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Radical Immanence of Thought and the Genesis of Consciousness: Salomon Maïmon

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Abstract: Salomon Maïmon argues that the formal determination of experience in Kant's first *Kritik* insufficiently answers the question 'quid juris?'. As an alternative to Kant's theory, he develops a genetic transcendentalism in which experience is completely determined *a priori*. Discussing this genetic approach, I focus on how the spatiotemporal determinations of conscious experience are traced back to pure ideal relations. Relying on Leibniz and his theory of space and time, I explain how the extensive magnitudes of consciousness are founded in intensive magnitudes of what Maïmon calls 'pure thought'. As the latter is the transcendental ground for both sensibility and the understanding, Maïmon's theory contains a radical form of immanence, much like the philosophy of Spinoza and Gilles Deleuze.

Keywords: Intensive magnitude, genetic transcendentalism, radical immanence, differentials

Introduction

In his main work *Versuch über die Transzendentalphilosophie* (1790), Salomon Maïmon criticizes Kant and develops a Leibnizian form of transcendental philosophy. In this article, I want to focus on the notion of immanence in his theory. I will discuss three different aspects of his philosophy. First, I will examine his critique of Kant and how his quest for immanence led him to genetic transcendentalism as an alternative to the Kantian system. Secondly, I will explore the details of this genetic approach. I will explain how Maïmon understood the production of consciousness and intuition (*Anschauung*) out of a transcendental field of ideal elements. Thirdly, I will argue that in Maïmon's theory, thought (*Denken*) is ultimately a purely immanent process which is not attributable to any mode of being. This reveals the true originality and critical value of Maïmon's theory.

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In many ways, this philosophy anticipates themes and debates in German Idealism. But more importantly, Maïmon anticipates the Neo-Kantian movement. Especially Hermann Cohen's interpretation of Kant coincides on important points with Maïmon's theory. Cohen found a lot of what Maïmon understood to be an improvement on the Kantian system in the Kantian theory itself.¹ Furthermore, Maïmon's theory also anticipates central aspects of the philosophy of Gilles Deleuze, especially his conception of immanence and his theory of differentials and intensive magnitudes. However, it is not a goal of this paper to compare Maïmon's philosophy with either Cohen's or Deleuze's philosophy. Instead, I will focus on explaining the theory itself from the viewpoint of this notion of immanence.

1 The insufficiency of Kantianism and the necessity of genetic transcendentalism

The heart of Maïmon's critique of Kant lies in his rejection of pure intuition. Not only does he reject the conception of space and time as empty forms and pure intuition, he also rejects the way Kant uses pure intuition to solve the question 'quid juris?', which is central to the first *Kritik*. The second part of this article will focus on Maïmon's conception of space and time and his rejection of Kant's concept of empty space and time. In this part, we will focus on why, according

¹ Certain authors, like Samuel Atlas, have interpreted Maïmon's work not as a criticism of Kant but merely as a new interpretation of the *Kritik der reinen Vernunft* (Atlas, Samuel: *From Critical to Speculative Idealism: The Philosophy of Solomon Maïmon*. The Hague 1964, 63). Maïmon is understood to safeguard Kant's theory from early critics by, for example, interpreting the *Ding an sich* in an immanent way. Therefore, he says, Maïmon anticipates the return to Kant of the Marburg School. Although the relation with Cohen's Neo-Kantian philosophy is indisputable, I do believe Maïmon was a fiercer critic of Kant. Maïmon, for example, clearly states about Kant's theory that he "halte aber doch [...] dies System für unzulänglich" (Maïmon, Salomon: *Versuch über die Transzendentalphilosophie*. In: *Gesammelte Werke*, Band II. Hrsg. von Valerio Verra. Hildesheim 1970, 338). Many of the problems that Maïmon has with Kant's theory are addressed in the third *Kritik*. There, Kant resolves important problems concerning the harmony of the faculties and the genesis thereof. But Maïmon's *Versuch* and Kant's *Kritik der Urteilkraft* were written quasi simultaneously and published in 1790. In conclusion, both the *Versuch* and the third *Kritik* solve problems concerning the first (and second) *Kritik*, but they do so in different ways. As I will show, Maïmon's theory is therefore more than an interpretation of Kant's philosophy; it is a critique of the latter and a genuine attempt at formulating a new transcendental philosophy.

to Maïmon, the determination of experience (*Erfahrung*) through pure forms of intuition is not a sufficient solution for the problem that Kant wants to solve.²

For Maïmon, the central issue is that in Kant's theory understanding and sensibility remain heterogeneous. As long as this is the case, Maïmon says, the question '*quid juris?*' cannot be answered in a satisfying way:

Nach dem Kantischen System, daß nämlich Sinnlichkeit und Verstand zwei ganz verschiedene Quellen unserer Erkenntnis sind, ist, wie ich gezeigt habe, diese Frage [*quid juris?*] unauflöslich; hingegen nach dem Leibniz-Wolffischen System, fließen beide aus einerlei Erkenntnisquelle: (ihr Unterschied besteht nur in Graden der Vollständigkeit dieser Erkenntnis); sie kann also leicht aufgelöst werden.³

Given this heterogeneity between sensibility and understanding, the only connection that can be made between the two is an *external* one. The formal determination of sensibility by understanding is an *external* determination. But, as Maïmon argues, to truly answer the question '*quid juris?*' we have to rely on an *internal* connection between understanding and sensibility. As such, Maïmon's philosophical focus is on "einen Übergang von der sinnlichen zur intelligiblen Welt (welches gewiß, die Politiker mögen sagen, was sie wollen, wichtiger als die Erfindung eines Weges nach Ostindien ist)".⁴ Maïmon finds this passage, the internal connection, in the Leibnizian-Wolffian system where both understanding and sensibility are produced from the same source: the pure 'thought' (*Denken*) of an infinite understanding.⁵ But in contrast to Leibniz and Wolff, Maïmon relies on a transcendental move to affirm this divine understanding. He does not merely posit this in a dogmatic manner. This infinite understanding and its concepts are shown to be the transcendental necessary conditions of experience; they are the object of a transcendental deduction. But Maïmon's transcendental conditions differ dramatically from Kant's, as they are not merely *formal* transcendental conditions but *genetic* transcendental conditions.⁶ Infinite understanding not only determines experience qua form but produces it:

² As Kant is a philosopher who has been interpreted in many different ways, I will limit myself here to Maïmon's criticism according to his interpretation of Kant's first *Kritik*. I am aware that on certain points there are more fruitful interpretations of Kant's system which can counter Maïmon's criticism. However, the focus of this paper is not Maïmon's criticism of Kant or its legitimacy. This is merely discussed in order to facilitate our understanding of Maïmon's own theory.

³ Maïmon: *Versuch über die Transzendentalphilosophie*, 63–64.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 339.

⁵ It will become clear that Maïmon's philosophy is influenced very deeply by Leibniz. Maïmon even states that his system "mit dem Leibnizischen (wenn dieses richtig verstanden wird) aufs genaueste übereinstimmt" (*Ibid.*, 206).

⁶ *Ibid.*, 58.

Der Verstand unterwirft also nicht Etwas a posteriori gegebenes, seinen Regeln a priori; er läßt es vielmehr diesen Regeln gemäß entstehen (welches, wie ich glaube, die einzige Art ist, die Frage: quid juris? auf eine völlig befriedigende Weise zu beantworten).⁷

According to Maïmon, this is necessary because the explanation of experience by its subjection to a rule always leaves open the possibility of further questioning the factual submission to this rule. As Martial Guérout argues, you would need a second rule guaranteeing submission to the first rule, but submission to the second rule would require a third rule, etc.⁸ In other words, determination through subjection to a rule is always an *external* determination, but what true certainty requires is an *internal* determination. The rule should not be an external formal principle to be followed but an internal genetic principle, a rule for production.

Kant's comparison of critical philosophy with the Copernican revolution in astronomy allows us to fully understand the necessity of full genetic determination. As Guerout argues, the importance of the analogy between Kant's philosophy and the Copernican revolution is not to be found in the inversion of the subject-object relation.⁹ The true revolutionary character of Copernicus's theory consists in the fact that he was able to explain the movements of the heavenly bodies in an immanent way, without dogmatic reliance on absolute movement or absolute rest. In Ptolemaeus's theory, the movements of the heavenly bodies are for the most part undetermined and relative to the movements of the rest of the cosmos. The problem is widely known: how do you differentiate between the earth moving a lightyear to the right and the rest of the cosmos moving a light-year to the left? In the face of such relativity, belief in the sun's absolute movement around the earth remains dogmatic. In the heliocentric theory, however, the movements of the heavenly bodies are fully determined as the movements themselves are explained through the laws of gravitation.¹⁰ The result of these movements being fully determined was that Copernicus did not have to rely on an unexplainable absolute movement in order to claim that the earth moves around the sun, as he was able to fully explain how the movement itself is produced. In Ptolemaeus's theory, the movements of the heavenly bodies are only *externally* determined – said to follow an *external* rule. In Copernicus's theory, movement is *internally* determined; the genesis of movement itself is explained. Now, Kant's

⁷ Maïmon: *Versuch über die Transzendentalphilosophie*, 82.

⁸ Guérout, Martial: *La philosophie transcendantale de Salomon Maïmon*. Paris 1929, 131.

⁹ Ibid., 115–121. In what follows, I largely take over Guerout's comparison of the Copernican revolution with genetic transcendental philosophy.

¹⁰ Of course, the heliocentric theory was only fully completed a century later with Newton's laws of gravity.

system can be compared to the Copernican revolution in the sense that he also aims for immanence in his theory. Unlike Ptolemaeus, Copernicus did not rely on an absolute movement that is unexplainable and thus *transcendent* to his system. In his critical approach, Kant too aimed to get rid of all transcendent elements, elements which could not be explained from inside the theory. But, as Maïmon argues, Kant's theory is nevertheless left with a transcendent remnant: the reality and the matter of experience. It is irrelevant whether this is explained through a transcendent *Ding an sich* affecting us. The critical issue here is that the reality of experience – the matter of sensation filling the forms of intuition – is analogous to the sun's absolute movement in Ptolemaeus's theory; it is unexplainable from within the system and has to be dogmatically assumed. Only a transcendentalism of true immanence can claim a Copernican revolution in philosophy. But this is only achieved in a *genetic* transcendentalism as the formal determination of Kantianism still relies on a transcendent matter and an unexplained submission of sensation to the forms of pure intuition.¹¹ As such, Maïmon aims to explain the 'complete determination' (*vollständige Bestimmung*) of experience.

Maïmon seeks this complete determination of experience in the concept of an infinite understanding. He distinguishes between two forms of determination: reciprocal (*wechselseitig*) and unilateral.¹² In infinite understanding, a concept (*Begriff*) completely determines an object (*Gegenstand*); therefore, concept and object coincide.¹³ This complete determination is a 'reciprocal' determination.¹⁴ The concept is complete as it is determined in an infinity of reciprocal relations with other concepts. As it is fully determined, the concept does not have to be applied to an object in space and time.¹⁵ Infinite understanding does not need to represent an object in imagination to understand it; it merely *thinks* the object. For Maïmon, thought (*Denken*) is the process of complete internal determination. The fully determined concept of infinite understanding is equal to the object. In our finite understanding, however, every concept is incomplete and only incompletely determines an object. This is why the concept has to be applied to an object in space and time; it has to be further determined in intuition. This is a 'unilateral' form of determination in which a predicate is applied to a subject. The determination goes in one direction. One pole, the subject, retains a form

¹¹ Guérault, Martial: *La philosophie transcendante de Salomon Maïmon*, 19.

¹² Maïmon: *Versuch über die Transzendentalphilosophie*, Ch. 4. In using the expression 'unilateral determination' I carry over the terminology of Martial Guérault in *La philosophie transcendante de Salomon Maïmon*.

¹³ Maïmon: *Versuch über die Transzendentalphilosophie*, 103–104.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 38.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 98 f.

of independence from the other pole, the predicate. But in a reciprocal determination, both poles determine each other and cannot be thought outside of this determination.¹⁶ As such, infinite understanding completely understands objects, its concepts coincide with the objects, and therefore there is no need to intuit an object. Maïmon argues that when we intuit an object, we present it in space and time because we do not fully understand it. Intuition is thus nothing more than a result of the finitude of our understanding. Maïmon writes about the synthetic propositions “daß sie nämlich ihr Dasein aus der Unvollständigkeit unserer Begriffe herleiten”,¹⁷ which is why this synthetic determination in intuition is always an inferior form of determination. The determination in space and time is a confused partial image (*Bild*) of a purely ideal complete determination in infinite understanding which we, in our finitude, do not understand.

The idea of such a complete conceptual determination presupposes a Leibnizian notion of conceptuality. In Leibniz's theory, conceptuality is not equal to generality. The generality of our concepts is only a result of their limitation. Only our concepts of finite understanding are general. The division between the particular (as the fully determined in space and time) and the general, only exists relative to our limited understanding. The concepts of infinite understanding completely determine an object; no further determination in space and time – as a particular realization of the concept here and now – is required. Therefore, this infinite understanding is pure spontaneity. In fact, it does not really *understand* an object; it *thinks* it.¹⁸ Infinite understanding is pure thought (*Denken*). As such, the reciprocally determined concept coincides with the object.¹⁹ This agrees with Leibniz's conception of the ‘perfect notion’ (*notion parfaite*).²⁰ According to Leibniz, each individual thing has a notion that grasps it completely, in all its individuality. As such, every form of contingency disappears; everything in the object is conceptually determined. This is only possible because the relationship of the object to the whole world is grasped in its concept. Such a concept is thus an infinite concept, and full understanding of it requires an infinite understanding. I will come back to this issue in section three. First, I will discuss how our spatiotemporal experiences find their genetic origin in infinite understanding.

16 Maïmon: *Versuch über die Transzendentalphilosophie*, 85 f.

17 Ibid., 65.

18 Ibid., 33.

19 Ibid., 103 f.

20 Leibniz, Gottfried Wilhelm: “Primae Veritates”. In: *Opusculum et fragments inédits de Leibniz*. Hrsg. von Louis Couturat. Paris 1903, 520–522; Leibniz, Gottfried Wilhelm: “Discours de métaphysique”. In: *Die Philosophischen Schriften*. Band IV. Hrsg. von C. I. Gerhardt. Hildesheim 2008, 437.

2 Spatiotemporal determination

Space and time as pure forms of intuition only account for an external and formal determination of experience. Therefore, Maïmon judges the Kantian concepts of space and time to be insufficient for the role that they ought to play in the critical theory. But Maïmon's critique of Kant's concepts of space and time goes further than their inability to answer the question '*quid juris?*'. The idea of space and time as empty forms is itself put on the line. Two major points of critique can be distinguished. First of all, Kant uncritically assumes that matter and form of sensibility can be distinguished, while we only have access to sensibility as a complex whole. Kant's distinction between matter and form thus implies an abstraction that is ungrounded.²¹ Maïmon draws an analogy to a vessel of wine:

Wir wissen z. B., daß der Wein in einem runden Gefäße bloß des Gefäßes wegen rund ist; denn wäre er seinem Wesen nach rund, so müßte er auch außer dem Gefäße rund sein, welches sich doch nicht so verhält; hingegen ist das Gefäß auch ohne den Wein rund. Wir nennen daher mit Recht den Wein an sich, wie er auch außer dem Gefäße ist, Materie, und die runde Figur, die er bloß von dem Gefäße angenommen hat, die Form. Laßt uns aber annehmen, wir haben den Wein nie außer dem Gefäße, wie auch dieses nie außer jenem gesehen; wie werden wir hier erkennen, ob der Wein an sich, oder nur wegen des Gefäßes rund ist?²²

If we don't have separate access to the mere matter or form of a sensible experience, how can we be certain that our pulling apart of the phenomenon is legitimate? Maïmon concludes that Kant's theory of pure intuition is based on a mere assumption.²³

According to Maïmon, space and time should not be understood in terms of form alone; space and time are necessarily also material. This means that space and time do not constitute anything without something's taking up space and time. What we see reflected here is Leibniz's rejection of an absolute conception of space and time in favor of an understanding of them as relations between things.²⁴ But in order for these things to relate to each other, they must of course differ from each other. Space and time presuppose not just a content but a *heter-*

²¹ Thielke, Peter: "Intuition and Diversity: Kant and Maïmon on Space and Time". In: *Salomon Maïmon: Rational Dogmatist, Empirical Skeptic*. Hrsg. von Gideon Freudenthal. Dordrecht 2003, 92f.

²² Maïmon: *Versuch über die Transzendentalphilosophie*, 341.

²³ Ibid., 342.

²⁴ This theory of space is elaborated most extensively in his correspondence with Samuel Clarke (Leibniz, Gottfried Wilhelm: *Korrespondenz mit Samuel Clarke* (1715–1716). In: *Die Philosophischen Schriften*, Band IV).

ogeneous content. Here we arrive at Maimon's second point of critique of Kant's pure forms of intuition. Maimon argues that space and time presuppose difference: "ohne daß Verschiedenheit darin anzutreffen ist, kann die Vorstellung des raumes nicht statt finden".²⁵ An intuition with a completely homogeneous content, the intuition of a completely uniform color, for example, would not be a spatial (or temporal) intuition. For if no spatial point could be distinguished from another, how could any spatial location be determined? Without these distinguishable locations, without these determined points, space collapses. The argument is very similar to Leibniz's critique of the Cartesian concept of matter as homogeneous extension.²⁶ In Descartes's uniform plenum, one piece of matter cannot be distinguished from another piece of matter. In the end this leads Leibniz to the conclusion that extension does not have enough reality in itself and should be grounded in a substantial space, a '*spatium*', a space of substances.²⁷ Likewise, Maimon argues, pure intuition understood as empty space is a faulty idea,²⁸ for in empty space there is no way to determine a spatial point and to distinguish it from another. Empty space is completely homogeneous, but space presupposes difference; space presupposes a diverse content. Accordingly, Maimon grounds the spatiality and temporality of intuition in the diversity of sensation.

From Maimon's genetic perspective, sensation is understood in an immanent way. Sensation does not refer to an outside that affects us as passive subjects. Our apparent *passivity* is merely the subconscious *activity* of infinite understanding.²⁹ Maimon writes that the given is "bloß eine Vorstellung, deren Entstehungsart in uns, uns unbekannt ist"³⁰. As such, the difference in sensation – that which Maimon takes to ground spatiotemporality – is a difference that is merely not understood by our limited understanding. Due to our limitations, we only have limited concepts that are always general and abstract. These limited concepts only partially determine an object. In order for a determined object to be presented in our consciousness, our general concepts have to be determined further

25 Maimon, Salomon: *Streifereien im Gebiete der Philosophie*. In: *Gesammelte Werke*, Band IV. Hildesheim 1970, 287. See also Maimon's discussion of the primacy of diversity in *Versuch einer neuen Logik oder Theorie des Denkens*. In: *Gesammelte Werke*, Band V. Hildesheim 1970, 195 f.

26 This critique often recurs in Leibniz's writings, most prominently in "Specimen Dynamicum" (In: *Leibnizens mathematische Schriften*, Band VI, Hrsg. von C.I. Gerhardt. Halle 1860) and "Ipse Natura" (In: *Die philosophischen Schriften*, Band IV).

27 Leibniz's concept of the '*spatium*' is analyzed brilliantly in Guérout, Martial: "L'espace, le point et le vide chez Leibniz". In: *Etudes sur Descartes, Spinoza, Malebranche et Leibniz*. New York 1970.

28 Maimon: *Versuch über die Transzendentalphilosophie*, 399.

29 Ibid., 202 f.

30 Ibid., 203.

in space and time. The latter are thus nothing but a means of presenting to our consciousness that which we cannot understand. They are ‘negative criteria’ of this incompleteness.³¹ More specifically, space and time are the means of presenting, to ourselves, those differences in the object that our concepts cannot grasp. But this presentation in intuition is never more than an image, an *ens imaginarium*.³² The spatiotemporal determination is an imitation of the full determination in infinite understanding, in pure thought.

The relation between space and time and these unknown differences that come to us in sensation is thought in terms of differential calculus:

Die Sinnlichkeit also liefert die Differentiale zu einem bestimmten Bewußtsein; die Einbildungskraft bringt aus diesen ein endliches (bestimmtes) Objekt der Anschauung heraus; der Verstand bringt aus dem Verhältnisse dieser verschiedenen Differentiale, welche seine Objekte sind, das Verhältniß der aus ihnen entspringenden sinnlichen Objekte heraus.³³

Maïmon’s theory of differentials has always been difficult to grasp.³⁴ Why differentials? I think the best way to understand this is through his ideas on determination, which I discussed earlier. In unilateral determination, one term retains a form of independence. This term functions as the ‘determinable’, that which receives the determination. But this kind of determination is never complete, for the determinable pole is always more than how it is determined in this unilateral determination. Complete determination is where the terms reciprocally determine each other and cannot be thought outside this relation to each other. This is precisely the case with differentials. Take the example of the derivative of a function, determining the instantaneous rate of change of that function. One can think of the instantaneous speed of a car, determined by the relation between an infinitely small covered distance and an infinitely small elapsed time. While both the distance and the elapsed time are vanishing quantities without a value, the instantaneous speed does have a determined value. As Maïmon writes: “ $dx = 0$, $dy = 0$ u. s. w.; ihre Verhältnisse aber sind nicht $= 0$.”³⁵ Differentials thus seem to consist of pure relations, relations that subsist while the terms vanish. This is why these reciprocally determined ideal elements of infinite understanding are thought of

31 Maïmon: *Versuch einer neuen Logik oder Theorie des Denkens*, 192.

32 Maïmon: *Versuch über die Transzendentalphilosophie*, 19.

33 Ibid., 31f.

34 Simon Duffy provides the most in-depth analysis of Maïmon’s theory of differentials. Duffy, Simon: “Maïmon’s Theory of Differentials As The Elements of Intuitions”. In: *International Journal of Philosophical Studies* 22 (2), 2014.

35 Maïmon: *Versuch über die Transzendentalphilosophie*, 32.

as differentials. So why differentials? Differentials allow us to understand what a complete and immanent form of determination is. Only through such a form of pure reciprocal determination is there no recourse to any element outside of this determination. The object that is determined is fully produced in such a determination, not merely formally determined. This is why, from a transcendental standpoint, differentials are so valuable to Maimon. True critical philosophy is only possible if every reference to a transcendent outside is eliminated, but this is only possible in a genetic transcendentalism where the full production of objects is understood in an *immanent* way. And differential relations are the perfect way to understand this, for differentials are nothing outside of their relation.

Due to our limited understanding, imagination produces an image of these differential relations. As Maimon tells us, this image should be understood as the integral of these differential relations. The technical and mathematical details of how this process of integration is understood by Maimon are unclear.³⁶ But whatever mathematical method Maimon is referring to, integration always involves a form of absolutization in the extension of mere ideal relations. Maimon writes that “die Einbildungskraft dasjenige was nur in Beziehung auf etwas anders ist, als absolut sich vorstellt”³⁷. This absolutization is necessary because, as Maimon writes, “ein Verhältnis bloß gedacht, nicht aber angeschaut werden kann”³⁸. This process of integration thus produces an absolute extensive figure out of mere relations. This can be better understood through Maimon’s reference to intensive magnitudes. Intensive magnitudes are the magnitudes determined in a differential relation; they are reciprocally determined and do not have an absolute value outside of this relation. As Leibniz says, they are magnitudes of relation.³⁹ These magnitudes are ‘internal’ to the terms relating to each other. As such, they don’t allow for a metric as extensive magnitudes do. The latter are homogeneous and can be related or reduced to each other. Four meters is homogeneous with one meter, and the first can be reduced to an addition of four single meters. But this is not possible for intensive magnitudes as they are heterogeneous with each other. Each magnitude is ‘internal’ to itself. This property of intensive magnitudes is even more clear in the original scholastic concept. In the tradition of Duns Scotus, intensive magnitude refers to the degree of qualitative form or ‘latitude

³⁶ However, through an analysis of both Maimon’s suggestions and the history of mathematics, Simon Duffy argues that the method of integration that Maimon is referring to is the Taylor series expansion (Duffy: “Maimon’s Theory of Differentials As The Elements of Intuitions”, 241).

³⁷ Maimon: *Versuch über die Transzendentalphilosophie*, 19.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 60.

³⁹ Leibniz: *Korrespondenz mit Samuel Clarke*, 404.

of form' (*latitudo formae*).⁴⁰ Extensive magnitude is *more or less* of something common, the spatiality and temporality that objects share. But *intensive* magnitude refers to the magnitude of a *singular* and *internal* property. When the imagination transforms these intensive magnitudes into extensive magnitudes, these internal properties are laid out in a shared homogeneous field of space and time. Therefore, the spatiotemporal image of the differential relations that is produced always entails a homogenization of the objects involved. This is even more clear if we look at it from the angle of difference. The differences in the ideal objects are intensive and internal to the objects. The differences between the ideal objects are as singular as these objects themselves: "Rot ist von grün auf eine andere Art verschieden, als süß von bitter verschieden ist."⁴¹ To present these differences in intuition, they have to be transformed into spatial (or temporal) differences, i.e., extensive differences. "Hier ist die Verschiedenheit überhaupt von den besondern Verschiedenheiten abstrahiert", Maimon writes.⁴² The extensive entails a general form of difference and a homogenization of difference. As Leibniz says, extension involves a "difference without diversity".⁴³ The internal differences of the ideal elements are externalized, laid out in extensive space (and time). And as such, the singularity of these differences is transformed into a homogeneous form of difference, a *more or less* of the same thing.

To sum up, the magnitude of space and time finds its origin in intensive magnitudes; the quantitative differences of space and time are an abstraction of deeper intensive differences; and lastly, the continuity (*Stetigkeit*) of space and time is traced back to the continuity of the ideal elements of sensation.⁴⁴ The differentials form a continuum, although they are not extended. How should we understand this unextended intensive continuum? Can the infinitely small constitute a continuum? Again, it has to be emphasized that the intensive magnitude concerns the relation of magnitudes rather than merely being the infinitely small magnitude. As such, the intensive continuum, constituted by the ideal elements, is a purely relational continuum—undetermined qua extensive magnitude—rather than a continuum between infinitely small extensive magnitudes. The intensive continuum is not the extensive continuum shrunk to an infinitely

⁴⁰ Dun Scotus, Jean: *Quaestiones super libros Metaphysicorum Aristotelis*, VIII q.2–3, VI. In: *Opera Philosophica*. St. Bonaventure 1997. For a discussion of the history of the concept of intensive magnitude in the Middle ages, see Maier, Anneliese: *Das Problem der intensiven Größe in der Scholastik*. Leipzig 1939.

⁴¹ Maimon: *Versuch über die Transzendentalphilosophie*, 181.

⁴² Ibid., 181.

⁴³ Leibniz, Gottfried Wilhelm: *Korrespondenz mit de Volder* (20 Juni 1703), In: *Die Philosophischen Schriften*, Band II. 249: "Diversa sine diversitate".

⁴⁴ Maimon: *Versuch über die Transzendentalphilosophie*, 137.

small size; it is rather the relational structure of the extensive continuum.⁴⁵ And as the extensive continuum is infinite in its divisibility, the intensive continuum, too, contains an infinity of relations.

In conclusion, due to our limited understanding, our concepts are too general and cannot fully determine an object. A further determination in space and time is necessary to present us with a determined object. But this determination is merely an imaginary determination. In consciousness, the relative is made absolute, the internal is made external, and the heterogeneous is made homogeneous. Our limited concepts and the forms of intuition both abstract from the true singular, purely reciprocally determined objects of infinite understanding.

3 The immanence of thought

The ideal elements, the reciprocally determined differentials, are also understood as ‘Ideas of understanding’.⁴⁶ These are different from the Kantian Ideas, which are Ideas of reason. In Kant’s theory, reason produces Ideas through logical reasoning, which cannot be known in experience. In Maïmon’s theory, however, it is *understanding* that demands something of imagination that it cannot give.⁴⁷ Most importantly, the continuity and the infinite divisibility of space and time is something that is understood to be true, but it is never given in intuition, for it would require an infinity of intuitions. It is something that understanding, through mathematics and differential calculus, insists on but cannot be imagined by imagination.⁴⁸ Furthermore, the Ideas of understanding refer to “Die materielle Vollständigkeit eines Begriffs, in so fern diese Vollständigkeit in der Anschauung nicht gegeben werden kann”⁴⁹. As discussed in the previous section, the object is always homogenized and simplified in intuition. The ‘material completeness’, i.e., the infinite differences that the understanding demands, cannot be given in

⁴⁵ For a discussion of Leibniz’s notion of intensive continuity, see Vermeiren, Florian: “Het Spatium: Leibniz en Deleuze over ruimte en uitgebreidheid”. In: *Tijdschrift voor Filosofie*, 81 (1), 2019.

⁴⁶ Maïmon: *Versuch über die Transzendentalphilosophie*, 373.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 75–83.

⁴⁸ “Die Differentialgrößen sind von der ersteren Art; denn sie sind reelle Objekte, die durch Bedingungen a priori bestimmt sind, sie können aber nicht konstruiert, d.h. in der Anschauung dargestellt werden, weil sie (indem sie bloß durch ein allgemeines Funktionsverhältnis, das als Zahlenverhältnis sich beständig ändert, ausgedrückt werden) abstrahiert von aller Größe betrachtet werden müssen; sie sind also Verstandesideen.” (Ibid., 373)

⁴⁹ Maïmon: *Versuch über die Transzendentalphilosophie*, 75.

intuition. This is why the differentials, which determine the object completely, constitute Ideas of understanding.

Unlike Kant's Ideas of reason, Maïmon's Ideas of understanding do have an objective reality.⁵⁰ The Ideas of understanding are not impossible to objectify; their objectification, their cognition, is merely on the infinitely far away horizon of our progressive cognition. So although Ideas of understanding are not objects of our *finite* understanding, they are objects of the *infinite* understanding. This infinite understanding is thus the transcendental genetic ground of experience as the infinitely distant horizon towards which our progress of cognition moves.

Ultimately, Maïmon's notion of infinite understanding as the condition of experience replaces not only the given, the outside or the *Ding an sich*, but also the notion of a transcendental subject. The subject is just like the *Ding an sich*, not an object of cognition; it is also merely an Idea, the cognition of which is infinitely far away. Maïmon conceptualizes this as a process of self-realization:

Wir haben also nicht nur eine Methode, wie wir uns zu der Idee Ich immer in der Konstruktion nähern können, sondern auch eine praktische Regel, wodurch wir gleichsam in uns selbst gehen, oder besser, immer als solche mehr Realität erlangen. Denn, wie ich schon bemerkt habe, je allgemeiner die Modifikationen unsres Ichs werden, desto mehr werden wir Substanz (Subjekt unsrer Vorstellungen,) und je allgemeiner diese werden, desto mehr werden sie unter einander verknüpft, und desto einfacher werden wir dadurch, und je länger die Reihe der auf diese Art verknüpften Vorstellungen wird, um desto mehr werden wir zu verschiedenen Zeiten mit uns selbst einerlei.⁵¹

The point of infinite understanding is a point both where the subject is known, through self-realization, and where the *Ding an sich* is known, through the coincidence of concept and object.⁵² This coincidence of concept and object entails a complete spontaneity of cognition. At this point, cognition is a process of pure self-realization. The infinite understanding constitutes the coincidence not only of concept and object, but also of subject and object. As such, Maïmon says, the Ideas of understanding – which are the objects of infinite understanding – replace the three Kantian transcendental Ideas.⁵³ Or to put it otherwise, infinite understanding is the Idea of a soul, the Idea of a world, as well as the Idea of a divine understanding.⁵⁴

⁵⁰ Maïmon: *Versuch über die Transzendentalphilosophie*, 366.

⁵¹ Ibid., 165 f.

⁵² Ibid., 194 f.

⁵³ Ibid., 366.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 116.

The result of such an immanent approach is that thought (*Denken*), as the genetic process of determination of the ideal elements, is not related to any kind of being outside of thought. Thought is the process of determination of the differentials. But this is a purely immanent form of determination; the differentials of thought are nothing outside of their being thought and reciprocally determined. Thought is a creative process which is not attributable to a transcendent thing being thought or a transcendent subject thinking the thoughts. Maïmon's theory describes a process, a function, but never a mode of being. As Atlas writes, true critical philosophy realizes "that being cannot be explained by another mode of being".⁵⁵ Cognition (*Erkenntnis*) is described as a process of determination of objects by concepts, a process which is led by the idea of a total determination in an infinite understanding. But this process cannot be attributed to a knower or a known.

In fact, the process of thought cannot be ascribed to a consciousness either. Consciousness and intuition play no essential role in the process of cognition. Maïmon writes in the final chapter of the *Versuch* that the relation of thought to any form of intuition is merely contingent.⁵⁶ Intuition and consciousness – understood as inner sense – require spatiotemporal extension; therefore, they are nothing but a schema, an image of the intensive process of thought, the process involving differentials and pure relations.⁵⁷ Consciousness is the result of a limited understanding which is obliged to further determine objects extensively in intuition as it is unable to fully determine objects conceptually. But this does not add anything to the true process of cognition, i.e., the true process of determination taking place on the level of differential relations and intensive magnitudes. As such, Maïmon's philosophy is very different from a philosophy of consciousness like phenomenology. His plea for immanence is not the same as the plea to return to the immanence of consciousness. In fact, Maïmon's concept of immanence is very close to Gilles Deleuze's philosophy on this point. The latter always criticized phenomenology for making immanence immanent to something – be it the transcendental subject, *Dasein* or *la chair* – and in this way destroying immanence.⁵⁸ As Deleuze argues, "L'immanence ne l'est qu'à soi-même".⁵⁹

In this way, thought – as a creative process of determination – cannot be localized in any way. It is a process, a function, not a mode of being. Reading Maïmon, one often gets the impression that thought is a mathematical or logical

⁵⁵ Atlas: *From Critical to Speculative Idealism: The Philosophy of Solomon Maïmon*, 46.

⁵⁶ Maïmon: *Versuch über die Transzendentalphilosophie*, 206.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 365.

⁵⁸ Deleuze, Gilles – Guattari Deleuze: *Qu'est-ce que la philosophie?* Paris 1991, 48.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 47.

process. But even localizing the process in mathematics – which itself is hard to localize – is not legitimate. *The process of thought is immanent to itself, and as it is the condition of everything we would want to attribute it to, every such attribution, every such localization, is illegitimate.* Matter, consciousness and mathematics all result from thought as an immanent process of determination which comprises everything. In this way, Maïmon abolishes any form of dualism. Understanding and sensibility have the same source: infinite understanding. This is where concept and object, subject and object, understanding and world, coincide. But this also entails that the opposition between idealism and materialism, or idealism and empiricism, vanishes. Therefore, it is hard to determine whether Maïmon is an idealist, a rationalist or an empiricist. One could argue that, in the end, the principle of reality is found in understanding and that therefore Maïmon's philosophy is still a form of idealism and rationalism.⁶⁰ But seen from another perspective, Maïmon's philosophy is very close to empiricism, as he understands the genesis of consciousness out of the infinite understanding as an empirical process, a process of sensibility. For Maïmon, sensation does not merely fill the forms of intuition. Consciousness is fully produced out of the differentials of sensation. Is this not equal to a radical form of empiricism or sensualism? He describes the differentials as "das was *materialiter* als verschieden gegeben wird"⁶¹. And sometimes he describes these ideal elements as a subconscious sensibility.⁶² But then again, it is a fact that he interprets sensibility in a rationalistic way, as a (subconscious) *conceptual* production. Yet understanding is then in turn interpreted in a genetic, almost materialistic, manner. Understanding is in the end nothing but the genesis of objects. The concepts of infinite understanding determine an object in all its materiality.⁶³ In the end, we cannot but conclude that Maïmon moves in a very original way between idealism and empiricism, that he moves between these poles in a way that abolishes their opposition. Ultimately, he incorporates them as different aspects of his monistic theory.⁶⁴ Again, in the immanence of infinite understanding, every distinction between mind and matter, subject and object,

⁶⁰ For a mainly idealistic interpretation of Maïmon, see Atlas: *From Critical to Speculative Idealism: The Philosophy of Solomon Maïmon*; For a more rationalistic interpretation see Buzaglo, Meir: *Salomon Maïmon: Monism, Skepticism and Mathematics*. Pittsburgh 2002.

⁶¹ Maïmon: *Versuch über die Transzendentalphilosophie*, 133.

⁶² Ibid., 29.

⁶³ Ibid., 103 f.

⁶⁴ In the final chapter of his *Versuch über die Transzendentalphilosophie*, Maïmon distances his theory from idealism, dualism and materialism (ibid., 155–166). He argues that once the implicit opposition of materiality and ideality is left behind, the distinction between those positions vanishes.

vanishes as infinite understanding absorbs everything.⁶⁵ To quote Deleuze again: “L’immanence ne l’est qu’à soi-même, et dès lors prend tout, absorbe Tout-Un.”⁶⁶ Maimon is in this way very close to the philosophy of Spinoza. In fact, Maimon proclaims in one of his letters that his goal is the “Vereinigung der Kantischen Philosophie mit dem Spinozismo”.⁶⁷ Ultimately, everything has its condition in God as the infinite totality of the whole world, *Deus sive natura*. Again, immanence requires infinity. The immanence of the creative process of thought that Maimon describes can only be attained if it is infinite. As Deleuze says: “Dès que s’arrête le mouvement de l’infini, la transcendance descend, elle en profite pour resurgir, rebondir, ressortir.”⁶⁸ Maimon’s idea of immanence is therefore, just like Deleuze’s concept of immanence, truly Spinozistic.

In the end, the process of determination of the object is nothing but a process of implication in an infinite totality. As was shown in the previous section, intensive magnitudes are relative magnitudes (or ‘magnitudes of the relative’) rather than absolute magnitudes. As Kant already stated, in the case of extensive magnitudes, the parts are primary to the whole, and the whole is constructed out of the addition of parts, but with intensive magnitudes it is the other way around.⁶⁹ Intensive magnitudes are always dependent on a whole. Intensive magnitudes always point to an implication into a structure of relations. In this sense, Maimon follows Leibniz in his idea of the monad mirroring the whole universe from its point of view.⁷⁰ In order for a concept to determine an object completely, in all its singularity, the concept has to relate the object to the rest of the universe. This is what Leibniz’s idea of infinite analysis is about.⁷¹ A complete concept of an object

65 Maimon: *Versuch über die Transzendentalphilosophie*, 206 f.

66 Deleuze – Guattari: *Qu’est-ce que la philosophie?*, 47.

67 Maimon, Salomon: “Antwort auf das Schreiben des Herrn Obereit an Herrn S. Maimon”. In: *Gesammelte Werke*, Band III, 455.

68 Deleuze – Guattari: *Qu’est-ce que la philosophie?*, 49.

69 KrV, A 162/B 203. Maimon formulates it slightly differently: “Größe ist entweder Vielheit als Einheit, oder Einheit als Vielheit gedacht. Die erste ist eine extensive, die letzte eine intensive Größe” (Maimon: *Versuch über die Transzendentalphilosophie*, 120). Formulated in this way, the link with the distinction between the analytical and the synthetic is even more clear. While the extensive is a product of synthesis, the intensive points to a bigger analytical whole. As such, the link with Leibniz’s idea of infinite analysis can be understood. The complete determination of an object through intensive magnitudes constitutes an infinite concept of which an equally infinite analysis can relate the object to the rest of the universe.

70 Leibniz: *Système nouveau de la nature et la communication des substances*, 71.

71 Leibniz, Gottfried Wilhelm: “De contingentia”. In: Leibniz: *Textes inédits d’après les manuscrits de la Bibliothèque provinciale de Hanovre*. Hrsg. von Gaston Grua. Paris 1948, 302–306; Leibniz, Gottfried Wilhelm: “Origine veritatum contingentium”. In: Leibniz: *Textes inédits d’après les manuscrits de la Bibliothèque provinciale de Hanovre*. Hrsg. von Gaston Grua. Paris 1948, 325 f.

allows us to analytically deduce every proposition about this object. This is an infinite process of analysis leading us from the notion of the object to the rest of the world. There is a strange interplay of infinite exteriority and infinite interiority, an interplay between being implicated in an infinite universe and being completely singular. We cannot determine an object in all its singularity without referring it to the rest of the universe, without grasping the infinity of relations with the rest of the world in the concept of that object. *As such, it is the infinite totality of the world as an unextended relational whole that is the unlocalizable immanent genetic condition of everything.* But this whole is as much a world as it is a concept. Ultimately, Maïmon writes “alle Begriffe zuletzt auf einen Begriff, und alle Wahrheiten auf eine einzige Wahrheit reduziert werden müssen”⁷². This ultimate concept is the complete concept of the world as a totality which is indistinguishable from the world itself.

As I have pointed out, true critical philosophy refers to a process or a function instead of a being or a mode of being. In Maïmon’s critical philosophy, not only is cognition in general understood as a process, but things themselves are in the end nothing but processes:

Der Verstand kann kein Objekt (außer den Formen der Urteile, die keine Objekte sind) anders als fließend denken. Denn da das Geschäft des Verstandes nichts anders als Denken, d. h. Einheit im Mannigfaltigen hervorzubringen, ist; so kann er sich kein Objekt denken, als bloß dadurch, daß er die Regel oder die Art seiner Entstehung angibt: denn nur dadurch kann das Mannigfaltige desselben unter der Einheit der Regel gebracht werden, folglich kann er kein Objekt als schon entstanden, sondern bloß als entstehend d. h. fließend denken.⁷³

Objects in themselves are not intuitions; they are not the spatiotemporal phenomena of which we are conscious. Intuitions are mere images of the ideal elements, the differentials, where the object is completely determined. But as I argued in the previous section, an object is only completely determined by a concept through its principles of production. The ideal elements in which the objects of intuition are grounded are *genetic* principles. The complete cognition of an object understands it as an arising object, a process, a ‘flowing’ (*fließend*) object. But an obvious critical question arises: how can that which is beyond time be said to flow? The problem is similar to the issue we encountered in the previous section concerning the continuity of that which is not extended in space and time. The objects, fully determined by the concepts, flow in an unextended way. And so, Maïmon’s theory implies not only a concept of intensive continuity but

⁷² Maïmon: *Versuch über die Transzendentalphilosophie*, 198.

⁷³ Ibid., 32f.

also a concept of intensive flowing, or an intensive process. Yet again, differentials can help to understand this notion. The derivative, as a differential relation, describes an intensive process. The derivative of the trajectory of a car describes the instantaneous speed of the car at a certain point in time. However, the car is not stationary at this point in time; it moves. But the movement is not extensive. It does not cover a trajectory in extensive space and time. The movement is *intensive*. When Maïmon talks about the object being understood through its ideal elements, through its differential relations, this means that the object is understood through these derivatives, these instantaneous speeds, these intensive processes, which are not extended in space or time but nevertheless constitute movements and processes.

Maïmon's philosophy is thus not only a form of critical, rationalistic, empirical philosophy, but also close to the kind of process philosophy that was later developed by thinkers such as William James, Henri Bergson and Alfred North Whitehead. Maïmon does not cease to amaze his readers with his capacity to combine such divergent approaches to philosophy in a single system. Maïmon himself argues that the idea of an infinite understanding, in which all classical philosophical oppositions are abolished, brings philosophy to a point of unification:

Hier ist also der Punkt, worin Materialisten, Idealisten, Leibnizianer, Spinozisten, ja sogar Theisten und Atheisten, (wenn diese Herren sich nur selbst verstünden, und nicht aus Bosheit gegen einander den Pöbel aufwiegelten) sich vereinigen könnten.⁷⁴

The unlocalizable process of thought is the unifying genetic ground of matter, understanding, sensibility, ideality, consciousness and subjectivity. By grounding all these modes of being, Maïmon argues, the difference between these philosophies, each of which seeks the principle of reality in a different mode of being, is overcome.

74 Maïmon: *Versuch über die Transzendentalphilosophie*, 208.