given distributions, and so we return to our concepts, intending to construct more thorough theoretical explanations.

Thus, Maimon develops the schematisms of pure empirical experience, pure mathematical cognition, and natural scientific cognition from the principle of determinability, so that together they make up our a priori system of cognition. On the one hand, this is our systematic a priori cognition of objectivity; on the other hand, objectivity is the *object in general* of this system of cognition. This solves the *aporia* of transcendental logic, which was the problem of obtaining the a priori principles of the object of thought. Moreover, these principles are the categories, which Maimon explicitly derives from this system in the following chapters. However, he finds that he needs to justify these categories with a “transcendental deduction”, since this system of objective cognition also tells us that the object of natural science is *real*: it is determined in itself, outside of thought. What, then, justifies our a priori application of categories, which are pure concepts, to objects which are not concepts, and are in themselves not conceptually structured? This is the explicitly ontological turn that Maimon gives to Kant’s transcendental deduction.

In Chapter 10, Maimon derives the categories straightforwardly from his system of cognition. Importantly, he defines them in a dual way, as both (a) fundamental concepts derived from the principles of thought and (b) “the *elementary predicates* of all real objects” (V 155). For, as Maimon emphasizes, the categories are concepts that capture what real objects *must be* in themselves, should thinking exist in the first place. First, there is the *quantity* of objects: *unity*, *plurality*, and *totality*. With any thought “A is B”, we must presuppose that the given sensible properties we arrange or present in intuition are a *plurality* that we can bring into an intuitive order or *unity*. This must be the case if we are to have any thought, whether merely empirical, mathematical, or natural scientific. Therefore, the categories of quantity are “*conditions* of thinking of an object in general” (V 161). The category of *totality* serves as a transition-point to the categories of quality since it is not a purely intuitive property of an object but a conceptual one. When we conceive of a totality, we affirm that there is such a *reality*. The categories of *quality* are *reality*, *negation*, and *limitation*. On the one hand, Maimon notes, the judgmental forms of affirmation [*Bejahung*], negation [*Verneinung*], and infinite judgment are acts of thought without which we would not have these categories of quality—reality [*Realität*], negation [*Negation*], and limitation. But on the other hand, if there were not *absolutely real* objects that are “beings in themselves given outside of real thinking”, each of which is *not* like all other objects, so that they mutually *limit* each other, then “thinking as an absolute reality” (V 163) could not take place. Thus, the categories of quality are conditioned by this structure of reality, which is the ontological condition of their “cognizability” (V 161). The category of limit then serves as a transition to the categories of *relation* since it refers to relations between objects as *substances*, or determinate realities. The categories of *relation* are *substance and accident* and the *reciprocal determination of substances*. If real objects were not related as *substances and accidents*, we would not be able to move from mere *thoughts* to subsequent *cognition* of objects in terms of relations of determinability. Such cognition also presupposes that substances, with their accidents, are in *reciprocal relations* to each other. In this way, the categories of relation are conditioned by “the possible objects of” real thinking (V 164).²⁶ Finally, we have *modality*. Its categories are *possibility*, *actuality*, and *necessity*. The principles of all cognition imply that some conceptual relations are *possible*, and some are *necessary* (and some are necessarily impossible). What remains is merely our affirmation or denial of those relations with respect to whether or not they are *actual*. This, again, would not be possible were there not actual objects determined in themselves in ways which can be captured by the categories.

Maimon’s transcendental deduction, given in Chapter 11, concludes the derivation. The initial problem was this. We must cognize according to the categories, which are relations of thought we regard as characterizing objects. However, the objects we apply the categories to are not structured *because* of our conceptual system—they are determined in themselves! This is revealed in any natural scientific investigation, since we can always know from it that our truths are both abstract and finite with respect to the concrete and infinitely complex relations of reality. In Wagner’s example, which serves perfectly, the

inference from “all men are mortal, Caius is a man, Caius is mortal”, is formally valid and sound. We can arrive at such a truth thanks alone to the principles of thinking. No object—humanity, mortality, Caius—determines how thinking is able to arrive at such objective cognition; thinking determines itself absolutely in this regard. However, it is essential that we know, as a part of this cognition, that Caius will not die *because of this inference*. Caius will die because of, e.g., a heart attack (Wagner [1959] 1967, p. 182). Thus, Maimon asks about the categories, “How can these *relations* which, when regarded as *objects*, stand in no *relation of determinability* demanded by thinking with the *objects* to which they relate, yet be thought in these *relations* with them?” (V 175) And his answer, which is already evident in the derivation of the categories, is that the categories are justified because without them we would not have been able to ask the question with which the *New Logic* started in the first place. We would not have been able to ask about the truth-conditions of cognition since we would not have had or have been able to have any cognition to ask about. Without this universal use of the categories, “we could not have the *real objects of thinking* which we certainly do have” (V 180–1). Therefore, by validating the categories, Maimon proves that thought, or *the thinking subject*, is the *sufficient condition* of the objective truths it arrives at. Moreover, there are two *necessary conditions* for objective truth. One is formal logic as the doctrine of the formal validity of thought, which we have derived from thought. The other is nature, or the independent existence of objects in the ways stipulated by the categories, since if objects did not exist as beings in themselves in these ways, thinking could not occur.²⁷

6. Morality

Having found in the *New Logic* Maimon’s doctrine of a priori systematic cognition, we turn to his post-1794 axiomatic philosophy. It has four distinct components: morality, natural right, metaphysics, and aesthetics. The “Attempt at a New Presentation of the Morality and Deduction of its Reality”, published 1794 in the *Berlinische Monatsschrift*, is the moral component. There, Maimon establishes that the doctrine of cognition in the *New Logic* is a necessary condition of Kant’s moral philosophy. He also establishes that Kantian morality is a necessary condition of pure cognition. This is what he means by presenting the moral principle and proving its reality. However, he establishes this result quite early on in the article. After doing so, he says:

If the *reality* of the moral principle is now proved, it remains to us to (1) show how this principle, as it has been presented here, is *sufficient* to determine all moral duties; (2) to seek out, beyond this *logical ground of cognition* (the ground of its possibility), its *metaphysical real ground*; and finally, (3) to demonstrate its *use as a fact*”. (VI 420)

Maimon focuses only on the first task in the rest of the article. But in “On the First Principles of Natural Right”, published 1794 in the *Berlinische Monatsschrift* (and again, slightly modified, in 1795 in the *Philosophisches Journal einer Gesellschaft Teutscher Gelehrten*), he focuses on the third task. There, he demonstrates how the conflicted attempt to realize a free political life in the world is a condition for moral behavior. And finally, in the “Prolegomena to a Critique of Practical Reason”, the third part of his final book, the *Critical Investigations into the Human Spirit [Geist]* of 1797, he focuses on the second task, the metaphysical ground of the subject. This establishes the capstone to the *New Logic*. For in the latter, as we know, Maimon arrived, from within his reflection on cognition, at an ontological distinction between the principles of transcendental subjectivity and the principles of nature or the world. The final step of that same reflection is an inquiry into the metaphysical ground of that distinction. And as we will see, metaphysics is inseparably related to aesthetics. Now, we approach Maimon’s axiomatic works by closely reading them in this sequence, beginning with the “Attempt”. We will investigate how his reflection, taken from an axiomatic perspective, unites the axiomatic sciences or disciplines.

Two aspects of Maimon’s “Attempt” stand out. First, he claims that his presentation of morality does not reframe morality but reformulates it, putting the moral law on more

intelligible footing. Just as Kant surpassed Wolff in this regard, Maimon claims to surpass Kant, for Wolff's formula for moral behavior was "act so that you promote the perfection of yourself and others to the highest possible degree" (VI 276). But one must be skeptical of this rule. For in cases where one's own possible perfection conflicts with that of others, why should one give any regard for the perfection of the other? Why should one aim at the "greatest sum of perfection?" (VI 277) Kant's formula may be read as an attempt to answer this deficit. It is "act so that the maxim of your will can always be valid as the principle of a universal law" (ibid). But one must again be skeptical. For the motive for this kind of action is restricted to it. The motive is "respect for [that very same] moral law". Thus, Kant presents a circular genesis of the moral feeling so that it is, barring a sufficient explanation, only an "artificial feeling" that could not persuasively be said to ever counteract "all other natural feelings". Maimon claims that the presentation of his formula will make good this deficit. It will provide a real foundation for the motivation behind Kant's moral principle. Second, Maimon (VI 279–85) rather closely copies Kant's text of Section I of the *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*. He begins with "It is impossible to think of anything at all in the world, or indeed even beyond it, that could be considered good without limitation except *striving after cognition of the truth*", replacing Kant's "a good will" with "striving after cognition of the truth". And he continues Kant's argument almost verbatim for many pages with this substitution. The effect is persuasive since it makes at least as much sense in this new form.²⁸

How does this rhetorical substitution, according to which the highest good, at least within the world, is "striving after cognition of the truth", improve Kant's account of moral motivation? Maimon makes one basic argument in the article. He isolates it and repeats it as a prerequisite to his article on natural rights.²⁹ We must reconstruct it since it is not clear in either version. It proceeds as follows. There are two relevant synthetic a priori propositions we take as premises. "(1) A reasonable being determines itself in a necessary way to think according to laws of truth. (2) A reasonable being determines itself in a necessary way to act according to laws of duty" (VI 290–91). The first is "given as a fact of consciousness". For this self-determination is something we actually observe, which proves its possibility. However, the second premise should be doubted, so far as we do not have a sufficient concept of the motive that may lie behind our self-determination to act not just according to but *necessarily* according to, i.e., *for the sake of* what is demanded by duty. Nor can we claim to actually observe this self-determination to confirm its possibility. Hypothetically, to act for the sake of duty would be to act according to "the representation of the necessary limitation of the will of a reasonable being by the possible will of every other reasonable being". A moral being would unconditionally limit its will for others and their self-determination. To cure our skepticism about the possibility of this will, we find a "common essential property" shared by the two objects of these two kinds of self-determination, namely truth and duty. This property is "universal validity". Both truth and duty are objects (the one of cognition, the other of the will) that are by definition universally valid—valid for all subjects. Maimon then reasons that, since it is impossible "to cognize anything as *true* that cannot be valid as true for every other reasonable being", then, since the very same property of universal validity is also essential to duty, it is impossible to "will anything from duty which cannot be willed by all other reasonable beings" (VI 291–92). He concludes that a reasonable being self-determines only in a universally valid way, which means for the sake of truth and for the sake of duty, both. This he takes to "prove the *reality* of the moral principle" (VI 292).

Can we interpret the argument so that it becomes clear and persuasive? And, again, how is declaring that the highest good is "striving after cognition of the truth" instrumental here? Let us begin by examining the first premise, "A reasonable being determines itself in a necessary way to think according to laws of truth". This self-determination refers to the reflection of the *New Logic* now taken from an axiomatic perspective. To see this, recall how the *New Logic* depicts theoretical thought as dual: thought reflects and is reflected upon. This reflexive self-analysis results in a complete account of the a priori principles of

thought and their objective application in cognition. Importantly, cognition is an absolutely infinite task. The subject can only infinitely approximate and never complete its concept of reality. It can only register attempts to introduce complete concepts of reality, like the world-soul, as violations of the principles of thought by which it pursues this absolutely infinite task. And it is precisely when facing this task that the duality of thought in theoretical reflection reconfigures itself. It becomes *transcendental subjectivity* characterized by an intrinsic bifurcation into an *axiomatic relation*. On the one hand, the subject characterized by the principles of absolutely infinite cognition is an unconditioned task for itself. On the other hand, the subject that is concerned with the validity of each single and finite thought is that which *faces* this unconditioned task, having it before itself.³⁰ Characterized by this bifurcation into the conditioned and unconditioned, the transcendental subject “*strives* for the cognition of the truth”. Thus, Maimon holds cognition of the truth to be the highest *value* of the subject. It is the absolute value of *unconditioned* striving. In other words, although the human being needs to think and cognize to live in the world, the human being as reasonable is *essentially* characterized by the striving for truth *unconditioned* by any selfish or societal want or need. Maimon calls this our “drive [*Trieb*] to cognition”. We are conscious of this drive for the truth, which is not conditioned by this or that fact or truth, e.g., by whether this or that particular theorem or fact is true. “It is so little satisfied with the determination of an object as with the reaching of an end or aim, but it strives always after new cognitions” (VI 295). Moreover, when the subject proves new truths by its autonomous striving to cognize, it is universally the case that it experiences a happiness [*Glückseligkeit*] better called bliss or joy [*Seligkeit*] (VII 257ff.), because the power to cognize new truths stems solely from the subject and not from circumstances. We have this undeniable pleasure in every such occurrence. It is never equaled by merely copying an existing proof. Moreover, it is selfless, and thus by definition it is an intersubjective feeling. The joy in cognition is Maimon’s material a priori value that motivates the transcendental subject. Finally, with the transcendental subject bifurcated into the two sides of the striving subject, he argues for the *reality* of the transcendental subject. It must *exist*—not as an empirical or metaphysical substance, but as what forms itself under the totality of its principles and can, in principle, attain ever more valid cognition. Therefore, Maimon needs “a real metaphysical ground” (VI 420) of this subjectivity.

Depicting the transcendental subject as the axiomatic relation helps us clarify other essential terminology, namely of freedom, will, desire, and morality. First, freedom. According to the *New Logic*, when the subject determines truths, it determines *new* truths. Since thinking always involves hypothetical or theoretical work, it invents possibilities not given to it but through which it nevertheless reveals objects of cognition as they are in themselves. In this creativity, thought must forever correct and refine itself. Freedom for Maimon is freedom to determine new truths. But with this there is also a larger freedom of the self to determine itself to its unconditioned task—to strive to develop itself according to its unconditioned drive to the truth. This leads to Maimon’s definitions of will, desire, and morality, for there is an exercise of will in all cognition of the truth. Maimon defines the will as what “immediately relates to the action of the subject, which it thinks as the means to the state of the subject to be brought about by it” (VI 296–97). He says that one never has a will for an *object* but only for an *action* that the subject can do. This seems odd, but it must be correct. According to Wagner, one does not will an apple. One wills *to eat* the apple.³¹ One wants what *does not exist*, wanting to bring it about; one wills to abolish hunger with this object. In the case of conditioned wills like this, Maimon calls the will a *desire*. However, when the will is for truth unconditionally, it is synonymous with the drive to cognition, and Maimon calls it “the will in general” (VI 292ff.). Since he obtains this concept of the free will in general from his reflection, Maimon argues that “the mere form of the will of a reasonable being can be represented simply by reason and thus is no object of the senses, and thus it is not subordinated to appearances” (VI 307). Morality, moreover, is a science of the “will in general” (VI 292).

This clarifies the meaning of Maimon's first premise: "a reasonable being determines itself in a necessary way to think according to laws of truth". And it clarifies his main argument. According to it, the reasonable being who determines itself unconditionally according to laws of truth must determine itself unconditionally according to the laws of duty, too, because truth and duty are defined by being universally valid. While they are different objects of theoretical and practical reason, respectively, they share the same essential property of universal validity, so that when one of them is in play, so is the other. They are necessary conditions of each other. To see this, we argue from both directions, from the practical and the theoretical.

First, consider the problematic demand of duty by itself. Consider Maimon's statement of Kant's categorical imperative: "act so that the maxim of your will can always be valid as the principle of a universal law". For Kant, a good will is unconditionally good not because of its content but because of its form. The form must be universal, and it is universal if its maxim can be universalized. E.g., as a banker, one cannot claim a bank deposit for oneself if the owner has died, and no one else knows that there are instructions to bequeath it to a someone else (this is Kant's example, which Maimon uses at VI 309ff.), for if one universalized one's maxim in this case, clearly no one would make deposits anymore. Banking would suffer or disappear. But importantly, Kant is not concerned about such consequences. Kant argues that the action is contradictory because it presupposes that there is, and will continue to be, the practice of deposit-making, banking, and promise-keeping in general. There is a logical contradiction in that one cannot universalize both this theft and standard business practices together. There is a moral contradiction in that, as Jay Bernstein puts it, one is "free riding on the good will of everyone else. To be Kantianly immoral is to be a moral parasite" (Bernstein 2003, p. 409). However, one obvious problem is that this sheer formality implies a relativity of values. If banking or, more critically, promise-keeping were not universally valued, then this specific formal difficulty could not arise in the first place. The success of the argument presupposes that promise-keeping and truth-telling are unconditional values a priori. However, Maimon's axiomatic relation defines subjectivity by the unconditioned task of striving to cognize the truth. We value truth intrinsically in our free self-cultivation and do not want to be deceived or to deceive. Acting from duty has as a necessary condition unconditional striving for cognition of the truth.³²

Second, we can proceed from the direction of theoretical cognition. On the face of it, it seems possible to act immorally and then, knowing about it, consider the resultant cognition intrinsically valuable. This could be for personal pleasure or for some societal gain, e.g., conducting non-consensual biological testing. Valuing such cognition does not seem to require an unconditioned commitment to duty. However, in these sorts of cases, one can never act for the sake of cognition unconditionally. One can only act from personally or socially conditioned interests, that is, from interests in perverted knowledge. It becomes clear that one can only be truly autonomous in cognition—reflecting on cognition in itself and aiming at the truth unconditionally—if one strives for it *selflessly*, which implies the ability to be together with others as equals in this unconditional effort and to share in the joy of it. Striving for cognition of the truth has as a necessary condition acting out from duty. Maimon's thesis that the highest good is "striving after cognition of the truth" is, therefore, crucial for his main argument.

The result of Maimon's argument is that there is only one kind of striving characteristic of the subject, and theoretical and practical reason, or cognition and the rational will, are two different but intertwining components of that striving. This justifies Maimon's concluding argument in the *New Logic*, where he claims that "*Striving after totality* in our cognition is [only one] particular type of striving after the *highest perfection* in general" (V 224–25). But it is upon our general "striving after the *highest perfection* that religion and morality must be grounded". Here, he accomplishes the reflexive grounding of morality. In Maimon's language, the theoretical component of striving characterizes the subject as "a Hobbesian monarch, an absolute law-giver", (VI 317ff.) since for theoretical reason the fact that a cognition is proved objective (by "reflection on oneself a priori") means it is universally valid

as well. There is no private truth here. But the practical component of striving characterizes the subject as “a member of a perfect republic” who has to see if his will is valid for every other rational being before he can consider it to be suitable to be objective, i.e., determinative of reality. Moreover, the successful exercise of practical reason results in a person being ascribed, by himself and others, “dignity”, even “kingly dignity”, since he or she gives practical laws that others must follow. Thus, there is only one striving of the transcendental subject. In it, pure theoretical and pure practical reason are reciprocally dependent. With this, Maimon improves upon both Wolffian and Kantian formulas of morality. Additionally, he makes a convincing argument against Reinhold’s moral philosophy (VI 278–79), for Reinhold had argued that, if we are truly free beings, we must have “absolute freedom” in a highest “uninterested drive” in which we have the free ability to choose between an “interested drive” and an “uninterested drive”. Of course, Maimon agrees with this, in that we can always ask “should I be interested in this or that?” Specifically, it is necessarily possible for us to be able to choose freely between either (a) a selfish or interested desire or (b) our selfless or uninterested unconditioned task of perfection. But this very choice, when we pose it, *is itself a reflection*. It is a reflection on the thought of possible wills and actions. Therefore, it must be subsumed under the infinite task given to the subject in speculative reflection and measured against the corresponding axiomatic relation. And because we reflect on the “uninterested drive”, as our supposedly ultimate standpoint, Maimon correctly dismisses Reinhold’s philosophy of morality. Since it can only fall under our a priori reflection, it is not ultimately satisfactory.

7. Natural Right

The subject characterized by the absolute striving to cognize the truth must, by virtue of what it is, unconditionally rule out all activity that could harm that striving, and it must act for the sake of other subjects who have original and equal interest in this effort. With this, Maimon concludes that the moral principle is real. Moral motivation is grounded in the subject depicted by the *New Logic*. However, he then wants “to demonstrate its *use* as a *fact*” (VI 420). The sense of this becomes clearest at the end of *On the First Grounds of Natural Right*. In its penultimate section on civil society, Maimon writes that, unlike many natural right theorists, he does not care whether people are, in the state of nature, evil like tigers or pious like lambs. He only asks, “how *should we conceive humanity*, not in order to be able to derive the mere [contingent] *possibility of a civil society*, but in order to derive the *necessity of it from morality and from [the science of] natural right?*” (V 356). In other words, for Maimon, we can only conceive of “natural rights” when we reflect a priori on what occurs when the moral subject needs to live, and make free space for itself, qua moral subject in the natural world. With this account of natural rights, we will then be able to infer what civil society *must be*, and not merely what it can be under contingent historical circumstances, as the organization that safeguards the moral freedom of the subject, or its ability to pursue its unconditioned interests, in the world. Thus, human striving has another component: striving to secure external relations of *freedom* between human persons.

Maimon deals with a limited selection of natural rights in his article. He devotes sections to the rights of property, promises and contracts, testaments (wills), and—since these are natural rights—the corresponding rights to coerce those who do not uphold their duties relative to these rights. The right to independence or personal discretion in the disposal of one’s property and the making of promises for the benefit of others, as well as in the defense of these rights, is itself a natural right. In all of this, Maimon remains quite close to Moses Mendelssohn’s account of natural right in Section I of *Jerusalem* (Mendelssohn 1983, pp. 45–56). For there, Mendelssohn argues that the natural person, by definition, is directed to perfection, and therefore is morally bound to keep the promises he or she makes and is morally permitted to redress failures to keep promises. Maimon thinks the same way. He argues, against Fichte, as the anonymous author of the *Contribution to the Correction of the Public’s Judgments on the French Revolution*, that we are naturally bound to either keep our contracts or to change them by agreeing to a new contract. However, he

bases his account of the direction of persons to perfection on the transcendental philosophy of the *New Logic*, rather than like Mendelssohn on Wolffian dogmatic metaphysics.

This new philosophical foundation results in a new perspective on natural rights. First of all, it entails that the natural right of the subject, because it is characterized by unconditioned striving, is unlimited. As in *Genesis*, the natural subject or person has dominion over the Earth and its creatures. But this also means that *each and every person* has *the same* unlimited natural right in the world. This results in the essential possibility of primeval clashes over the natural resources for which each and every subject has unlimited right. For example, when multiple persons want to possess or use the same natural resource, then each person's will is "something positive (morally possible)" in itself, but in this collision "they reciprocally negate their (moral) efficacies" so that "no positive moral determination (no positive right) remains left over" (VI 331). Therefore, in such a case each person has a natural right to use physical force. But this conflict has contradictory results. On the one hand, it results in the necessity of right behavior, which is in turn the condition for the possibility of moral behavior. For if one party is the victor, then because his natural right is unlimited, his possession must be deemed universally right. The other parties have the universal duty to respect that right. The victor has "positive right" to self-defense and the defeated party has a "positive duty" not to resist that right (V 332). But on the other hand, because each party possesses an unlimited right, it is also true that the defeated party "always has the right, if he has increased his strength in the subsequent period, to use his strength against the one who first had taken possession of the disputed thing and to wrest it from him for himself" (V 350).

This fundamental contradiction obviously destroys natural rights, making them altogether impossible. In order to preserve natural rights, it is necessary for people to recognize, or to be coaxed to recognize, both (a) that natural right is infinite and unconditioned for each person and (b) that each person must limit his natural right for the sake of all other people. For Maimon, this recognition is operative naturally; it is an essential part of making promises or contracts, and this is why he argues that contracts must be fulfilled or altered by a subsequent contract—and if they are not, that we have the right to discretionary action for coercion or recompense. But, from the standpoint of civil society and what it should know, this recognition is also the content of the *science* of natural right, which Maimon defines as "the science of the necessary and universally valid *apparent exceptions* to the moral law which are determined *a priori* by [the moral law]" (VI 328). In other words, it is the science both of the self-contradictions of natural right, which make rights and therefore morality impossible, and of the means to resolve the self-contradictions constructively.

Maimon explores the basics of this science of natural right. Here are some examples in order of importance. First, he deals with the right to property. Without legitimate property, we could only have a "negative universal validity of the will", i.e., the self-contradictory state described above. But with it, we can have "a positive universal validity of the will" (VI 340). Thus, the recognition of the right to property is the first condition of a civil society. Without it, there is no right, and with no right, no possibility of shared moral behavior. Hence, "the right to property is the necessary condition of all morality" (VI 340). Second, there is the natural basis of punishment. Here, Maimon anticipates Hegel's theory of coercion and punishment. If a criminal attempts to seize rightfully owned property, his will is expressed as a "minus" or a negative. It is not a positive right. However, since the will to defend against the theft is also a "minus", since it is directed against another will, it is in this case "a minus minus (negation of a negation), which is always something positive" (VI 332). This natural logic, when transferred to the sphere of civil society, would justify the Hegelian rationale behind lawful punishment. That is, the criminal affirms the conditions of the existence of freedom when he commits a crime. He desires a positive right, but positive right only exists in the context of society, which he has injured. Therefore, a lawful punishment is the right of the criminal himself, or something owed to him as his own right. As Wagner reminds us (Wagner [1959] 1967, p. 309), this theory depends on

what Maimon originally ascribes to the subject, namely an unconditioned interest in its own self-cultivation.

Third, Maimon explores the relation between contracts and civil society. Importantly, he writes:

The real *social contract*, if one understands by it an *exchange* or *reciprocal transference of rights*, is not first made in the *establishment of civil society*, but it is already necessary in the *state of nature* as the *a priori* determined relation of men to each other, through the moral law. (VI 357)

We already, as natural persons, have a social contract, in that we naturally make promises and contracts that bind us when we exchange property, for example. We transfer rights to each other. Thus, we are, as Aristotle says, political beings by nature. When we join together in a civil society, we constitute, at the minimum, an executive function by means of which we carry out our general will, as opposed to the merely arbitrary or mob-like will of all.³³ But we do not do so by transferring or alienating our natural rights to those who hold political functions, as if the power of society should originate in such a transference. Rather, Maimon argues, the power of society is its own and predates both civil society and the state; each person only transfers his “right in general” (VI 359) to those with authority or a special political function, by which he means our discretionary freedom to coerce or demand recompense from other individuals. This is an important argument in that Maimon respects the unlimited or infinite natural right of individuals as something inalienable. Evidently a republic, by his lights, can be valid only if it has no power that is contrary or deleterious to those rights. Ultimately, Maimon establishes a minimal basis for a transcendental philosophy or science of natural rights as an autonomous discipline that treats its object “purely, separated from morality on the one hand and from positive right on the other hand” (VI 328), for its subject matter is the external relations between people that follow a priori from the emergence of transcendental subjectivity into the material world, knowledge of which is necessary for the just establishment of civil society.

8. Metaphysics, Religion, and Art

Maimon concludes the *New Logic* by arguing that striving is rooted in human nature, in that it essentially characterizes human nature as what it is. Theoretical and practical reason are two aspects of striving according to which we aim at truth and goodness. And it is necessary to divide practical reason further into two autonomous aspects, inasmuch as we separately aim at freedom. After having studied the “Attempt at a New Presentation” and “The First Principles of Natural Right”, we can understand Maimon’s argument better, since we can understand how the speculative reflection of the *New Logic*, while obviously a product of theoretical reason, is also motivated by the striving for the good and for freedom. These divisions of striving, like that of thought into conceiving, judging, and inferring, only follow *from* the reflection; afterwards, we see more clearly how it is that the *human being* asks the question of truth. However, Maimon makes one more fundamental division (or two, counting aesthetics) of the human drive to perfection. The final sentence of the *New Logic* is, “it is upon this *striving* after the *highest perfection* that *religion* and *morality* must be grounded” (V 226). This sounds as if Maimon intends to ground both religion and morality in one argument. However, the tasks are quite distinct. For Maimon evidently believes it is possible to ground morality on transcendental philosophy’s account of human striving. However, it would seem quite another matter to ground *religion*, especially Judaism, on this subjective reflection. Religion, as Judaism, means absolute *obedience* to God, the Absolute. God holds the whole of creation under His sway and has made an explicit covenant with the chosen people who have since upheld it as the strongest of traditions. Subjective reflection on principles of truth, together with all “Greek wisdom”, may seem, not just at first glance but according to the whole tradition, worse than worthless.³⁴ Nevertheless, Maimon argues for an a priori harmony between philosophy and religion, via the age-old discipline of metaphysics. For after obtaining a picture of the ethical subject in the “Attempt at a New Presentation”, he declares his intention to seek

out, for the subject in general, “beyond this *logical ground of cognition* (the ground of its possibility), its *metaphysical real ground*” (VI 420). Fichte wrote to Reinhold that Maimon had “completely *overturned* the entire *Kantian* philosophy as it has been understood by everyone until now, including you, and I am prepared to show it” (Fichte 1988, pp. 383–84). We have never known the precise meaning of these words, but the most fitting sense would be gained for them by applying them here—where Maimon, by grounding the Kantian philosophy on a speculative reflection, subverts it by setting a firm *theoretical* foundation for metaphysics, in striking contrast to the *practical* metaphysics which Kant had favored.

Maimon develops his account of metaphysics partially in the *New Logic* and partially in the *Prolegomena to a Critique of Practical Reason* (the penultimate part of the 1797 Critical Investigations of the Human Spirit, his last book). Chapters 12–13 of the *New Logic* tackle the problem of Kant’s Transcendental Dialectic, for Maimon is, assuredly, a Kantian in the *New Logic*. His principles of truth are not like Christian Wolff’s principles of truth. They are not transcendent principles of beings qua beings but transcendental principles of objectively valid thought. Most strikingly, Maimon holds his principle of determinability to be the true expression of the “principle of sufficient reason” (V 20), turning the central pillar of Wolff’s metaphysics into the central principle of subjective thought itself. More precisely, Maimon’s argument in *New Logic* means that the *transcendental subject* is itself the principle of sufficient reason; for, in striving for cognition of the truth, it is the sufficient condition of the existence of all of its truths in cognition. But then what does Maimon do with the Transcendental Dialectic, which is widely thought to cease the possibility of metaphysics? In Chapters 12–13, Maimon employs his theory of thinking to defuse the Dialectic, particularly the Antinomies of Pure Reason. Then, he gives a positive metaphysics in his *Prolegomena to a Critique of Practical Reason*. This becomes the final stage of his transcendental philosophy. Maimon uses his account of transcendental freedom of cognition and the will from the *New Logic* and the “Attempt” to prove the existence of God and immortality. He does not make them into Kantian practical postulates but infers to them via theoretical argument.

Maimon’s response to Kant’s Transcendental Dialectic in Chapters 12 and 13 of the *New Logic* is as follows. Kant takes the faculty of reason to be the faculty of logical inferences. But he also takes it to be the faculty of principles (A299/B356), by which he means that reason *also* investigates the principles of the validity of logical inference. Our reason seeks to account for itself. In doing so, reason naturally tries to base the validity of inference on a priori metaphysical principles of the soul, the world, or God. This makes sense, since logical inference needs to be valid a priori for everything we could possibly apply it to, and the soul, the world, and God seem to be the only viable candidates, singly or together, which can account a priori for the universal and necessary applicability of inferences in cognition. Kant, of course, critiques this traditional metaphysical approach. And Maimon joins him. However, Maimon critiques Kant as well, for he cannot admit reason as the faculty of principles. He cannot admit this because, according to the speculative reflection in the *New Logic*, the *whole* human intellect reflects on the principles of cognition. This *results* in the normal division of thought-acts into conceiving, judging, and inferring. Therefore, reason is only the “the capacity to *infer*” (V 200), but it is not the capacity of principles. “How far *reason* must go in progressively or regressively inferring is undetermined by this function [of reason]” (ibid).

Having established his own concept of reason, Maimon agrees with Kant’s conclusion in the Paralogisms of the Transcendental Dialectic and denies the validity of any inference to the human soul as a substance. For Maimon’s speculative reflection has already confirmed that, while we necessarily posit the thinking subject as the first element of thinking, we cannot cognize it as it might be *in itself*, as we do with other objects of thought (V 207–9, 15–16), for we cannot cognize the undetermined “I”; we only cognize anything, the “I” included, as a concrete individual by presenting it as determined.

But Maimon refuses to follow Kant’s argument in the Antinomies. The Antinomies, like the Paralogisms and the Ideal of Pure Reason, depend on Kant’s specification that reason (1) seeks the universal condition, as the very first premise, of all of its inferences

and (2) presupposes that “when the conditioned is given, then so is the whole series of conditions subordinated one to the other, which is itself unconditioned, also given (i.e., contained in the object and its connection)” (A307-8/B365). Kant claims that this is why reason makes, from out of the forms of its inferences, its metaphysical ideas of the soul, the world, and God. In the Antinomies, Kant wants to defuse metaphysical cosmology. He does so by showing that reason can make four sets of ideas by inferring about the world a priori, but that each set is contradictory. He concludes from this that it is invalid to use inferences beyond experience and to attempt to validate inference as such by traditional metaphysical means. However, in the second stage of this argument, Kant uses reason, again, to resolve the contradictions in a way that establishes a priori the boundaries of the use of reason, making the metaphysical ideas into regulative ideas that guide our cognition. Leaving aside the difficulties of Kant’s argument, Maimon cannot begin to accept it, since reason for him simply does not seek for the universal condition of its premises and therefore it does not assume that the unconditioned condition is given in the first place. Nor, then, does reason resolve this conflict with itself. As Maimon says, “it truly must be an *unreasonable reason* which can end up *in opposition with itself*” (V 210). Instead, he holds that Kant’s metaphysical arguments in the Antinomies are not reasonable at all. They are errors of the imagination. The transcendental subject errs by “confusing an *extension* [in the use of reason] *that is not given* . . . with an *extension that cannot be given*, and *indeterminacy* is confused with the *totality of the extension*” (V 201–2). To explain by example, if we happened to lack (as we do) some very powerful *physical* explanation of the phenomena that we face in the world, we would err by confusing the theoretical cognition we do not have—which is not given—with a *metaphysical* theory that would attempt to explain the unconditioned totality of the world—which cannot be given. We would not commit an error of reason, since it is unreasonable to substitute some absolute and unconditioned theory where reason can only accommodate something conditioned, but an error “of imagination” (V 202).

The four sets of contradictory ideas of reason Kant finds are, when paraphrased: (1a) the world has a beginning in time (and a limit in space) and (1b) the world is infinite in time (and space); (2a) the world consists of simplest parts and (2b) the world does not contain simplest parts; (3a) the world consists of phenomena both freely and mechanically caused and (3b) the world consists solely of phenomena mechanically caused; (4a) the world has an absolutely necessary being as a part or cause of it and (4b) the world has no absolutely necessary cause. Maimon defuses Kant’s attempt to infer to these four sets of contradictions by making objections which, “like the Polish *nie pozwalam, decide* nothing but merely *suspend* our judgment over these dark matters” (V 210–11).

We consider in detail only Maimon’s response to the First Antinomy (V 211–15). He first argues that Kant does not prove 1a), the thesis that the world has a *finite* beginning in time. Kant believes it possible to prove this thesis by arguing that if the world had *no* finite beginning, then an infinite time would have gone by already, which is contradictory. But, Maimon argues, there is a fatal error of the imagination in this proof. It confuses “absolutely infinite time” (which is implied, since otherwise there would be no contradiction) and “time gone by.” No one could reasonably argue that an *absolutely* infinite time has *gone by*, since to affirm any “going by” is to admit by definition an elapsing or a “going by” in a *finite* time. Since “goings by” are all finite, with such a term one can only admit of *indeterminately* many “goings by.” And by definition, one can never cease an indeterminate searching for a beginning to times going by. Therefore, there is no contradiction in the antithesis by which to prove the thesis. Importantly, however, this means that it is *not disproved* that the world has an *absolutely* infinite extension in time and space. For we do not say that such an absolute time has gone by, but it may exist. Second, Maimon argues that Kant does not prove 1b), the antithesis that the world has no *finite* beginning in time. Kant believes that one can prove the antithesis by arguing that if there were a finite beginning in time, then there would be an “empty time” prior to that beginning, which would also be impossible. But, Maimon argues, there is also a fatal error of the imagination here that confuses absolute and indefinite infinities. It is true that there cannot be a finite beginning

to something indefinitely extending into the past, of course, but this does not disprove an *absolute* beginning or creation of time itself, along with the world. Consequently, Maimon defeats Kant's intention to prove that *neither* thesis nor antithesis can be true because they are both proved true against the other. Rather, the attempts to prove them true raise two stronger metaphysical possibilities. Maimon ends by forcing the Kantian to admit that the Antinomy disproves neither the possibility of an absolutely infinite time allotted to the world nor the possibility of an absolutely infinite or divine creation of the temporal world *ex nihilo*. Both these options remain possible, and the fact that they *both* remain possible does not disprove either or both of them.

Maimon then demonstrates the same error of the imagination in each subsequent pairing of thesis and antithesis, showing ("like the Polish *nie pozwalam*") each time that Kant does not prove any of them by disproving its opposite. Moreover, certain absolute options, while not affirmed, are not disproved either. For the Second Antinomy, Maimon reasons that there could be found, in physical explanation, absolutely simple particles. But at the same time, mathematical space, as the space of our pure mathematical cognition, must be considered absolutely infinitely divisible. For the Third and Fourth Antinomies, Maimon argues that, on the one hand, the world could be (as for Spinoza) an absolute whole that is necessary as such but whose infinite parts are each contingent. On the other hand, it is also possible that there is (completely opposed to Spinoza) "an *absolutely necessary cause outside the world*" (V 224). As a free cause, God could create all beings *including* time itself, absolutely, as Maimon states in the First Antinomy. The basic point of this section is that we cannot possibly tell from merely reasoning about the world as such whether it is "simply independent or requires a transcendent ground for its being" (Wagner [1959] 1967, p. 414). The answer to this question must come from elsewhere. This conclusion seems more devastating to traditional metaphysics than Kant's Transcendental Dialectic.

Maimon then gives his answer to the question of the absolute in his 1797 *Prolegomena*. For if this answer cannot come from thought about the world, it can come from the reflection begun in the *New Logic*. There, as we have seen, the thinking subject concludes that it applies its categories to beings that exist in themselves, independent of thought. It justifies itself in this. Maimon then emphasizes the strangeness of this fact, which makes the subject, as a determining cause in the world, "the greatest *secret of nature*" (VII 239). He analyzes the interaction of thought and will in cognition. When we have a true thought, we produce a universally valid concept which, simultaneously, "according to its *presentation* can only be *individual*"³⁵ (ibid). That is, we simultaneously generate a "*reality in the sense-world*" (VII 240). Now, when we take an axiomatic perspective on thinking, we find the subject bifurcating. On the one hand, there is the finite subject, dependent upon what it discovers in the world. And on the other hand, there is the absolute subject which gives itself, as finite, the unconditional task of objective cognition. In the same act of cognition, the will of this striving subject is universally valid and objective, yet it brings forth a new concept that we present in the sensible world, e.g., in the imagination or on paper. This account of our free determination of nature in all sensible presentations of cognition, which is unlike mechanistic causality in that it brings about hitherto nonexistent determinations and possibilities, is Maimon's "positive concept of freedom". The point is that the transcendental subject is not just absolutely responsible for all of its determinations in cognition *a priori*, but that it constitutes absolutely free *existing* individuals:

Thinking is an *absolutely free action of the cognitive capacity* which is determined not by *natural laws* but by *laws of the cognitive capacity itself a priori*. The *will* related to thinking (the will to think) is also determined not by the *object which is thought* but by the *form of thinking a priori* (before the actual thinking of this object). Thus, we have an *instance* of a free will in general. (VII 242)

The transcendental subject as an *existing instance* of freely cognizing will becomes the final *metaphysical* problem for reflection. The subject realizes that it is absolute with respect to cognition of the truth, but that the natural world that it cognizes exists absolutely independent of it. Thus, it has this dilemma. As an absolute being, it does not owe its

own existence to itself. But it does not owe its existence to the natural world either, even though it is a being of nature. Its existence as an absolute being is uniquely conditional. As Wagner puts it, it knows that “if the subject exists, then it exists as an absolute. But what is the ground for the existence of the subject, if the subject, this absolute, is *not* the required ground?” (Wagner [1959] 1967, p. 415). The premises allow only one answer, arrived at by a *via negativa*. If this ground is not the subject or the world, then it must be a transcendent ground. Since the transcendent ground grounds the “instance” of the “absolutely free” subject, it cannot fail to be an *absolutely existing* ground. That is, since it grounds both the subject and the world in different ways, but the subject, as part of the world, exists contingently, then the transcendent ground, God, cannot fail to exist in and by itself, subsisting independently of the existences that it grounds. Thus, Maimon’s arguments decisively affirm God’s creation of the world *ex nihilo*, the possibility of which, in the *New Logic*, he left open: “our reflection leads us beyond our own cognition to the proof of the existence of such a Being” (VII 249). Moreover, the facts that God, not the world, is the ground of the existence of the transcendental subject, and that the subject poses an infinite task for itself, allows Maimon to argue, also by *via negativa*, that since there is nothing opposed to the “persistence of the higher capacity of cognition”, and since we must assume God to approve of our infinite self-cultivation, then the “immortality of the soul” (*ibid*) is possible (at least as “a discrete act of moral hope” (Cohen 2021, p. 143)).

Given Maimon’s proof of God, we can return to the *New Logic* with a better grasp of its metaphysical argumentation, for in its Preface, Maimon claims that God must neither be isolated from nature completely nor equated with it (V xix-xx). He also claims that “Without *divinity* no *world* can be *thought*, but without the *world* the *divinity* cannot be *cognized*” (V xix). This makes sense only given his argument that a condition of our capacity of thought is the world’s existence independent of us, without which we could not cognize God as transcendent ground. However, can we attain *greater* cognition of God, i.e., of God’s inner attributes? Maimon briefly discusses this at the end of the *New Logic*. He repeats that human striving is a whole comprised of strivings for truth, goodness, freedom, and “*beauty*” (V 225). But beauty is something new! Maimon then argues that we have true metaphysical cognition of God as the transcendent ground and as the end of infinite striving. But this also means that we desire a “*representation*” of God as the “*goal of striving*”.³⁶ Inevitably, therefore, we produce representations of God via the newly coined “*transcendent imagination*”. If these representations are taken as cognition of God, they are necessarily “*false*”. However, they must belong to the sole remaining way we schematize reality: *the aesthetic*. Flach formulates this schematism as T^t/M^t (Flach 1963, p. 164ff). This stands for the total conceptual determination of the intuitive manifold for the production of a sensible *singularity* as an *artwork*. An artwork must express something exemplary of human experience; it must have a truth of its own; ultimately, it must be a response to the mystery of the transcendent ground. \textcircled{P}

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Notes

¹ Kuntze (1912), p. 5. “. . .wohl dem Hauptwerk Maimons”.

² See Maimon (2018b) for Quinn’s English translation of the “Attempt”.

³ See Maimon (2021) for Nance and Yonover’s English translation of the “First Grounds of Natural Right”.

⁴ (Maimon 1965–1976). Cited as volume number plus page number. Translations my own.

- 5 Cohen (2021), p. 148: “Research . . . will have to take on an entirely different character from that which dominates the market today before Maimon’s merits, which run somewhat deeper, will gain recognition”.
- 6 As in the classic studies by Kuntze (1912), Cassirer (1920), Kroner (1961), Gueroult (1929, [1930] 1982), Atlas (1964), Bergman (1967), and in the collection in Freudenthal (2003). Things are shifting with Elon (2021) and Schmid (2022).
- 7 Ak 22: 479. Kant (1993), p. 135.
- 8 Ultimately, the *Essay* suffered from a third-man problem. Maimon needed to account for how it is possible to think our own understanding in two different ways, as infinite and finite, in order to in turn account for the possibility of the Kantian finite intellect. But his principles could only allow an ad infinitum approach to this justification. Fichte seems to have adopted Maimon’s problematic in the *Essay* and attempted to solve it by the *fait accompli* of Faustian practical striving in his *Wissenschaftslehre* of 1794. Beiser (2016), pp. 50–51. Maimon explicit recognized the *Essay* as a failure at III 455n.
- 9 Maimon’s 1797 article “Pragmatic History of the Concept of Philosophy” (VII 274–405) argues that the history of philosophy is shaped by the attempt to reconcile “cognition of the absolute” (God’s cognition) with “absolute cognition” (justified human cognition).
- 10 From the *Beylagen* to the second edition of Jacobi’s *On the Doctrine of Spinoza in Letters to Herr Moses Mendelssohn*.
- 11 Maimon’s chemical analogy can, like much of his language, be traced back to Kant. In the Architectonic, Kant called for a critically purified metaphysics in this way: “What chemists do in analyzing materials, what mathematicians do in their pure theory of magnitude, the philosopher is even more obliged to do, so that he can securely determine the proper value and influence of the advantage that a special kind of cognition has over the aimless use of the understanding”. (A842/B870).
- 12 The term “speculative” distinguishes the reflection from formal logic and from transcendental logic of the categories; it transcends yet immanently unites both. See Wagner ([1959] 1967), p. 149, for “absolute or speculative logic”.
- 13 See Modrego (2021) for the *Categories* as such a propaedeutic.
- 14 For the author’s English translation plus annotation, see Maimon (2020).
- 15 Wagner ([1959] 1967), p. 100. This reconstruction is, in all of its sections, deeply indebted to Hans Wagner’s work. Wagner’s reflection, like Maimon’s, directs itself to the principles of the thought-object or “noema,” which are likewise obtained by resolving the following *aporia* of contradiction. And, like Maimon’s, it grounds the axiomatic relation of transcendental subjectivity and culminates in metaphysics as final philosophy.
- 16 Ibid, pp. 101–4.
- 17 Maimon insists that analyticity, for him, is also ampliative (V 29, 123f., 174, 402f.). Like all aspects of his philosophy in this article, Maimon’s reflection deserves further scrutiny. It could be compared to Kantian apperception, Reinhold’s theory of representation, and Fichte’s doctrine of the I. It could be analyzed in terms of Frege’s notion of functions (to what extent does Maimon’s determinable anticipate Frege’s function? Can a determinable be like a two- or many-placed function? What of the distinction between sense and reference?). Maimon’s logic also seems to call for more precise conceptual specification in, e.g., geometry. Such further research should also be brought in relation to Chikurel’s work, e.g., on Maimon’s theory of invention (Chikurel 2020), and it should respond to Melamed (2021) and Schechter (2003) on the principle of determinability.
- 18 I use Guyer and Wood’s 1998 translation (Kant 1998).
- 19 See especially V 160–61.
- 20 V 98, 104. “All types of syllogism rest on the principle of determinability”.
- 21 And, conversely, “No A is B” is true if and only if nothing that falls under the concept of A also falls under the concept of B.
- 22 For the distinction between orthodox and heterodox *dictum* semantics, Malink (2013), *passim*.
- 23 It is characteristic of Maimon that, after having independently hit upon the heterodox *dictum* semantics for the syllogistic, he ends Chapter 7 saying “I will therefore make an end here to the dry and very unfruitful doctrine of *general logic* (which I have dealt with here solely in order to make my *theory of thinking* systematically complete and show the uses of logical characteristic) and hurry to much more important investigations. . .”.
- 24 According to Kant, conceptual determinations are general while intuitive determinations are singular.
- 25 Flach (1963), pp. 76–77. Lachterman (1992) originally suggested applying Flach to the study of Maimon.
- 26 Maimon notes that he does not include causality, or cause-effect, as a relational category (V 164–65). This is because the concepts cause-effect apply a priori only to subjective or mere empirical experience; they are “mere *conditions* of the thinking of *empirical* objects but not of *real* objects in general”. In scientific cognition, we replace causal judgments with scientific theories, which express relations of ontic dependencies rather than cause-effect relations. Nevertheless, this is a kind of indirect a priori justification of this category for *empirical experience*, and Maimon ends his transcendental deduction by concluding that “the concept of *causality* is a *possible determination* of *temporal sequence* according to a rule”. (V 183).
- 27 This reconstruction overlooks an important aspect of the *New Logic*, namely Maimon’s skepticism. Many would prefer to see him maintaining the “half rational dogmatist half empirical skeptic” position found in his 1790 *Essay*, rather than developing new systems. One piece of evidence for this position here is that, in Section VII of Chapter 11, “Results of the Critique of the Cognitive Capacity”, Maimon suddenly seems to contradict everything he argues so far. He says “My *skepticism* grounds itself

therefore on this two-horned dilemma. Either the *fact* in itself (that we use the hypothetical judgment on empirical objects) is false, and the given examples rest on an *illusion* of the *imagination*, as I have already shown many times, and the *categories* have in this case *no use at all*; or it is in itself true, but then it has no *cognizable ground*, and the *categories*, after their laborious *deduction* and *schematism*, remain like before mere forms which can determine no *objects*". (V 192) In Chapter 11 Section VIII, he says, "I deny (or at least doubt) both the *transcendental* and the *empirical* use of the *categories*. The former because *things in themselves* stand in no *cognizable* relation of *determinability* demanded for their use. The latter because the *time-relation* perceived in *empirical objects* is not this relation of *determinability*" (ibid). Does Maimon simply deny the detailed arguments he has made? Absolutely not. A close reading discovers that in these sections, he asks four questions of Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*. The above skeptical statements are subsequent responses to Kant's arguments. But they do not indict his own work. He ends by saying, "I do admit the *use of the categories* on *sensible* but nevertheless *not empirical objects of pure mathematics*, because here I actually find this relation determining their use". By "sensible but not empirical objects of pure mathematics", he means the kind of objects aimed at by the natural scientific endeavor he posits in his system of a priori cognition: objects that we do not associate in time but determine theoretically by means of the pure a priori system of cognition he establishes.

28 See Quinn's introduction to his Maimon (2018b) translation.

29 In the second publication of the "Rights" essay. See Nance and Yonover (2021) for historical details.

30 Compare (Wagner [1959] 1967) §25.

31 Ibid, p. 248.

32 Admitting the a priori material value of truth may also allow Maimon to accept what Höhle (1990) calls "implicative imperatives". E.g., I may lie in certain conditions in order to save people's lives, since it *preserves* truth.

33 Maimon, like Fichte in 1796, coopts Rousseau's mathematical distinction between the general will and the will of all in the *Social Contract* Book II Chapter 3.

34 See Lachterman (1994) for philosophy and Judaism as divergent extremes.

35 Flach (1963), p. 166 defines the Kantian problem of presentation [*Darstellung*] as "the determination of a singular *qua* singular as adequate to the Idea".

36 In the language of Maimon's *Prolegomena*, *representation* would likely be replaced by *presentation*.

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