Kant's Defeated Counterpart¹

Moses Mendelssohn on the Beauty, Mechanics, and Death
of the Human Soul

Anne Pollok

In his letter from September 11, 1770, Marcus Herz sings the swan song for any possible reconciliation between the dawning Critical Philosophy and traditional metaphysics. Moses Mendelssohn, he writes, follows Baumgarten word by word, incapable of accepting any aspect of Kant's thoughts that contradicted Baumgarten's premises (AA 10, 100). Clearly, such a thinker is not willing to accept any aspect of Kant's ground-breaking reshaping of philosophical inquiry.

Indeed, although Kant asked him more than once for critical comments, Mendelssohn never seriously considered Kant's philosophy as grounds for changing his own point of view. In his second-to-last work, the *Morning Hours* (*Morgenstunden*, 1785), he ultimately admits the destructive force of Critical Philosophy. Indirectly, Mendelssohn seems to imply that the old system is not done for. But he also complains that Kant fails to replace the edifice he tore down with a better one.² Accordingly, his *Morning Hours* could also be interpreted as offering an even more refined refutation of Transcendental Idealism³, thereby turning

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- 1 I want to thank Lanier Anderson and Paula Schwebel for revising my paper. With the hope that I could address their concerns and follow their suggestions for improvement I should also stress that all remaining mistakes are entirely due to obscure parts of my own understanding. I dedicate this paper to Reinhard Brandt, who introduced me to the exciting field of the Long&Grand Eighteenth Century and whose wonderful sense of humor I am still trying to emulate.
 - 2 See JubA III/2, 3. From Kant's point of view, however, it is understandable that he did not feel all obliged to enter into the infamous Pantheism-debate between Jacobi and Mendelssohn a few years later. And it was also not necessarily due to his favor for Mendelssohn, that he finally raised his voice (in: "Was heißt, sich im Denken orientieren?"; which offers a friendly, but not overall supportive reading of Mendelssohn's works), but more that he feared for his own undertaking being understood under the guise of pantheism (Zammito 1992, 12).
 - 3 Most recently, Dyck ("Turning the Game against the Idealist: Mendelssohn's Refutation of Idealism in the *Morgenstunden* and Kant's replies", unpublished

Kant's *Critique* into a mere correction of the status quo, but not its revolution. Apparently Mendelssohn himself did very little or nothing to contribute to a radical philosophical reform—at least it seems so on the surface, since in his published works of this time he mainly sticks to Baumgartian or Leibnizian assumptions. But that does not necessarily mean that Mendelssohn was in no way innovative. In this paper, I intend to show that Mendelssohn's philosophical potential becomes particularly obvious in his treatment of the unconscious. In different philosophical areas, Mendelssohn inverts the immediate impression that anything unconscious must be irrational in that he shows it as the enabling condition of rationality. Wherever the unconscious seems to be at work, in aesthetic appreciation, in moral reasoning, and—most fundamentally—in the making of our personality, it proves our deeply ingrained rational weaving pattern rather than making us subject to irrationality and chance. I will attempt to support his thesis by the following arguments:

a) Thinkers of the Enlightenment obviously had their problems integrating the unconscious into their philosophy (section 1). Nevertheless, it plays a decisive role in Mendelssohn's metaphysics. Elsewhere I argued⁴ that it is more appropriate to view Mendelssohn's version of 'metaphysics' as a form of 'rational anthropology' in that it is less concerned with a general approach to metaphysical issues, but with their respective effects on our notion of humanity. Thus, his philosophy takes human beings' actual life into consideration, in that it inquires into the role and importance of sentiments, the body, human instincts (and our ability to act against or to re-form them), hopes, and our cultural outreach. In this paper I shall limit my scope to Mendelssohn's treatment of psychology as a part of rational anthropology, and more specifically as a science of the human soul, considering both its metaphysical foundation and its phenomenal side.⁵ However, the unconscious is not only the foundation of mental phenomena, as I intent to show in the first part of this paper (sec-

manuscript) argued convincingly that in fact the *Morning Hours* are a more refined rejection of Kant's *Critique*, especially the Transcendental Aesthetics, as previously noticed. Mendelssohn's ultimate counter-argument against Kant's Transcendental Idealism, once more, rests on his attempt to secure all unconscious parts of ourselves within the divine mind (see "Turning the Game...", 9).

4 See Pollok 2010.

5 Actually, the two aspects are not easily distinguishable. According to the Leibnizian postulate of continuity, the transition from obscure to clear perceptions is in principle continuous, hence the distinction between the sensible and the intelligible is gradual, not categorical.

tion 2), but also a main aspect in Mendelssohn's metaphysical-practical argument about the nature of the human soul (section 3).

b) The center of Mendelssohn's philosophy, the human soul, is not as 'empty', or formal, as the Kantian transcendental unity of apperception (see KrV, B157–8). Instead, Mendelssohn argues that it must be substantial. For him, this notion contains more than pure functionality. It has to be seen as what we may call 'ontologically furnished' in that it possesses certain innate properties that unfold over time. It has to be stressed here that Mendelssohn apparently did not look very deeply into Kant's much more sophisticated take on the different aspects of this functionality as presented in the first *Critique*⁶, but limits the apperceptual activity to two parts: i) having perceptions at all, and ii) uniting them under the apperception of the soul itself. Mendelssohn's main reason to cling to the idea of a substantial notion of the soul is not only a result of his aforementioned belief in Leibnizian metaphysics, but ultimately rests on *practical* reasons, as the third dialogue in his most famous work, the *Phaedon* (first published in 1767) shows. In sections three and four of my paper, I will focus on how Mendelssohn reformulated the unconscious in order to secure the validity of personal immortality, guaranteed by divine providence.

1. Accessing the Unconscious

The Cartesian *Cogito*, or its subject, the Cartesian "I"—as the uniting force behind any sort of mental activity—is the point of perspective from which to understand and to reconstruct most of 18th century psychology. What, then, did philosophers make of the negation of this particular mode of awareness, or consciousness; how did they treat the seemingly blind aspects of human behavior and conduct? It seems that the need to integrate the unconscious perceptions (*Vorstellungen*) and sensations (*Empfindungen*) into the full picture ultimately led to the abolition of traditional metaphysics. This is illustrated by the emergence of new disciplines from *prima philosophia*, first rational psychology, then, more rad-

6 For a deeper discussion of Kant's ideas see Lanier Anderson: "Synthesis, Cognitive Normativity, and the Meaning of Kant's Question, 'How are synthetic cognitions a priori possible?', in: *European Journal of Philosophy* 9/3, 2001, pp. 275–305 and Konstantin Pollok: "'An Almost Single Inference': Kant's Deduction of the Categories Reconsidered", in: *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie* 90/3, 2008, pp. 323–345.

ically, empirical psychology, aesthetics, and ultimately anthropology, all of which include a new awareness of these dark areas of our minds.

According to contemporary vocabulary, the unconscious is defined as the area of obscure perceptions.⁷ They seem completely useless for rational understanding, for we lack the ability to intrinsically differentiate their composition—which would make them “distinct”—and even to extrinsically separate these perceptions from each other—which would render them “clear”. Leibniz and others refer to the unconscious as an “ocean” of minute perceptions (*petite perceptions*), thus marking the indistinguishability of its parts, but also its enormous share in the human mind. These unconscious areas mainly govern sensory contents and reactions. They refer to what we may call the mental representation of our body. Others represent too distant and too vague impressions of our environment, due to our perspective on the world and the human incapability of representing everything *sub specie aeternitatis*. These perceptions never reach the higher state of clarity that accompanies apperception, or self-awareness as the conscious separation of the activity of perception from its content. Therefore they mark the purely passive aspect of the human “mind” and do not show clear signs of self-reflectivity.⁸

Thus, passivity and obscurity are *prima facie* not overwhelmingly advantageous attributes, since they do not seem to enable us to practically or theoretically cope with the world. But undeniably they are important aspects of human nature and may therefore be worth philosophical attention. Baumgarten made it clear that the “logic of the senses” (*logica sensitiva*), a science of sensible cognition and its perfection, is a necessary correlate to the investigation into metaphysics and logic. Even more, it

7 See Leibniz’ *Meditationes de cognitione, veritate et ideis*, 1684 (see Pollok 2010, 158–67). A somewhat hilarious approach to this topic can be found in Kant’s lectures on Anthropology. See for example *Anthropologie Dohna-Wundlacken* (1791/92), Konvolut 75–83. Man is merely the toy of his obscure perceptions, but he also plays with them. He does never know what is on his mind if asked to come up with a story. But if others tell a story he will be more than happy to jump in. In the first case he thinks he knows nothing, but the latter case makes him wonder about the God in his head.... Generally, obscure and therefore unconscious perceptions as Kant defines them here seem to be rationally not justifiable. Kant depicts this with the wish of having a dry place for one’s grave: this cannot be rationally justified if death is accepted as the end of the living body, for which the place of burial does not make any difference.

8 I put this in quotations because this kind of “mind” already includes body as well as soul: it is not their nature which is different, but their respective status of clarity.

would be a shame for humanity to miss this opportunity for exhaustive self-assessment. Therefore, understanding the perfection of sensibility is not only supplementary, but marks the completion of philosophy. The minute or obscure perceptions are not epistemologically void, but offer a more refined picture of a humanly possible perception of the world. In a first step, Baumgarten refers to the richness (*ubertas*) of inherently obscure notions (which are defined as “clear and confused ideas”) as “extensive clarity” (*extensive Klarheit*).⁹ In such extensively clear representations we do not gain conceptual knowledge out of which we can form notions of the understanding, but we—nearly instinctively—grasp a potentially endless field of perceptions at once. In its most elaborated forms, such as in poetry, this extensively endless field cannot be completely reduced to clear and distinct parts except at the price of utterly reducing its richness. Thus, neither can art be ‘translated’ into science, nor a Homeric epic into a scientific description. On the one hand, this points towards our limitations; the complexity of our world can only be grasped by abstractions, or conceptual abbreviations of what is “really there”. But on the other hand it allows for grasping the universe’s richness in a uniquely human way. Poetic representation may be less exact than science, but it offers an indispensable human perspective and a distinctively human way to understand our cosmos.

Following Baumgarten, different schools developed different perspectives on this phenomenon. Johann Christoph Gottsched used the Baumgartian scheme to develop his version of poetics as an instrument to improve human sentiment and thought by means of aesthetically pleasing lessons in the theater. His opponents, Johann Jakob Bodmer and Johann Jakob Breitinger, promoted the faculties of wit and imagination. Both schools had a huge impact on the development of aesthetics as a literary discipline, in particular on the theory of tragedy and the development of the novel. Further reaching were the concepts developed by the promoters of the Enlightenment in Berlin, such as Friedrich Nicolai, Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, and—philosophically most distinguished—Mendelssohn. With their critical journals they not only changed the face and usages of literary criticism; they also promoted the value of human sentiments for the improvement of human understanding and behavior. Ultimately they offered what one could in a broader sense call a holistic approach towards the understanding of the human mind and the

9 See *Meditationes philosophicae de nonnullis ad poema pertinentibus* (1735), § 16, *Metaphysica* (1739), § 531.

respective limits of ‘pure’ rational thought without falling prey to irrationalism. Still, it seems as though all of them were more concerned to explain and justify merely clear and confused, but not entirely obscure notions. I will argue that Mendelssohn’s philosophy shows an awareness of the importance of this wider and more challenging area, which renders his philosophy more provocative than it may seem on the surface.

Generally, his version of a rationalistic anthropology does not negate the impact of biology and history on humankind.¹⁰ But its focus lies on the human ability to individually and socially develop within *culture*, whose beneficial influence he views as being secured by divine providence. The establishment of this culture needs enlightened people, who are able to make unhindered use of their own reason, and who rely on their own conscience. This sounds as if the unconscious, in good rationalistic tradition, needs simply be overcome and ‘illuminated’, i.e. turned from obscurity to clarity. However, Mendelssohn had a more refined view on this phenomenon, which stresses the importance of the unconscious as a means for the success of human enlightenment. First, the unconscious explains our pleasure in art and the motivation of our actions, and, second, it guarantees for our personhood, and that is, our immortality. For Mendelssohn, this is the real achievement of his age.

2. Yet Another Rational Psychology?

As mentioned, the unconscious plays an important role both in Mendelssohn’s thoughts on aesthetics and in his consideration of moral motivation. Ultimately both aspects could be reformulated as a kind of ‘mental training’, where a rational, clear thought is “translated” into an obscure intuitive motion. A Kantian might claim that this kind of unconscious is not unconscious at all, for it is in principle open to clarification.¹¹ But this potentiality is foreign to Mendelssohn’s idea, since he subscribes

10 The areas of biology and history served as counter-pieces to a still viable mechanical approach to explain the nature of humankind. See for example Zammito 2002, 230.

11 See Kant’s lectures on Logic. According to him, it does not make sense to talk about “unconscious cognition” (“unbewusste Erkenntnisse”), because what is unconscious cannot be known *in principle*. Any such reference to unconscious notions actually refers to the fact that these notions are not immediately (instantaneously/actually) conscious—but potentially open to clarification by (logical) reasoning (AA 24:341)

the Leibnizian claim that there are only gradual differences among particular mental contents. Therefore, ideally any one of them could be grasped and dealt with rationally. But Mendelssohn's theory of the unconscious is more sophisticated than those of his predecessors. As I shall show first, in following Baumgarten's account of the emotional impact of poetry through the sheer amount of perceptions it has to offer to the human mind, Mendelssohn achieved a more refined approach toward the explanation of aesthetic pleasure in seemingly un-pleasurable objects. With that he helped to uncover the all-too-human delight in ambiguity.¹² Additionally (see 2.b), he applies this effect to (moral) deliberation, thus providing possible explanation of the problem of weakness of will. But due to an overly instrumentalizing view his take may be seen as an insufficient solution to this problem.

2.1 The Aesthetic Unconscious: The Complicated Case of Pleasures

In his 1757 essay *On the Main Principles of the Fine Arts and Sciences*¹³ Mendelssohn stresses the importance of aesthetics for our understanding of the human soul. As he mentions already in the introductory passage, on the "obscure paths" (JubA I, 427/Dahlstrom, 169) of aesthetic phenomena we can gather information about the functioning of our mental apparatus that we could never have detected through mere rational analysis. In other essays of that time, Mendelssohn continues to explore this vast ocean of the unconscious for "improving" our understanding (i.e. making it more clear), or at least as a means to enhance the full range of our aesthetic approval. Instead of just accepting the unconscious, Mendelssohn seeks to reconstruct the unconsciously effective pleasure, and therewith to provide us with the means to deliberately and rationally influence it.

The necessary existence of obscurity within our consciousness—and the possibility of its rational improvement without turning it into conscious clarity—is a major issue in his first publication on the topic: the *Letters on Sentiments* (1755). This is reflected in its very composition, for Mendelssohn tackles the problem in two voices: the elderly British ra-

12 See Kaus 1993, and 1995.

13 *Über die Hauptgrundsätze der Schönen Künste und Wissenschaften*. First published in *Bibliothek der schönen Wissenschaften und der freyen Künste* I, 2 (Leipzig 1757), pp. 231–68. With some revisions Mendelssohn includes it 1761 (2nd edition 1771, 3rd edition 1777) in the second volume of his *Philosophical Writings*. See JubA I, 165–190, 425–452, Dahlstrom 169–91.

tionalist—if this were not already a *condradictio in adiecto*—Palemon,¹⁴ and the younger, more feverish enthusiast (*Schwärmer*) Euphranor, ironically a German. Mendelssohn's position is revealed in the interplay¹⁵ between the two characters. One could even add that with his purposeful reversing of the standard applications of certain character traits of specific nationalities (i.e. rationality=German; enthusiasm=British) Mendelssohn aimed at reversing a whole set of standard expectations in academic philosophy. It is indeed possible for a German not to be a convinced rationalist—as it is for a Jew (in this case: Mendelssohn himself) to offer philosophical insight.¹⁶ On this line, it is Palemon who offers the more rational, Leibnizian point of view, which is seriously challenged by Euphranor's objections and demands for which his counterpart Palemon is obviously unable to give.

In essence, the *Letters on Sentiments* inquire into the nature of sentiments, how they function within human life, and whether they benefit our being or not—up to the point of whether their total absence is desirable or not.¹⁷ The mode of presentation reveals the inherent problems in these areas: the ambiguity of the issue (and Mendelssohn's take on it) is shown by two *conflicting* voices which ultimately do not achieve sufficient agreement. Euphranor favors pure pleasure and fears the destructive, or at least the cooling effect of thought on aesthetic pleasure. Palemon, on the other hand, holds that a “refined” understanding of our sentiments improves our general world perception (see the fourth letter, JubA I, 54–58/Dahlstrom, 18–20). In particular, it enhances our pleasure in aesthetics and the speed and correctness of our decisions in practical issues. Taking up Euphranor's suggestion that our pleasure in clear and confused, or even in obscure perceptions enhances our overall appreciation of beauty, Palemon introduces a process of the productive interplay of

14 To make his rationalistic point of view even more obvious Mendelssohn renamed him as Theokles in the second edition from 1761.

15 Other scholars hold that Mendelssohn speaks through Palemon alone. But Mendelssohn's high esteem of British thinkers and the circumstances of Euphranor's possible role in the *Letters* seem to stand against such one-sided reading. It is not by accident that Mendelssohn favors the ambiguous Platonic style. See Pollok 2010, 169.

16 This twist, of course, was fairly hidden by the date of the first publication. The *Letters on Sentiments* appeared anonymously. But after the reviewers found out about Mendelssohn's identity, this book also stirred a debate about contributions to philosophy by Jews.

17 The *Letters* thus also deal with the justification of suicide. I will leave this issue aside here.

thought and passion. First we need to clarify every single perception, and find the grain of rationality that allows us to put it in a justifiable connection to related perceptions. This, of course, is not a matter of aesthetic pleasure, but of scientific inquiry. But the process could and should be reversed to enable bodily and mental pleasure in its results. Palemon illustrates this with the activity of a mathematician (see JubA I, 91/Dahlstrom, 54). This poor fellow has to investigate into the meaning of each equation, each term in question first—a merely exhausting and dry activity. But after having understood and reconstructed the whole mathematical proof, our mathematician is able to take a step back and intuitively enjoy the proof as a whole. This is not possible by a clear and distinct perception of every single step, but rather by letting all distinct parts deliberately pass back into confusion, up to the point where they become indistinguishable, or obscure, and thereby form a whole. While the mathematician is enjoying the whole proof, all steps are indeed obscure in that they are internally and externally indistinguishable *for the moment*, but potentially each step could be brought back to clarity again. Thus, there is no unconscious as such but a deliberate re-making of the unconscious: aesthetic pleasure becomes a whole piece of work by the perceiver's ability to turn perceptions into qualitatively different states, thereby improving the quality of their impact by a renewed understanding of their connections, and an improved insight into their actual quantity. The decisive point is that, without painstakingly distinguishing each and every aspect, the concept of extensive clarity does not come to its full force. In other words, the formerly completely obscure aspects have to become clear, that is distinguishable, in one instance of the process. Put back into obscurity, they serve to enrich the immediate intuition. What changes is not their actual nature, but their potential capacity to become clear again more easily. In the moment of aesthetic enjoyment, they are not confused but obscure, to be sure, since in the moment of pleasure they are taken as one indistinguishable whole. But the potential awareness that this whole is formed out of actually different parts makes the experience richer overall, thus fulfilling the Baumgartian notion of extensive clarity in a diachronic mode.

According to Palemon, this has an effect on the body as well; the fibers and nerves get the tension and relaxation they need to set the whole system in a pleasurable mood. Thus, the mathematician has enjoyment on all levels: rationally, emotionally, and bodily. The obstacle of obscure perceptions is translated into one side of the coin of aesthetic pleasure which also becomes more complex in its temporal order.

Mendelssohn's theory sounds somewhat plausible for a certain kind of pleasure in artworks. We can, for example, enjoy an antique fresco which is beautiful in itself, but which becomes even more beautiful when we know about its history and the pictorial specifics—and this is so even if this knowledge is only virtually at hand, but not explicitly conscious at the moment of our perception of the fresco. If we were clearly conscious of it, we would be merely engaged in its rational assessment rather than enjoying it. But one cannot help but notice that this refinement does not cover all areas of unconscious impressions of artworks. Additionally, the “bodily pleasure” that Palemon refers to seems to be more of a byproduct than an essential part of Mendelssohn's account of aesthetic appreciation. Moreover, Baumgarten's theory of the irreducibility of aesthetics appears in a different light. Rather than insisting on the peculiarity of aesthetic pleasure as in principle untranslatable into clear and distinct notions, Mendelssohn characterizes this pleasure as a mere mode of thinking, whose parts (if seen distinctly) are by no means different from any rational inquiry. Thus, the aesthetic dawn is essentially already daylight.

Along the same lines, the explanation of our enjoyment in *prima facie* unpleasant or evil aesthetic beauty remains problematic, too. In the *Letters on Sentiments* Euphranor mentions the enjoyment of witnessing war scenes or of observing a sinking ship; a well-known topos since Lucretius. Palemon tries to explain all these phenomena as an effect of curiosity and reassurance: since we know that we can only perceive the bad event but are helpless and cannot do anything to improve it, we seek to satisfy our drive for knowledge and therewith to at least improve ourselves. None of this, Palemon tries to explain, shows any trait of human evil but could be reformulated as an intrinsically positive trait of character in that we always strive, within the scope of our abilities, to become more perfect. Thus, a seemingly negative joy in other peoples' suffering just shows our unconscious drive to self-perfection. What he cannot deny, however, is the obvious human need to perceive and enjoy such scene.¹⁸ In the *Letters* Mendelssohn refers (with both his “voices”) to Dubos' theory of human beings' natural propensity to avoid *ennui* and therefore seek the most compelling, exciting, and emotionally uplifting sensations, be they inherently good or evil. What makes them aesthetically pleasing is the level of passion they allow for, not their moral worth. “The theatre has its own morality”, concludes Palemon (JubA I, 94). However, these

18 See Zelle 1987, 353, Pollok 2010, chapter III.3.

'evil' or unpleasant situations tend to be more interesting for us than Palemon's positive characterization for humankind allows: to put it briefly in Euphranor's terms, it arouses more aesthetically relevant passion to enjoy seeing the sinking ship than to admire a beautifully crafted, but safely sailing one. We seem to be less interested in witnessing a serene scene, and more interested in observing conflicts, or experiencing action rather than passive enjoyment, being appalled rather than lifted up.

Obviously Mendelssohn himself was not fully satisfied by his own explanations. In the *Rhapsody*¹⁹, a subsequent reflection on the themes from the *Letters on Sentiments*, he makes several attempts (here in his "own" voice) to explain this unsettling pleasure via a further differentiation of the human apparatus. What we enjoy in these ambiguous scenes is not their content, but our ability to *reject* this content—and, on a more formal level, to still enjoy it as artfully crafted. What could be seen as a (perverse) enjoyment of a bad situation actually turns out to be an unconscious training of a whole set of (positive) human powers: being able to distinguish form and content, and judging each of them according to their criteria—all in one moment of aesthetic pleasure, now a peculiar mix of appreciation and rejection. These movements, which Mendelssohn coins as a "mixed sentiment", explicitly call for a "secret consciousness" of the fact that what we aesthetically enjoy is actually not real. This sets us free to distinguish content and form, which in turn enables us to take a more critical stance.²⁰ Thus, pleasure in ambiguity proves to be more sophisticated than pleasure in mere beauty, even though we are not aware of our role as art critics, while we seem to be simply attracted by a powerful painting or an intoxicating tragedy.

Overall, it may be convincing that our delight in these ambiguous kinds of situations is more complex than our pleasure in, say, a beautiful rose. For convinced rationalists it may also be convincing that a painted beautiful rose offers a richer enjoyment than a real rose. Perceiving the former includes not only the enjoyment of beauty, but also the flattering yet probably unconscious notion that it is within human power to artfully

19 The *Rhapsody* was first published in the *Philosophical Writings* in 1761, and modified in 1771. I argued elsewhere (Pollok 2010, 184–86) that the modification is not as fundamental as other scholars see it, see Zelle 1987, 348.

20 On the theory of mixed sentiments see Zelle 1987, Pollok 2010, and Guyer 1996 and 2005. This mode of consciousness of artistic imitation is mentioned in the *Rhapsody*, JubA I, 390; Dahlstrom translates it with "inner consciousness" (p. 138).

craft this beauty.²¹ Still, the problematic aspect of our pleasure, not in roses, but in witnessing forms of human suffering, is unclear. By experiencing these ‘mixed sentiments’ we may in fact improve by viewing particular artfully crafted scenes, but we improve *just and only* ourselves—admitting the cost of other people’s actual (or potential, if in a painting) suffering. Mendelssohn addresses this concern by turning it upside down: our pleasure in these ambiguous modes shows that unconsciously our natural propensity to feel pity is affected. Thus, self-perfection does not include the *actual* miserable other, but our ability to exercise this fundamentally human trait by seeing the *potential* harm of such an event.

If we would only take similar pains in art as the mathematician does in his calculation, we could become consciously aware of this mechanism of artistic attraction and ethical repulsion. Seen in this light, Mendelssohn’s treatment of unpleasant pleasure or ‘mixed sentiments’ reveals an explicitly functionalist take on the unconscious. In his analysis emotions are in fact translated into unclear knowledge, which ensures that they cannot be essentially irrational, or unethical. This should guarantee their internal positive worth. With this, Mendelssohn tries to prove that the unconscious is an inherently positive feature, showcasing our benevolent, rather than egoistic traits. He further sees it as rationally justifiable, therefore, as being potentially open to rationalization. Thus, perceiving something obscurely does not mark it as a specific kind of mental content as such. Its higher efficiency is not only a matter of difference in quality, in that its parts and shape cannot be differentiated at any given moment, but it is mostly due to a difference in quantity, in that more of these impressions together offer more occasions for the soul to exercise its powers. For a theory that strives to make qualitative propositions about art and aesthetic judgments, this may very well be too little. But it could indeed explain why some sensory impressions work in a particular way—and how this could be translated back into the key points of Leibnizian metaphysics: that everything is due to the best possible reason, and that everything is connected within a greater whole. This rational super-structure of our being is not confined to aesthetic appreciation, but also becomes visible in moral reasoning.

21 See *Main Principles*, JubA I, 433–34/Dahlstrom, 174.

2.b The Practical Unconscious: A Training of the Mind

Crafted as a response to David Hume's skeptical implications against the reality of causality, Mendelssohn's *Rhapsody* as well as earlier drafts (*On the mastering of our inclinations*, 1756/57, and shortly afterwards, *On the Kinship of Beauty and Good*), his essay *On Probability* (1756), and his prize-essay *On Evidence in Metaphysical Sciences* (1763) plus some related notes explicate the role of the unconscious in human motivation.²² Thus, Mendelssohn's theory mostly covers the ground of a Humean approach to the (empirical) laws of mental association and reclaims it for Rationalism.

Parallel to his argumentation concerning aesthetic pleasure, Mendelssohn holds that the deliberate darkening of perceptions by the mere speed of their succession could be used to train specific actions.²³ In Mendelssohn's model of the human mind this ability is represented by the so-called minor faculties: the sense of truth (*Wahrheitssinn*, which Mendelssohn sometimes also calls "common sense"), conscience, and taste.²⁴ "Conscience is a proficiency at correctly distinguishing good from evil by means of indistinct inferences, and the sense for the truth is a proficiency in distinguishing good from evil by similar means." (JubA II, 325/Dahlstrom 303)²⁵ Accordingly, taste is the ability to sense the higher quality of a work of art (or any other kind of "beauty"). All three are structurally equivalent to the working of the higher faculties, which on their side deal with "higher" forms of perception—i. e. clear and distinct

22 I will not deal with Mendelssohn's argument concerning causality, which parallels our inductive reasoning about similar events with the laws of probability.

I will also not deal here with similar ideas by Johann Georg Sulzer.

23 It must be noted, though, that Mendelssohn did not follow a more extreme position as held by Johann Georg Sulzer, who claims in his *Anmerkungen über den verschiedenen Zustand, worinn sich die Seele bei Ausübung ihres Hauptvermögens, nämlich des Vermögens, sich etwas vorzustellen, und des Vermögens zu empfinden, befindet* (1763, cit. from *Vermischte philosophische Schriften* Bd. 1, 225–43, here 213) that *only* obscure ideas have motivational force; see Pollok 2010, 306–08.

24 Kant will call this the aesthetic perfection of cognition, which is characterized as the subjective impression of easiness (*Leichtigkeit*), interest (*Interesse*) and liveliness (*Lebhaftigkeit*) in the act of cognition (see *Anthropologie Dohna-Wundlacken*, 1791/92)—in short, it is defined by a merely subjective mode of cognition.

25 "Das Gewissen ist eine Fertigkeit, das Gute vom Bösen, und der Wahrheitssinn, eine Fertigkeit, das Wahre vom Falschen durch undeutliche Schlüsse richtig zu unterscheiden." (JubA II, 325)

ideas. The “senses” for truth, beauty and morality on the lower part of the scale have the advantage that they work on an instinctive basis, do not demand any conscious deliberation, and are therefore faster than their “higher” equivalents. They are not inborn, but are developed throughout human life; this allows for the possibility that they could go astray, but also that they could be improved.

The speed and number of ideas perceived mark their motivational as well as their qualitative state: “With every sensitive feeling an ocean of notions enters our soul. The soul thinks if it perceives some of these notions distinctly; and it feels if it surrenders to the impression which contains them all.”²⁶ To actually act badly is therefore grounded on a false ratio between what is clearly known and what is (unconsciously) felt.²⁷ Accordingly, the appropriate aim is to control the content of the latter area. Mendelssohn identifies this as the aim of “applied morality” (*ausübende Sittenlehre*, see *On Evidence*, JubA II, 315).

Mendelssohn’s account of the senses for truth, morality, and beauty could be seen mostly as a pragmatic abbreviation of thought-processes. By training a particular action, it is transformed into an obscure pattern. This means that, first, the intellectual apparatus is not actively involved anymore, and, second, that this one pattern could be joined with other, similar patterns. They together form an “accumulation of compelling reasons”²⁸, with all the “reasons” being merely unconscious motivations.

26 “Mit jedem sinnlichen Gefühl strömt ein Meer von Begriffen in unsere Seele. Die Seele denkt, wenn sie einige von diesen Begriffen deutlich wahrnimmt; und sie empfindet, sobald sie sich dem Eindruck überläßt, der sie alle faßt.” (JubA II, 183, *Verwandschaft des Schönen und Guten/On the kinship of beauty and good*) This is even applicable to the artistic genius who—despite an innate predisposition, or talent—could improve his skills by learned rules, which, if applied correctly, serve as orientation in the back of one’s mind (i.e. obscurely). But when we as perceivers can sense that the artist slavishly followed rules which were conscious and clear to him in the moment of the creation of his artwork, the sensory experience and hence the aesthetic impression of the artwork will be severely limited. Mendelssohn does not claim, as Young or Warton (see Zammuto 1992, 28), that genius is destroyed by any knowledge of rules. But the ratio between knowledge and unconsciously working talent is to be taken seriously. A mere improvement in knowledge, so the not-so-rationalistic conclusion, does not necessarily serve to improve the genius.

27 See *Von der Herrschaft über die Neigungen/On the Mastery over the Inclinations* (around 1756/57), JubA II, 149.

28 Mendelssohn’s term “Bewegungsgründe” could also be translated with “motivating reasons”. See *Rhapsody* (1761), JubA I, 571; *On Probability*, JubA I, 164/Dahlstrom, 250, *On Evidence*, JubA II, 327/Dahlstrom, 305.

Given their number and speed, they work merely intuitively. Mendelssohn's example is the pianist, who practices a certain movement long enough to reach a state of mastery where he does not have to think about what he is doing. Apparently, the better he is acquainted with his work and the more he practices, the more the formerly artificial movements become part of his "nature" – hence, the more natural his performance.

But this accumulation of actions or "Beweggründe" does not exhaust Mendelssohn's treatment of the workings of the unconscious. In the Leibnizian tradition he also mentions the innumerable amount of "petite perceptions" as being responsible for the ultimate weight in decision-making. According to Leibniz' principle of sufficient reason, it is impossible to remain undecided in any case, since the perfect equilibrium between two things is a chimera. There will always be a "reason" why we decide on a particular action, even though this reason might be indefinitely small and hardly recognizable. Mendelssohn discusses this case in light of his theory of probability (see JubA I, 512–15/Dahlstrom, 248–49) as an argument against voluntaristic notions of a divine freedom of choice. In essence, his argument runs like this: we have to suppose that every free action is indeed decisively influenced by "compelling reasons" (ibid.) and therefore not free in the sense of being arbitrarily chosen, because otherwise not even god could have probable prescience. Taken down to earth, Mendelssohn reiterates Hume's argument that we do indeed expect certain actions from a certain kind of character (see *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, VIII, footnote), even though we view this character as having free will. That "the soul cannot choose otherwise than according to compelling reasons and impulses" (JubA I, 515/Dahlstrom, 250), however, does not mean that the agent herself perceives all of them clearly. Indeed, quite a few are hidden in the "vast ocean" of her "sensitive feelings", or the unconscious, which is legible only to a divine mind.

In line with this, Mendelssohn does not explicitly state one obvious conclusion from the aforementioned remark about the enormous amount of obscure notions entering the soul with every "sensitive feeling". Given that the soul perceives *some* notions distinctly, this still leaves a vast part of this "ocean" obscure. Mendelssohn mostly deals with those parts that become clearer and subsequently are moved back into obscurity again—which does not say anything about those petite perceptions which are not involved in this mechanism, nor in any way related to it. One could argue that some of these minute perceptions are indirectly formed by those

which are part of the process and that therewith potentially all unconscious areas are *affected* by conscious acts. Still, this does not and can not take into account the possibility that it merely works the other way around and the minute perceptions have their own influence on our mental apparatus. Mendelssohn's argumentation does not offer an answer to this concern, and therefore leaves the works of the unconscious in practical philosophy ambiguous.

The relatively unsuccessful story of Mendelssohn's version of "applied ethics" might have two main reasons, both connected to this diagnosis. First, his notion of mental training is far too close to human conditioning and therefore does not quite cohere with Mendelssohn's call for Enlightenment as the ability to make use of one's reason, not one's "senses". Perhaps his later insistence on the value of culture, and his warning that reckless enlightenment produces more depressed outlaws than reason-guided citizens could be traced back to his earlier moralistic views. Second, it conveys a far-reaching problem of Leibnizian metaphysics due to a confusion of qualitative and quantitative aspects of perception. If the faster and deeper reaching obscure perceptions always outwitted our reasoning, what could be the need of deep rational analysis; what could be the worth of what Mendelssohn calls "dead ideas", which may be clear and distinct, but carry no motivational power at all? On the other hand, in line with Ploucquet's criticism (see JubA I, 97 and 139), minute perceptions could also be seen as highly ineffective, even if a vast amount of them is put together. Any amount of "nearly zero" could hardly add up to a positive (here in the sense of effective) notion. Mendelssohn himself constantly shifts between promoting the power of obscure feelings and the necessity and predominance of clear reasoning without offering a resolution of the resulting tension.

Perhaps a view on his metaphysics can help to clarify and define the role of practically and aesthetically relevant obscurity, since this vast ocean plays an equally important role here. In accord with Leibniz' central doctrine of the monads as mirrors of the whole universe Mendelssohn holds that the soul indeed represents the whole world, may it be unconsciously or with active apprehension (see *On Evidence*, JubA II, 277–78/ Dahlstrom, 260; also in *Phaedon*, JubA III/1, 96–97, *Morning Hours*, JubA III/2, 141). As the following section will show, the human "inner ocean" should also ensure the individuality and personality of the human soul even beyond death. This was Mendelssohn's greatest hope.

3. Practical Ends, Eternal Aims

Mendelssohn can claim the dubious honor of having been referred to by name in Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*. The second edition contains an explicit refutation of his proof of the immortality of the soul (KrV, B413–15), as an example of a paralogism in rational psychology, where the mistake lies in confusing the metaphysical and empirical nature of the middle term in the argument. Several scholars before me have already noticed that Kant did not bother to argue against the whole set of proofs put forward by Mendelssohn. More accurately, he only argues against the soul's permanence—which says nothing about immortality of the soul as a person at all. Given that the account for immortality is the key point to understand how Mendelssohn utilizes the unconscious in metaphysics, it is important to figure out whether Kant's refutation is appropriate.

Let's start from the fundamentals. For Mendelssohn (and, even if justified in a new and groundbreaking way, also for Kant), the unity of the soul is not factual as the unity of an atom, but it is an *act* of unifying all perceptual activity.²⁹ The synthesis done by the faculty of thinking (*Denkungsvermögen*) is thus the enabling condition of complexity. Without the “thinking being,” all manifold entities, such as beauty, perfection, and harmony are nothing. The “infinite amount of concepts, cognitions, inclinations, passions, which occupy us incessantly” (see JubA III/1, 96³⁰) are the material out of which the mind forms its world. Hence, the vast ocean of impressions is potentially given shape by our understanding. Without being formed and thereby focused, its force remains decisively low. By indirectly referring to Ploucquet³¹, Mendelssohn's Soc-

29 To a certain degree, this is a refined version of the Platonic proof, which draws on the soul's knowledge of the forms. Any being which could claim such knowledge must be of the same kind as the forms. This evokes quite some objections, which Mendelssohn seeks to avoid with his version. Against Sassen 2008, 223, who finds it “surprising” that Mendelssohn mentions this function as the soul's essence, I claim that this is good school philosophy and simply reiterates the main points of Leibniz' *Monadology*.

30 “—Sage mir, mein lieber Simmias! finden wir nicht in unsrer Seele eine fast unendliche Menge von Begriffen, Erkenntnissen, Neigungen, Leidenschaften, die uns unaufhörlich beschäftigen?—Allerdings!” (JubA III/1, 96).

31 See also JubA III/1, 97 and 139: here Mendelssohn mentions Ploucquet's remark, that a vast number of perceptions which have the quality of “nearly zero” can never add up to any perception of qualitative value. Therefore, the minute perceptions are merely meaningless because they cannot be effective at all.

rates holds: "Set all obscure, inadequate, and unsteady concepts side by side. Does this result in an enlightened, complete, and defined concept?—It does not seem so.—Where there is no mind (*Geist*), which compares them and by consideration and contemplation builds a more perfect cognition from them: there these concepts will never cease to be obscure, deficient and unsteady." (JubA III/1, 97)³² In this understanding, clear notions do not simply contain any number of obscure aspects, but order and concentrate them in a particular way; may the perceiver be aware of the constitutive parts as in clear and distinct ideas, or just be able to perceive its overall shape, as in clear and confused ideas.

On the other hand, this mental activity of shaping the "vast ocean" is not necessarily always conscious, since Mendelssohn let his Socrates claim that personality as the shaping force remains even within "sleep, fainting, vertigo, enchantment" (JubA III/1, 103), all only delivering obscure notions. That said, self-awareness, the most fundamental mode of *apperception*, is not necessarily and always given within the activity of unifying perceptions.³³ But apart from its complicated set-up, having self-awareness is taken as the decisive source of knowledge in general. As Mendelssohn lets one character in the dialogue, Philolaus, hold (JubA III/1, 53), real knowledge does not come about by observation of external events, but by inward observation of the soul's inferences from these events, or better, by the soul's own working on all sensory material. Thus, real knowl-

As mentioned here in section 1, Mendelssohn himself is not explicit enough as to whether he sides with Ploucquet or Sulzer.

- 32 "Setze viele verworrene, mangelhafte und schwankende Begriffe neben einander, wird dadurch ein aufgeklärter, vollständiger und bestimmter Begriff hervorgebracht?—Es scheint nicht.—Wo nicht ein Geist hinzu kömmt, der sie vergleicht, und durch Nachdenken und Ueberlegen sich eine vollkommnere Erkenntniß aus derselben selbst bildet: so hören sie in Ewigkeit nicht auf viele verworrene, mangelhafte und schwankende Begriffe zu seyn." Possibly "Geist" should be translated with "spirit" (not "mind") to stress the fact that Mendelssohn takes it as an equivalent to "soul".
- 33 Here Kant is of course much more clear. The transcendental apperception, the "I think" (*Ich denke*), is referred to modally: it does not necessarily *have* to accompany all my perceptions in actio. But all unified perception, i.e. thought, is only possible as being unified under it. So, in reconstruction, all thoughts can only be understood as being potentially accompanied and formed by the "I think", even though one was not aware of this connection in actio. This is the guise of the very formulation: "Das *Ich denke* muss alle meine Vorstellungen begleiten *können*" (B 131). Thus, it is not only a mere state of awareness, but the enabling condition of unity.

edge is gained by observing mental operations.³⁴ Aside from Kant's arguments against introspection, these notions at least correspond to Kant's view in that they stress activity or function versus gathering material. In Mendelssohn's case, this serves to elucidate the essential properties of a simple, non-extended substance called "soul". In Kant's case, however, this serves as a counter-argument to the apparent immediacy of inner experience. But before considering the differences, let us turn to Mendelssohn's proof: In the first dialogue, he argues in line with Leibniz that since the soul is simple, it can only cease to exist by a divine act of destruction. Each and every step, however small it may be, is taken under the law of continuity.³⁵ Under this law the decisive step from an infinitely small degree to nothingness (i.e. death) is an incredible jump. Therefore, under regular circumstances (that is: by natural laws)³⁶ the soul cannot just cease to exist. The proof that the soul indeed is this kind of substance follows in the second dialogue, which is the main target of Kant's refutation. Irritatingly, Kant does not directly address the problematic aspect of the soul's substantiality, nor does he mention (as in the "Anticipations of Perception", see A207/B252) the empirical status of our perception of continuity.³⁷ Instead, his argument against Mendelssohn's reasoning draws on the difference between extensive and intensive magnitudes, and therewith concentrates on the soul's activity. In the "Anticipations of Perception" Kant has already argued that, "in all appearances, the real that is object of sensation has intensive magnitude, that is, a degree" (KrV, B207) "of influence on the senses."³⁸ In the later refutation of Mendelssohn's proof in the "Paralogism", he stretches the qualification of

34 "Alle unkörperlichen Begriffe, sprach Philolaus, hat die Seele nicht von den äußern Sinnen, sondern durch sich selbst erlangt, indem sie ihre eigenen Wirkungen beobachtet, und dadurch ihr eigenes Wesen und ihre Eigenschaften kennen lernt."

35 Later Mendelssohn stresses that this is not only Leibniz, but also resting on Pater Bosovich's mathematical works; see Mendelssohn's addendum to the second edition, 1768, JubA III/1, 135. Kant also subscribes to this law, but just and only for empirical issues; see also *Prolegomena*, AA 4:306 f., §24.

36 See the discussion in the first footnote in Falkenstein 1998, 561–62.

37 As Powell 1985, 204–05 points out, Kant has his own transcendental version of continuity. I will not go into this issue here.

38 Powell 1985, 214 is correct in his criticism of Chisholm's reading of the refutation, that Kant is not referring to a "degree of reality" here (which would put his own refutation of reality being a predicate at risk, see Powell 1985, 212), but to the degree of the object of sensation's influence on our "mental image" of it. Thus, once more, any mental operation of the "I" requires empirical data.

having intensive magnitude not only to “objects of sensation” but also to its subject, the “soul”. If the soul is seen under this light it becomes nothing more than another *object* of sensation. This soul is not an extensive magnitude (like matter, for instance), but always (empirically) contains a degree of perceptual content. This intensive magnitude could very well approximate zero, which is not achieved by any alteration of parts but by gradual diminution of degree. Thus, the soul ceases to exist simply by the lack of any perceptible quality of inward activity.

Kant’s argument seems simple, but also uncharacteristically picky.³⁹ First, to conflate zero with the infinitesimally small may be adequate for a pragmatic approach, but it is not adequate for questions of metaphysics.⁴⁰ It could hence be argued that what is left after gradual diminution is perhaps not a conscious empirical “I”, but an unconscious one, which might still be capable of doing the job of the transcendental apperception (A166/B208). Second, Kant charges Mendelssohn of neglecting a suitable option (i.e. gradually ceasing), whereas Mendelssohn indeed mentions it several times.⁴¹ We can therefore hold that Kant’s objection against Mendelssohn is at least incomplete as the very argument is concerned.⁴² But why does he choose this mode of argumentation, which could be criticized as either unfair or inaccurate?

One way to defend Kant’s choice is somewhat *ad hominem*: he might have quoted Mendelssohn from memory, or perhaps even according to the discussions which followed the Pantheism debate, which ultimately lead to the breakdown of Mendelssohn’s philosophical reputation.⁴³ Ac-

39 Altmann 1972, 179 is pretty short on Kant’s Refutation: “Kant did not do full justice to Mendelssohn”, since, for instance, Boscovich’s law of continuity indeed includes intensive magnitudes. For a more detailed account, see Falkenstein 1998, Appendix A, 587–88.

40 In particular I do not quite buy into Powell’s argument that Mendelssohn had not shown the possibility that nothing can just vanish. He is definitely not relying on “experimental” information here. Powell does not only seem to ignore Leibnizian metaphysics, but also the whole second dialogue of the *Phaedon* (see Powell 1985, 202—more arguments against Powell are to be found in Falkenstein and Dyck).

41 See JubA III/1, 71–73, 83, 103, and then again in the Addendum to the third Edition of the *Phaedon* 1769, *ibid.*, 155.

42 See Falkenstein 1998, 587, Sassen 2008, 216, 220, among others.

43 See Alexander Altmann: “Das Bild Moses Mendelssohns im deutschen Idealismus”, in: *Moses Mendelssohn und die Kreise seiner Wirksamkeit*. Ed. by Michael Albrecht, Eva J. Engel, Norbert Hinske. Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag 1994, pp. 1–24.

According to this reading, Kant would not refute Mendelssohn, but would only object to a secondary understanding of Mendelssohn's main point. Regardless, this is not satisfying and most likely not correct. Another option is to argue from an architectural point of view. From this perspective, the main counter-arguments against Mendelssohn's proof are already mentioned in the constructive part of the *Critique*, the "Analytic". What remains to be said in the "Dialectic" are the results from denying the soul any substantiality. This could justify why Kant restricts himself to attacking Mendelssohn via the consequences of this view for the soul's degree of intensive magnitude, because he indirectly shows how Mendelssohn's argumentation only allows him to admit the soul's essence as an accompanying⁴⁴ function of perception. Thus, no further step towards proving its substantiality could be taken and hence immortality as a substance rests only on the "soul's" ability to unite perceptions. If this function is gradually annihilated, it cannot be said to endure eternally.⁴⁵

As Kant has shown in the preceding parts of the *Critique*, the soul is not a substantial entity, but can only be understood as the pure function of apperception⁴⁶—as pointed out, for instance, in the "Deduction", the "Anticipations of Perception" (A 176/B 217), and repeatedly in the "Paralogism" (B 407–8). The soul—or what traditionally is referred to as a soul—does not "cease to exist" as any kind of substance (e.g. matter with extensive quality), since it does not *exist* the same way. All we can say about it as a transcendental subject is that it enables experience. All claims beyond this, as claims about the soul *materialiter* are bound to empirical information, hence not part of metaphysics. Any possible way of thinking about the "soul" means either thinking about its operations, or about its empirical content. If it is the latter, the stage is open for Kant's refutation of Mendelssohn's proof. If it is the former, Mendelssohn's claims go not far enough.

44 Not, as Kant himself claims to have proven, as the *enabling condition of experience*.

45 See Powell 1985, 205 who argues that Kant first shows how any such proof could be still true in light of Critical Philosophy and then, second, reveals the most crippling argument in the Refutation. This clever version of charitable reading and then even more forcefully destroying the previous option seems to hint into the right direction.

46 It also follows that rational psychology is impossible (A 347/B 405–6; see Hatfield 1992 et al.).

Stripping the soul of all metaphysical content is exactly what Mendelssohn seeks to avoid, since it would lead to abolishing the Leibnizian philosophy of perfectibility. For a suitable defense he deems it necessary and sufficient to refute materialism⁴⁷, since he takes this as being the only possible option besides Leibnizian Ontology. At the end of the second dialogue (JubA III/1, 93) he stresses that even though the essence of the soul is its functioning as giving unity to the (perceived) manifold, its origin is not this mere functioning but its being a simple substance (up to p. 97). With this, his option against any form of materialism becomes obvious: the soul is different from matter. Therefore, its thoughts are fundamentally different from all quantifiable bodily reaction to a given stimulus (see *ibid.*, 99) and are suitable for a metaphysical proof.

It is also clear that the unconscious serves as the material of the subject's activity and guarantees its continuity. As considered in the previous section (2), it could be used to explain different phenomena and therefore even serve to explain the unconscious perceptions as a part of the soul's activity. Unfortunately, however, this cannot prove the thinking subject's primacy as a *substance*, or at least of this substantiality being anything more than its function. The aforementioned claim (see JubA III/1, 103) that unconsciousness over a period of time does not harm continuous personality remains questionable. One way to justify how "unconscious perception" without any consciousness of oneself (*Selbstgefühl*, JubA III/1, 106) still serves to define one particular person as the unifying function could be to hold that the unifying force does not rest within the person, but within god as the supervening power over all monads. But: Mendelssohn does not make this claim at all. The invulnerability of the monad remains untouched. All he mentions (especially in the third dialogue) is that it is only due to god's *benevolence* that the fundamental persistence of the soul after death still includes this "consciousness of oneself" (*Selbstgefühl*). And this is necessary to offer the path to further perfection. Here the unconscious is crucial, since Mendelssohn argues that every impression and even the remembrance of it leaves a tiny trace. This might grant an—unconscious—continual activity within the soul without its body as a sensorium. But there is no sufficient argument as to why this is enough to preserve the essence of the soul and ensure its further perfection *apart from* heavily resting on god's benevolence (here—as always in Mendelssohn's works—treated as the ultimate embodiment of the Leibnizian principle of sufficient reason). In the "Adden-

47 The main topic of the second dialogue, see Sassen 2008, 221–22.

dum" to the second edition of the *Phaedon* (1768) Mendelssohn mentions some of his readers' skeptical comments on the substantiality of the soul (JubA III/1, 133) and addresses them. Here he concentrates on the soul's *activity* as its distinctive mode of being, but essentially he does not get further than in the last part of the second dialogue. And again, Mendelssohn's arguments do not lead further than to mere functionality, thus leaving room for the third way: Kantian Idealism.

Unfortunately, on the other hand, if we go this route we cannot reasonably say more about the soul's immortality than just acknowledge the *possibility*⁴⁸ of a severe decrease of mental activity and therefore its ceasing to serve its essential function. Given that the mode of existence is the activity of unifying given sensory material, this mode becomes the crucial aspect in any "proof" for its eternity ("immortality"). The fundamental "force" of the soul's activity, as it seems here, can only be captured in its degree of consciousness, i.e. the soul's intensive degree of activity. Just given the argument that the soul is simple, then, does not hinder that natural forces can reduce the soul's activity to approximately zero, thus preventing its "fundamental function" (B406). If consciousness is all there is, a nearly zero degree of consciousness is insufficient. Thus, the soul as a pure function has indeed ceased to exist, since there was just and only a function to cease. Given unconsciousness about each and all activities and contents within the soul, including their relation to the "I" itself, no distinction is possible, no apperception, no application, no content gathering.⁴⁹ Without the notional presupposition of the "I" neither cognition nor sensitivity is possible, lest their mutual application—therefore, the "soul" indeed ceases to exist and any substantial permanence remains impossible to prove (see B415). And even if the latter could be proven, it would not suffice to reasonably talk about the soul's permanence, since it is not preserved in its essence. This is worth pointing out: for Mendelssohn, obscure perceptions serve to guarantee personhood for they are part of the complete (and in rationalistic diction: real) notion of every soul. For Kant, they prove to be metaphysically useless since we cannot take up the divine perspective which has to serve as their ultimate basis.

48 See Powell 1985, 216–17: it does not show the *fact* that the soul ceases to exist. All Critical Philosophy shows is the impossibility to prove either way.

49 Kant also refers to this issue in a letter to Herz about Salomon Maimon, see AA XI, 51–52.

Kant himself claims that the proof for the soul's substantiality would be crucial (B409) for the further proof of the continuance of the soul's personality after (bodily) death. Unfortunately, after the fire bath of critical philosophy, souls are left as functions of apperception, but not as substantial or at any rate "furnished" entities. It seems almost mocking to refer to the decrease of intensive magnitudes if Mendelssohn's proof is already done for with the denial of substantiality, but one could also say that with this step Kant manages to assign and clarify the new paradigm of functionality. Kant treats Mendelssohn's proof as *the* representative case of rational psychology, and that is certainly correct. But taken for itself, the possibility of a death-like (but not death-identical) state of nearly zero consciousness remains as an unsatisfactory remnant of Kant's overall successful refutation of traditional metaphysics, for Kant could have refuted Mendelssohn much more clearly and distinctly.⁵⁰ The only aspect left to discuss is the aforementioned aspect of god's benevolence. Ongoing consciousness after death—and therefore no ceasing in its essential function, as Mendelssohn claims, could be god's best reason to ensure the soul's perfection. If only he existed.

4. Why Immortality Matters. Concluding Mendelssohnian Remarks

It is not only Mendelssohn's, but also the pre-critical Kant's claim in his lectures in the 1770s that the real issue at stake is not whether the soul as a substance endures, but whether the soul's personality remains after death: "*personality* [is] the main matter with the soul after death" (AA 28:296) An issue he already claims being an issue of "hope", not knowledge.⁵¹

As Dyck⁵² points out, in traditional rational psychology it is not necessarily identity of consciousness (or the decisive part of consciousness in

50 Especially in this context it seems worthwhile to include the Refutation of Idealism from the second edition of the *Critique* (B274–79) into the anti-Mendelssohn picture, see Dyck, "Turning the Game...", 18.

51 Perhaps Kant supports Georg Friedrich Meier's claim here, that immortality is far more an issue of faith than of metaphysics; see Meier *Gedanken von dem Zustande der Seele nach dem Tode* (*Thoughts on the State of the Soul after Death*, 1746), Dyck 2010, 106–7. Likewise, it might also be possible that Kant's discussion of these issues was influenced by the published debate between Mendelssohn and Abbt about the vocation of man (see Pollok 2010, 416).

52 See Dyck 2010, 97.

the “I”) over time that guarantees personhood, but only “the very capacity for a consciousness of its own identity” which should serve “to distinguish it from animal souls”. Mendelssohn, however, indeed requires more than this “very capacity”, but builds his main proof of the immortality of the soul around the notion of personal identity as the *awareness* of being the same person over time and keeping this personhood eternally. Thus, the soul should not only be seen as separated from the worldly body (which is Mendelssohn’s main concern in the first two dialogues in the *Phaedon*), but it should also be eternal as this particular individual.⁵³

Mendelssohn lets his Socrates argue that the state of the soul after the body has died cannot be mere unconsciousness. However, this does not follow from any logical reasoning (since “a complete lack of consciousness does not contradict the pure nature of a mind”, JubA III/1, 103), but only from God’s benevolence. Like Leibniz, when it comes to this topic Mendelssohn heavily draws on the principle of sufficient reason. Apart from his considerations concerning natural law, which will not be treated in this paper⁵⁴, he focuses on the main trait of humanity: the human capacity for perfectibility. In a passage pointing once again to the vast ocean of “notions” entering our soul, Mendelssohn claims that the idea of our perfection is essentially the active improvement of our overall world-perception, which cannot simply stop at the end of our physical life (see JubA III/1, 105–6). For Mendelssohn, the soul’s inherent tendency to infinity (“Unendlichkeit”) is proof of its actual, dynamic, and enduring realization of its telos—and necessarily, but only from the

53 In fact, but for other reasons, Mendelssohn is much closer to Locke than to Wolff; see Dyck 2010, 103 (not mentioning Mendelssohn). It is also worth mentioning that the word “should” implies Mendelssohn’s own ambivalence as concerning claims about reality and aspects which essentially presuppose god’s existence. With Kantian Philosophy, this latter aspect becomes *normative*, not (as Mendelssohn himself had always tried to show) descriptive.

54 This argument starts off *ex negativo*: what would be the consequences given the soul were indeed mortal? If the continuance after her physical death left the soul in the state of a mere unconscious point (i. e. a less than vegetative state, even for a Leibnizian), the worth of this worldly life would dramatically increase. If man had nothing to expect after his physical death he would do whatever is suitable to provide him with a longer life-span. And even god would have no sufficient reason to decide whether one or another individual is right if it comes to the clash of interests (which would inevitably happen, see JubA III/1, 117–22).

human perspective, presupposes the unconscious as the material out of which the soul forms its world.⁵⁵

Moreover, not only the soul's own improvement but all of nature can reveal perfection if represented by an apperceiving (conscious) soul.⁵⁶ Hence, the world's richness just becomes meaningful if perceived by a mind, and it is ultimately and completely formed if this mind stretches out to every aspect of it, may it be conscious or—given the vastness and sheer number of unclear impressions—unconscious of it.

This highly rhetorical passage directly appeals to the necessary reality of the principle of sufficient reason. If this principle were not actually realized the world would be senseless, and human perfectibility in vain. Kant seems to be willing to allow for a “belief” in personhood “for practical use” (*zum praktischen Gebrauche*, A365–66), but not in issues of theoretical insight into the nature of the human soul. The “practical use” of the notion of personal immortality, however, is aptly portrayed in the third dialogue of the *Phaedon*⁵⁷, not at all addressed by Kant's refutation in the *KrV*, since Kant could even subscribe to it—but only as an *Ideal of Pure Reason*. Idealism, though, was not what Mendelssohn wanted to deal with.

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55 In tandem with a new “scientific proof for god's existence” (JubA III/2, 88), Mendelssohn utilizes this thought in his attack on Kantian Transcendental Idealism in his *Morning Hours*. There (see JubA III/2, 141) he explicitly mentions the soul's obscure and confused “knowledge” of itself which only gains objectivity if thought by an eternal mind (see Dyck, “Turning the Game...”, 9–10). In his *Phaedon*, however, Mendelssohn stresses god's benevolence, thereby hinting at the principle of sufficient reason. In the *Morning Hours*, the proof for the existence of god rests on his theory of objective reality as the necessary connection of thinkability and being actually thought by one divine mind.

56 “Auch sind sie in dem großen Entwurfe dieses Weltalls nicht um ihrer selbst willen hervorgebracht worden: denn sie sind leblos und ihres Daseins unbewußt, auch an und für sich keiner Vollkommenheit fähig.” JubA III/1, 107.

57 Altmann 1972, 155–57: it all sounds like the continuation of his debate with Abbt

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