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Thesis for Graduation.

Hebrew Union College.

Moses Mendelssohn.
His religious and aesthetic Philosophy
and
Position in modern Philosophy.

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Cincinnati, O.

March 7, 1898.

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Chapter I.

A Characterization of the German Illumination.

Perhaps few periods in the history of philosophy have been more depreciated and neglected than the epoch of the so-called "Aufklärungsphilosophie". It seems as though the two giant minds that stand at the beginning and close of this period, Leibnitz and Kant, have wrested from our hands the measure for a correct estimation of the intervening time, as though the eye which has once rested upon these giants of thought could not accustom itself to itself to smaller dimensions, in order to do justice also to that period. The very knowledge that these two thinkers, although they confine the transition period, yet belong to it in many respects, is of modern origin and it is the great merit of K. Fischer[a] as well as of M. Kayserling[b] of having convincingly proved this fact. The sentence of condemnation usually passed on the philosophy of

a. K. Fischer: Geschichte der Mod. Philos. II.

b. M. Kayserling, Moses Mendelssohn. Sein Leben u. seine Werke

illumination is naturally somewhat weakened by this knowledge and would necessarily be entirely retracted, could we succeed in proving that the conception of the aim and purpose of philosophy as entertained by the savants of that time was, at least partly correct and well deserved to be called upon for the completion and perfection of our modern conceptions.

The period of Illumination extended over those few decades which close the era of Dogmatism, hereby mentioning its most prominent outer characteristic. The essential inner feature which discloses to us a deeper understanding and makes a genetical presentation of the epoch possible is perhaps best designated as Rationalistic Individualism. It is an individualism that considers things only in their relation to the philosophical mind[a], that does not presuppose the reality of things but examines the human certainty of this very existence; that does not

a. Rosenberg: Kant sein Leben und seine Lehre pp. 31 seq.

examine the beautiful as such but analyses the sensation of pleasure arising from it. The I, the ego subject stands every where in the forefront and does not admit of being equalized to the object, does not assent to a monistic composition of matter and mind. Since the I is the origin of all being and in its essence a mere rational thinking[a], there is nothing in the world that could remain hidden from a normal understanding. Thus arose the "Tendenz" of the illumination which presumed to dispell all darkness and combated from the stand point of an exclusive individualism all authority even of a religious and political character. Dogmatism paved the way to criticism.

To this one sided subjective mode of thinking was due an inability of appreciating and realizing other times and conceptions[b]. This absence of all

a. Goethe calls the phil. of that age "almost or less sound and trained human mind that dares ins Allgemeine zu gehen und über innere u. äussere Erfahrung abzusprechen (Wahrheit u. Dichtung); b cf. Mendelssohn's Life of Socrates.

historical sense naturally prevented a correct understanding of ethical organisms[a] in their gradual development and to it we must ascribe the chief fault of the period viz. the inability of conceiving a general progress and development. b

From this individualistic tendency of thought springs also the lack of critique which carries on the investigation of a matter to a certain point only and, then, modestly, discontinues its examination with an "ignorabimus"[c]. Past to this selfsame tendency was due that pure and noble striving after a universal humanity and that lofty conception of the purpose of philosophy

a. The best illustration is furnished in Mendelssohn, despite the fact that his opinions on church and state were indorsed by Kant. b. I have no idea whatsoever of the education of the human race of which my sainted friend Lessing had been persuaded by I know not what historian of humanity II[425] Brasch. c We are here at the limit not only of human cognition but of all cognition and wish to proceed still further without knowing whither. When I tell you what a thing effects and suffers, do not ask what it is. ibid I.[275] cf. Falkenberg 302.

which is so closely related to it. Since the individual is the focus of all our efforts and endeavors, Philosophy, as an integrating part of culture must pay special regard and attention to the wellbeing of man and instead of merely being the property of a few favorite persons must seek to purify and elevate the existence of the entire human race. &

It is, then, an outspoken Eudaemonism which follows an exclusively subjective Weltanschauung as logical consequence and which in connection with an overestimation of "sound common sense" runs the risk of degenerating into a shallow "Glückseligkeitsphilosophierei" This, indeed happened to most of the so called Popular philosophers. Men like Eberhard, Abbt, Engel Nicolai whom Geller so pointedly calls scientific epigons (Wissenschaftliche Epigonen) are not able

a. Falkenburg. Hist. of Mod. Phil. 302 .... who did not seek after the truth but believed that they already possessed it and desired only to disseminate it; who did not aim at the promotion of investigation but the instruction of the public.

in the insipidity and barrenness of their minds to conceive and understand the great problems of philosophy and naturally debased philosophy. It would be a grave error and injustice, were we to rank the so called philosophers of the illumination with Moses Mendelssohn who has adopted but what was best and beautifullest in in the tendencies of that period of philosophy. The severe condemnation which Mendelssohn has received from Gervinus in his Geschichte der deutschen Dichtung must be attributed partly to a misunderstanding of the entire trend of his thoughts, partly to an incomplete conception of the essence of Philosophy. Modern historians of philosophy have recognized the true worth of the Jewish thinker and agree that "we find in the works of Mendelssohn deeper and more systematically developed conceptions than in the writings of those men who have been ranked with him as popular philosophers."[a]

Zeller: Gesch. d. d. Phil. seit Leibnitz p. 335.

A perusal of the following chapters in which we attempt to give the gist of Mendelssohn's religious philosophy and aesthetic will, I hope, prove satisfactorily that Mendelssohn is entitled to the position in the history of philosophy which we claim for him in the closing chapter of this thesis.

Note. We endeavored to present only those parts of Mendelssohn's religious philosophy and aesthetics that would be of special interest to the students of Theology.

Philosophy of Religion

Chapter II.

The Purpose and Origin of Religion.[a]

Mendelssohn defines religion as the relation between the Creator and the creature - man. According to him religion and ethics have one thing in common, both impose upon man certain duties which he is expected to fulfill. They differ, however, as to the reason for these duties. Ethics prescribes for man a system of duties but considers him in his relation to nature. It demands of him that he, a part of nature and a being gifted with free will, should subject himself to the whole. Religion defines the relation of man and God as one of creature and creator and tries thus to change the natural relation of dependence into a relation of reverence. Religion gives a higher sanction to ethical duties. Religion proceeds, however, still further in order to obtain truly moral actions, it appeals to the self-esteem peculiar to man and represents him not only as a creature, but also as the image of God. Just as children are not merely the product of parents but also resemble

a. This chapter appeared in the H. U. C. Journal Nov. 1897.

them, so God created man in his likeness (cf. Genes. I. 27 Deuter. 14')

A worship consisting in the observance of certain rites and ceremonies Mendelssohn considers as the lowest of all religions. Our relation to God must not express itself as a mere service or sacrifice in his behalf and honor. Our devotion to God should be equivalent to our love for man. We should love God's creatures as our fellowcreatures.

The three postulates of religion are God, Providence, and Immortality. From these fundamental doctrines all instruction and exhortation of man must proceed. For this very reason we find them in all religious systems as the pillars upon which the structure of moral teachings must rise. Without belief in these doctrines, happiness becomes a dream and virtue ceases to be virtue. "Without God, Providence, and Immortality love of mankind is an innate weakness and benevolence little more than foppery which we try to palm off upon one another (anzus chwatzen) in order that the fool labor and the mad man enjoy himself and be merry at his expense" [a] To the different conceptions

a. M. M's Schriften II. 395

of these fundamental doctrines is due the origin of the various positive religious systems. They all have and carry out but one purpose viz. to bring man nearer to his destiny i.e to happiness. "There is no religious system so debased that it does not give sanction to at least some duties of humanity" a

In what, then, does this happiness consist which religion originates? According to Mendelssohn, it is an eternal happiness; eternal, not as opposed to a temporal, an earthly happiness, but a happiness that will last beyond our earthly life. In this connection M. quotes Mishnah Aboth: "This life is merely an antechamber of the future world. Prepare yourself here in such a manner as you would like to appear in the palace." True wellbeing in this life is of the same kind as the eternal bliss in the future. In a letter to Lessing he clearly explains in what he considered the future happiness to consist: "In the knowledge of truth, in the contemplation of the divine works, in the joy at their excellence. Well, my future shall then begin in this life. The foretaste which I can have

a ibid I 136

of it here below makes of this world a paradise".[a] Somewhere else we find a similar passage: "This elevation (the elevation of the mind through the exercise of virtue) is the only true happiness worthy of our immortal soul".[b] His remark that "religion has per se no influence upon earthly things"[c] must be understood in the same sense. For ethics teaches us the duties which we, as men must fulfill. The happiness, however, which we obtain only by religion lies primarily and chiefly in the future. There are but a few privileged persons who attempt in this life to attain to a contemplation of the divine works and even with those it always remains an attempt only, while in the future life all men will stand upon that high plane of knowledge. Religion assures us a happiness in the eternal life, but it must be our endeavor to obtain of it as much as possible in our mundane existence.

The truths necessary for the human happiness are cognizable and have been cognized by reason. All men are destined to happiness and for this reason, the means to it must be accessible to every one of us.

a. ibid III § 54; b. § 57. I 516; c II 370

God teaches them not by signs or letters which cannot be understood by all men in the same manner, but by creation itself which can be read and understood by all. Not supernatural relation but contemplation and study of nature have produced religion in man. a God does not affirm these truths by miracles, for miracles deserve but a historical belief, he awakens the mind which he creates and enables the intellect to observe the various relations of things, to examine himself and to convince himself of those truths which man is permitted to perceive in this life. The human race must, therefore, have recognized the contents of the natural or "Vernunft" religion from the very beginning of their existence.

Mendelssohn is opposed to the so-called evolution theory according to which religion began with fetichism and gradually rose to pure monotheism. He believes that religion began with monotheism and gradually deteriorated into idolatry. He does not share Lessings view in regards to the progress of the entire human family. The human family as a whole remains stationary; it is

only the person to whom Providence has kindly granted to pass a part of his eternity here upon earth, that a advances.

The religious doctrines as far as they are necessary for the happiness of man cannot be the product of deep thought and searching investigation. Primitive man must have recognized them from a mere observation of the simplest processes of nature. (By thus refusing to believe in a development of the human race Mendelssohn postulates a retrogression and must, therefore, assume a supernatural revelation in order to dispell the darkness and gloom that soon enshrouded the earth. To the progress of culture he ascribes the reason for the retrogression of religion.)

"The changes that have taken place at different periods in the letters, says Mendelssohn[a], have from time immemorial played an important part in the revolutions of human knowledge and especially in the various modifications of their religious opinions and conceptions and although they did not cause them wholly by themselves yet they have cooperated in a perceptible

[a] II, 425 426. [b] II, 436.

manner with other causes." The progress of culture viz. to express abstract ideas by suitable pictures (hieroglyphics) caused the regress that man forgot the original meaning of these pictures and took the symbol for the thing which it represented. Man's religious views became thereby very much obscured; for in order to express moral qualities in sensible forms man arrived at zoomorphism which is more natural than anthropomorphism, because an animal can be more readily recognized as a type of a special quality. Man made use of the pictures of animals to represent certain qualities which God possessed. Soon, however, it was forgotten that the pictures were mere symbols and were now considered as the things themselves. The many attempts of philosophers to explain the original meaning of these pictures proved quite in vain. Their explanation had no influence upon the people's religion. In spite of this misconception of an historical development, Mendelssohn does not share the view held by the deists viz. that the natural religion had been misrepre-

sented as positive religion through the artifice of tricky priests but rather considers the union of positive and natural religion the normal development of the human mind.

Mendelssohn firmly believes that Judaism, Christianity, and Islam agree as to the essence of religion; they endeavored, however, to reach the same goal by different means. While the other nations became idolatrous and zoolatrous, the patriarchs remained true and faithful to God and did their best to preserve for their families true religious conceptions. Abraham is, therefore, not the creator but the preserver of the pure God belief. His descendants were chosen by God to teach these religious doctrines to the world and Israel continues to be the preserver of the primitive belief. Mendelssohn follows here Juda Halevi & Monotheism is neither a product of the Sinaic revelation nor a child of Abraham's fertile brain, but was the property of primitive man. Mendelssohn is just as much of a rationalist as Spinoza for Kusari (Cassel) I 95 b. cf. the well known passage in the Talmud that the Law was coeval with the creation of the world, but appears for the first time with Abraham. Sinai 2 57 (Einhorn)

he also is of the opinion that religious truths are cognizable and can be found by pure reason. While Locke[a] and Wolff teach, however, that revelation contains essentially that which can be grasped by reason and that supernatural revelation does not stand in opposition to natural revelation, Mendelssohn maintains that supernatural revelation contains nothing of that which reason teaches us. He is, however, not a naturalist who denies the possibility of a supernatural revelation for although he considers natural religion sufficient for man to obtain happiness, he still assumes a revelation.

The purpose of the Sinaic revelation was not to convince the people of Israel of the existence of God, or to teach them the truths founded upon reason, for these a contemplation of nature alone can teach.

a Pfleiderer: Phil of Rel. I 114 Locke also considers a supernatural revelation to be possible and to have actually taken place in Christianity, but he insists as strongly as Wolf does and even more logically that this revelation must not in any way contradict the natural revelation given us by God in our Reason.

He who has not grasped these truths must be instructed by a person who understands these doctrines for in no other way can he be convinced of their truth. The Israelites believe in the existence and unity of God, some of them convinced by reason, others because of a tradition which they received from trustworthy ancestors. The Jew needs has but one purpose viz to proclaim Israel in preference to all other nations, a holy people. In regard to the doctrines which are based upon reason Israel enjoys, however, no preference; for all nations believe in the divine being, even the idolator confesses that omnipotence belongs to God.

Mendelssohn firmly believes that the use of written characters has led men to iconolatry and zoolatry, and being convinced that human reason cannot guard abstract ideas without sensible signs against evaporation and complete dissolution, he demonstrates the necessity of the ceremonial laws.[a]

He does not suppose that the Israelites became idolators

a II 451

in Egypt as it is assumed by some, but is of the opinion that Israel was to be kept free from idolatry. The religious ceremonies were intended to remind the Israelite of the unity of God, of the creation of the world, of the special kindness which God had shown to Israel in delivering them from Egyptian bondage. Of course, it is impossible to give the reason for every single command. Some of the commandments, especially those of omission are intended to teach obedience to God; others and principally the laws of commission are the indispensable means for the preservation of the God belief. Man is thus guarded against presenting unto himself God in a sensible form.

Granted that all nations believe in the existence of God, do not many also worship other beings besides him? Do not some worship stars, others demons or still others even the statues of men? Correct, Mendelssohn replies, reason prevents no one from such a worship. No logical necessity forces man

to devote his entire service to the true God only. If God had not warned us Israelites against idolatry, who would have told us that worships belongs to Him alone? The belief in God does not prevent any one from erecting statues to a man whom he considers worthy of his veneration, nor is it contrary to reason to assume minor gods beside the highest God. And this does not contradict a former statement viz. that monotheism is innate in man. The belief in one God is the natural and original one, but having become debased, reason finds it difficult to retrace its steps.

Although Mendelssohn depreciates the worth and value of Judaism by maintaining that monotheism is not its exclusive property but common to all men, yet he considers the suitableness and efficiency of its commandments of the greatest merit. Israel must obey these laws in order to reach happiness, but the other nations are not excluded from that state of "Glückseligkeit" Gods

has not revealed to them in what manner he desired to be worshipped and there must be other means whereby they may become happy in this and in the future life.

Chapter III

Proofs for the Existence of God

The proofs for the existence of God as presented by Mendelssohn are neither original with him nor very cogent. It will, therefore, perhaps be of interest to examine them in connection with the relation in which Mendelssohn stood to former philosophers in regard to the proofs which they had furnished.

There are four proofs for the existence of God and not three, as it is usually supposed. The fourth is that one of which Mendelssohn is especially proud but which, as will be shown, was neither original nor did it check the others. The error in regard to the number of the proofs is evidently due to the fact that Mendelssohn himself speaks of but three methods in which may be found the link "that connects concept with existence, that joins reality to possibility"[a]

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[a] Brasch. M. M. I 368

The "A posteriori" Proofs.

Mendelssohn himself designates two of his proofs as a posteriori. In these we easily recognize the great hold which the Leibniz-Wolf system of philosophy has upon his mind. He prefers that one of the two which lays special stress upon the testimony of the inner sense (sinne Sinn.) For since this inner sense testifies that our own existence is an incontestable truth, we may infer from it the real existence of God as the conclusive reason of our own existence. The inference "Cogito ergo sum" must be granted now by the Egoist who does not consider anything outside of himself as existing. "I may, then, cite my own reality without having to fear the slightest contradiction; and if the objective existence of an unchanging necessary Being can be inferred from the existence of a changeable being, my proof for the existence of God must have the required evidence."[a] Mendelssohn prefers this proof to the other, the so-called

a. Morgenstunden X 137[3]

cosmological, which infers the existence of God from the reality of the external world, because it does not involve him in a "thorny" controversy with the idealists as to whether the sensuous qualities as they appear to us adhere to the material objects outside of us. But for this very reason only, does he give preference to this proof, for when we remember what Mendelssohn thought of solipsism, we cannot suppose that he would have renounced any one of his proofs in order to please the egoist. "The egoist, if ever there was one, denies the existence of all substance and the Spinozist declares that he himself is not a being existing by himself but is a mere thought in God. The Skeptic finally considers this still uncertain and subject to doubt..... It seems that the intention here was to try Reason and to find out whether she could keep up with the sound common sense."[a] Somewhere else[b] he remarks similarly: "Without presupposing a real existence, not even his own, though

a. I. 369; b. I, 434

it cannot be doubted"

That the objective existence of an unchangeable being can be inferred from the existence of a changeable he shows at length later on when he produces the cosmological proof which he derives from the reality of external things. In Morgenstunden XII he argues as follows: All that is real must have a conclusive reason i.e it must be conceived and clearly understood why it has become real at all. The cause of a contingent being is not found within itself, but there must be a necessary being which contains in itself the causes of all contingent beings. This necessary being has the cause of its own existence within itself, in its own being. This being, the causa sui, the ens a se is God. The dependence of all things upon this being consists in their having become objects of his "Billigungsvermögen".

Having noticed that the external world was as real to him as his own existence it would be per

haps more correct to contract the two cosmological proofs into one. For if we consider the two proofs as mere syllogisms, we can easily see that in both the major premise and the conclusion are alike and that the minor premise, according to Mendelssohn's real opinion on the existence of the external world is suitable for both. Both proofs proceed from the proposition: Contingent, dependent beings cannot exist without a necessary independent being.

The ontological Proof.

"A God is conceivable, therefore, a God must really exist"[a] The cause of the existence of this necessary being lies in its inner being, in its inner possibility or in its inner uncontradictable conceivableness. Even though there existed no example of this kind in the whole range of our scientific knowledge, it would not militate against the validity of the proof in regard to the infinite being. It is clear, indeed,

a. I 368

that things are conceived which have no real existence but which have, without (a real) objective reality, an ideal existence; the necessary being differs, however, from contingent beings in so far as it must have an objective existence as soon as it is conceived. The circumstance that this kind of proof is unique causes Mendelssohn no apprehensions, nay it strengthens him in the conviction of its correctness. What at the beginning might have been considered an objection to the correctness of the proceeding, Mendelssohn considers now as the necessary supposition for his argument. Since there can be but one substance of that kind and since, besides this single substance, the reality of nothing stands in a logical connection with its conceivableness, there can be but a single instance in which this kind of proof can be applied. Descartes attempted, as Mendelssohn shows, a transposition of syn-

a Morgues. XVII I 435

onyms and introduces the infinite, the perfect being for the necessary being. In the idea of the necessary lies the aggregate of all perfect qualities for the perfect being can have no limits and must possess all perfections. Existence belongs to the perfect qualities and consequently, the necessary being must really exist. Leibnitz, however, considers it necessary, first to prove that the idea of the necessary, infinite or perfect being contains truth only, and did not combine characteristics that contradict one another. But it is clear, that all realities must be affirms of the necessary being and that perfections are affirmative ie positive characteristics. Characteristics can exclude one another only when the one is positive and the other negative; the characteristics attributed to God are only positive and can, therefore not contradict one another. Existence, however, is not only an

idea that cannot be separated from the idea of perfection but is also an affirmative characteristic and must, therefore, necessarily be ascribed to the most perfect being. Mendelssohn thinks now to be clear and sure of his procedure and reiterates his argument: What I am doing here seems to be a subreption. For I form an abstract idea, ascribe to it all conceivable predicates and maintain that existence belongs to the conceivable characteristics, so that, suddenly, a mere idea changes into an actual reality, and my procedure is justifiable! For all abstract ideas have, as modifications of our own thinking being an idealistic, though no real existence. They can be conceived but must not, consequently, exist. The necessary being can, however, either not be conceived and does, consequently, not exist or it can be conceived and does, for this very reason, exist. The thorough equal-

ization of the Infinite and the Necessary proves the conceivableness of the Necessary. If the Infinite is conceivable, the necessary must also be conceivable. The Idea of the Necessary implies Existence.

Proof No. IV.

In Morgenstunden XVI.[a] Mendelssohn argues as follows: A thinking person must not only conceive the Possible as possible (and this he proves on page 431) but also the Real as real. Every real Existence must correspond to an ideal Existence; But since to my Existence belongs more than what I consciously conceive of myself and since what I conceive of myself is capable of a greater developments, of a greater clearness and perfection than I can give it, there must, therefore, be a being in which the Ideal Existence of these things is actually present. There must necessarily be an

a I 428/29

infinite Verstand.

Mendelssohn claims this proof for the existence of God as his own and maintains that no savant has ever advanced the same arguments. Leibnitz[a] cites, however, the self-same proof in his Theodicée §§ 184. 189 and is indebted for it to Cudworth. Cudworth[b] the representative of some kind of hylozoism (according to which matter possesses a species of life and sensation, so that matter and life are inseparable) finds in his system no denial of the existence of God. Since there are, undoubtedly, eternal truths we must infer according to Cudworth that there is also an eternal reason in which they are to be found and in which human reason participates. There must, necessarily, be, argues Mendelssohn (p 433) a thinking being, a reason which can most clearly represent to itself not only myself with all my qualities, characteristics

a. f. Falkenburg 288 seq. b. cf. ibid. 196 seq. Erdmann, History of Philos. (Modern) p. 100 seq. Ency. Brit. sub C.

and differences but also the sum of all reality as real, in short the contents and connection of all truths in their possible development.
If we consider this proof as a kind of cosmological proof we must say that according to Mendelssohn things attain their reality through being thought by the infinite reason. If there are things at all, there must be an infinite reason, by and through whose thinking they become real.

Chapter IV.

The Essence and Attributes of God.

We cannot agree with Kayserling in regard to Mendelssohn's conception of the essence of God. Es kam Mendelssohn nicht in den Sinn, says Kayserling in his biography of Mendelssohn, das Wesen Gottes zu erklären, er wollte das Dasein Gottes nach den Gesetzen des Denkens vernunftmässig beweisen und war zufrieden wenn die Gegner ihm einräumten dass der Mensch sich eine Gottheit als wirklich vorhanden denken müsse. Er bekennt sich zu einem philosophischen Theismus wie wir ihn etwa bei Rousseau finden und ich von beiden Anschauungen Anthropomorphismus und theologischen Despotismus gleich weit entfernt; weder auf die Güte noch auf die Grösse Gottes sollte mehr Rücksicht genommen werden. Er wollte einen persönlichen Gott wieder über die sublunarische Welt stellen und ihm nur die Sorge für die Erhaltung des

Ganzen mit völligem Verzicht auf die Schicksale der einzelnen beitegen noch ihm zu menschlichen Schwachheiten herabwürdigen: beide Wege erschienen ihm als Irrtümer, als zu Atheismus und Unglauben führend." a It seems to us that Mendelsohn's theism differs very much from the religious philosophy of Rousseau. True, Mendelsohn esteemed Rousseau very highly as may be learned from many passages and he felt very flattered because Rousseau knew of his writings and thought much of them. It is also true that Mendelsohn read almost every line written by Rousseau and even translated some of his works. Kayserling might also quote in his defence Mendelsohn himself who writes in a letter dated the 25. XII 1755 b. "I can differ in but a few points from Rousseau." But not the very subject before us viz. Mendelsohn's teaching of the divine attributes seems to us to be one of those points in which Mendelsohn differs from Rousseau.

a. Kayserling. Mendelsohn p. 463; b. Kayserling: Mendelsohn's philos. Grundsätze p. 29.

Rousseau's philosophical system of Religion is deism pure and simple. "The famous confession of faith made by the Savoyard vicar, says Ed. Erdmann,[a] exhibits a point of view in which the subjective side is exalted so far above the objective that while God really becomes of little import to man, man's enjoyment of the consciousness that God exists, becomes correspondingly important. The foremost place is given to the certainty that we are immortal and that we shall one day see merit and happiness brought into accord with one another. As neither of these is conceivable without a Godhead, a belief in the latter is accepted into the bargain. Hence the vehemence with which it is maintained that the nature of the être des êtres is unknowable." Rousseau does not wish to investigate the nature of God because according to his opinion, the contemplation of it is not at all likely to strengthen the religious conscious-

[a] Erdmann, Geschichte d. mod. Philosophy, English translation (Sonnenschein) p. 269.

ness. Man shall attain happiness and do to so he requires immortality and an abstractly thought deity. He asks for no God as lawgiver, in which capacity the positive religions teach him. Though Rousseau must agree to the fact that man cannot attain happiness except by believing in God, yet he delineates the deity so indefinitely that he loses all concrete being. Mendelssohn, however, considers God the grandest and most prominent theme of speculative investigation. He teaches that the belief in God should accompany man everywhere and regulate his doings; but to render this possible, we must ascribe to God all qualities of perfection. With great determination Mendelssohn turns against the Jewish philosophers of Religion who, following the example of the Arabs, would not ascribe to God any attribute because they feared to sin thereby against a pure monotheism.[a] Even Maimonides whom

[a] cf. E. Feldman: Outlines of Maimonides Chs. 53.57.

Mendelssohn esteems so highly, does not escape his reproof. If Mendelssohn had ascribed to God only the the attribute of being, he could not have brought the ontological proof which rests upon the supposition that all positive characteristics i.e. all perfections must be ascribed to God. If, furthermore, a feeling of reverence is to be aroused, then we must clothe this being with power and love, a power much greater than human power, a love that embraces mankind and takes a deep interest in the welfare of man. The belief in God is powerless unless man sees himself advanced through God's providence. Mendelssohns God seems to be the God of the bible. The existence of God which the bible does not prove but presupposes, is demonstrated by Mendelssohn in a speculative way. In the same manner he arrives at the qualities of the divine being, both the intellectual and the emotional qualities, as taught in the bible. For when we reflect upon

the various processes that take place in our soul, we, soon, arrive at the concepts of wisdom, kindness etc and become also aware of their limitations. But in spite of these limitations the soul is such an excellent creation that no one but an allwise God could be its author. Our soul recognizes the essence of God by infinite, by extending the perfection which it finds in itself and by negating the imperfections and defects which it has. To be sure, Mendelssohn confesses that we cannot in this manner recognize the divine being to his fullest extent, but is sufficient for the religious wants of man to suppose the mentioned attributes in the highest degree.

Mendelssohn, also, turns against those who maintain that we know nothing of God simply because no philosopher has ever told us what God is and at most has taught what God is not. To be sure, one cannot have a perfect conception of a thing whose negative qualities are only known, but

continues Mendelssohn, we often apply to God negative attributes when we might just as well use a positive one.[a] By denying e.g. limitations and imperfections of God we imply that he is possessed of all perfections. The proposition God is not imperfect is equivalent to the proposition that God is perfect.

Mendelssohns doctrine of creation, also, demands for God the faculties of cognition and approval, desire and loathing, reason and will i.e. all the faculties of the soul and anthropopathies which we find in the bible. All contingent beings, argues Mendelssohn become real through the approval of the necessary being. God's free choice of the best brought everything into reality. The free choice of the best presupposes, however, a knowledge of the best and, consequently, God must possess the faculty of cognition. But to choose means to prefer one thing to others, God must, therefore, possess Billigungsvermögen, desire and loathing, reason

a cf. Feldman: Aufkl. of Maimo.

and will.

Which qualities must be ascribed to God? In order to be perfectly sure Mendelssohn first explains the term "quality". He distinguishes[a] within the qualities of the things surrounding us realities and mere phenomena (Realitäten und bloße Erscheinungen). A true reality is only the perceptive faculty (Vorstellungskraft) and the various faculties which can be derived from it i.e. the faculties of cognition. The external things ie the objects outside of us are only phenomena and not realities for the observations which we make with our imperfect senses do not correspond to the reality and cause imperfect judgments. We must, therefore, ascribe to God only our faculty of cognition. The phenomena which we perceive in our limited cognition do not exist for God. Reason, wisdom, justice, kindness, and mercy are realities. The "qualitates sensibles" are phenomena. Mendelssohn is so firmly con-

a. I, 85

vinces of the truth of the axiom that whatever is a reality must be ascribed to God, that he also accepts its opposite viz. that whatever cannot be ascribed to God, is no reality.

The qualities of God are treated more at length in the monograph "Sache Gottes or die gerettete Forschung".

All qualities of God are divided into the two categories of

A. Kindness. B Greatness.

Greatness consists in omnipotence and omniscience or in the perfection of the Verstand, Kindness is the desire for the good and the pleasure at the good or the perfection of the appetitive faculty (Begehrungsvermögen).

Justice and holiness are consequences of Kindness. Kindness embraces 1) all animals in general and is then called together with the greatness, providence; 2) all rational beings and is then called together with the greatness, Justice. The highest degree of Justice is holiness. Justice refers to the physical

by goods or bads of the creatures, holiness to their moral character. The omnipotence of God shows itself 1/ in his independence of other beings and from this we derive the eternity of God; 2/ in the dependence of all creatures on him.

Dependent upon God is 1/ the possible i.e. that which contains no contradiction. If there were no God, nothing would be possible or conceivable. God's omnipotence consists also in this that all things have their origin in God, that he created them voluntarily and also preserves them voluntarily. The things depend, furthermore, upon God in their activity, with this limitation however that only the good and the perfect has its cause and origin in God.

It is evident that this doctrine goes more than the prescience of God implies a denial of the freedom of will of man and when we read in §83 " that nothing else is required for true freedom than that die Vorstellung der Absicht zur

wirkenden Ursache des Entschlusses werde, we can clearly see that Mendelssohn was not a firm believer in this freedom. For how could the prescience of God be harmonized with the free resolution of man and his ability of changing his resolution? Mendelssohn, undoubtedly believes that, in reality, we are no free agents but merely imagine to be such. His postulates of Religion are, therefore, not God, Freedom, Immortality as we find them elsewhere (cf Kant) but God, Providence, Immortality. It was more important for him to demonstrate God's power than human freedom.

To what an extent does God possess freedom? The Kindness of God, as the perfection of the appetitive faculties naturally presupposes a will of God and this, again, presupposes freedom for the being that acts ~~with~~ with necessity has not exercise of his will. There must, therefore, have been more things possible than there actually are for if this

were not so, God could not have acted with freedom. We easily recognize here the influence of Leibnitz's theories. Several worlds were possible but God chose only one, and this one was the best, by virtue of the moral necessity. Morally necessary is only that, the contrary of which is conceivable but not as good and fit in contradistinction to the metaphysical necessity i.e the necessity of that the contrary of which is impossible or contains a contradiction.

We learn, then, that according to Mendelssohn God also acts with necessity and the difference between the teachings of Mendelssohn and that of Spinoza according to which God acts with freedom ie. according to the laws of nature, practically vanishes. Mendelssohn's moral necessity is Spinoza's freedom. Mendelssohn does not admit any absolute necessity as regards God (§43) "God does not act necessarily for an other order of the universe was possible." But since the choice of a certain

order was not a free choice and was due to Moral Necessity, it is evident that according to Mendelsohn the divine being acts just as little with freedom as does man.

Aesthetics!

Chapter V.

Letters on the Sensations.

The letters on the Sensations represents the earliest attempts which Mendelssohn made for the furtherance and cultivation of the science which Alex. Baumgarten (1714-62) created in Germany. They appeared in the year 1755, perhaps half a year after his Philosophische Gespräche and were published by Lessing. In these letters Mendelssohn appears most clearly as a pupil of Wolf and especially of Baumgarten from whose leadership the influence of Lessing afterwards weaned him. But already in these letters we find new elements which were not only unknown to Baumgarten, but are even opposed to his theories. We must, however, not suppose, as it is done by some, that these letters embody Mendelssohn's entire system of Aesthetics. They are merely the starting point, the first promising beginnings and are, for this reason, of great historical value to the students of Mendelssohn.

The very introductory pages of the work show that Mendelssohn has adopted Baumgarten's definition of beauty viz. Beauty is the confused sensuous perception of perfection.[a] In the two opening letters Euphranor objects to a too careful analysis of beauty. Beauty is not perceived distinctly but confusedly. Reason disturbs pleasure by pondering over its origin. Our happiness depends upon the enjoyment and enjoyment upon the quick sensation with which every beauty surprises our senses. Pleasure disappears as soon as we attempt to clearly explain our sensations, analysis dissolves a harmonious general impression into single dry pictures. Feeling becomes a logical conclusion. We would be wretched, indeed, if all our sensations would suddenly become clear and pure representations. Beauty consists in an indistinct representation of perfection. Joy and gladness are accompanied in the body by a "sweet" agitation of the blood and by various pleasant movements of the limbs, with which we would be utterly indifferent to them. This

a. cf. Falkenberg. History of Mod. Phil 299. and Baumgarten: Aesthetica Aromatica 1.§14 Aestheticis finis est perfectio cognitionis sensitivae qua talis. Haec autem est pulchritudo. Brasch M.M. II.5

graceful motion is a daughter of the affection (Affekt) and the affection is necessarily connected with an undeveloped representation. The indistinct representation is so very inseparable from our happiness that we do not perceive (fühlen) as soon as we begin to think. The affection disappears as soon as the ideas become clear and distinct.

This youthful, onesided opinion of Euphranor does not find favor with the maturer Theocles (Mendelssohn). Theocles maintains that clearness of representation does not diminish but increases our pleasure. All conceptions of beauty must be held within the limits of clearness if we wish to perceive a variety without a long and difficult meditation. The clearer the representation of a beautiful object, the greater is the pleasure. We must ascend from a consideration of the parts to that of the whole. The especially clear ideas retreat as though in the shade; they all act upon us but they counteract each other in such a harmony and symmetry that only the whole radiates from them.

Aristotle justly ascribes to every beauty certain limits of quantity. The immeasurable universe is not a visible beautiful object for us. Immeasurableness has its peculiar attractions, but the cosmos is only then beautiful when our imagination arranges its parts into a certain harmony. The quantity which cannot be measured by our senses, is diminished by our imagination and recedes within the limits of beauty. Imagination can bring the smallest as well as the greatest objects within the proper boundaries by increasing or decreasing their parts to such an extent that we may perceive about the necessary variety.

The philosopher derives very much pleasure from the contemplation of the cosmos but to do so he must clearly perceive its construction and single parts. The clear perception which precedes the sensation of the whole is the very reason of his great enjoyment. The meditation and thinking are, however, but a preparatory activity. At the moment of the real enjoyment not a single special conception must wish to remain clear. The

contemplation of the whole causes the parts to lose their bright colors, but does not prevent them from leaving behind traces which explain the whole and make the pleasure intenser.

Now, rules are the preparations whereby the poet is to place himself and the object to be treated into such a condition that will display beauty from its most advantageous sides. These rules must, however, not disturb him during the execution of his work, nor weaken his imaginative power; they should be friendly guides that point out to him the right way from a distance and warn him when he is about to lose his way.

Agreeable sensations must not necessarily rise from confused conceptions, for if this were so, the highly cultured minds would be poorer in happiness than the less cultured persons and the beings of a loftier nature would be justly entitled to complaints against providence because the clearness of their representations deprived them of much enjoyment. The confused feeling as such is not the parent of joyful sensations but has become a necessary

companion of pleasure simply because clearness and width of conception cannot lodge together in our weak human soul. The obscure feeling as such is, then, not the cause of pleasure, nay the beings that can clearly comprehend a greater variety are the happier because the objects act upon them with a much greater charm. Pure joy when separated from its sensuous companion must rest upon the positive forces of the soul and not upon the incapacity or limitation of these original forces. The inclination toward perfection belongs to all thinking persons but especially and uppermost to God.[a]

In the fifth letter Mendelssohn distinguishes between perfection and beauty which Baumgarten had confounded.[b] He cannot be too highly praised for this and would be entitled to an exalted position in the history of Aesthetic had he fully and thoroughly worked out this distinction. But unfortunately Mendelssohn is somewhat embarrassed and too much under the sway of the reigning school and we do

a. cf. Mendelssohn's Phaidon. b. cf. Falkenberg and Bosanquet on Baumgarten.

not progress at all in spite of this important discovery because beauty itself is lost through the manner in which he proves his distinction. Beauty consists in the pleasing external union in form; perfection in the rational (vernünftig) internal connection and appropriateness. Equality and unity in variety is a property of the beautiful objects. They must present an order or any other perfection which is perceived by us without any trouble. The senses are to be delighted and from them the pleasure spreads to the dormant reason.

It is evident that the pleasure we derive from beholding unity in variety is due to our incapacity. We grow fatigues when our senses are to explain an order or an arrangement that is too difficult for us. Beings that are gifted with higher senses must find in our beauties "eine Melodie Eintonigkeit" and that which ties us causes them great pleasure. It is, therefore, clear that beauty cannot stand before God, nay, it is not even preferred to ugliness. God must reject unity in variety, for only the external form has been covered by him with

sensuous beauty." [a]

The real purpose of creation is the heavenly, most excellent perfection which Mendelssohn apostrophizes with great enthusiasm. It alone affords variety, but not unity in variety, not ease in occupation, which low excellences it leaves to its sensuous imitator, to beauty. Perfection demands connection, agreement, harmony and the present order of the Manifold must be comprehended from the common final purpose. This "divine Venus" [b] must not be mistaken for the earthly Venus viz. beauty (This personification of the terms beauty and perfection is an imitation of Plato, who distinguishes in the Symposium a higher and a lower goddess [c] η μεν γε που πρεσβυτερα και αμητως Ουρανου θυγατρου θυγατης ην δε και ουρανιαν επονομαζομεν η δε νεωτερα Διος και Διωνης ην δε πανδημον καλουμεν.) This earthly Venus rests upon limitation and incapacity, but the pleasure at the harmony of the Manifold is founded upon a positive force of our soul. If it is natural for persons who possess susceptibility to long for representations, it is certainly

a. Pasch. M. M. II 29 b. cf. Notes to the "Letters";
c. Pasch M. M. I 81

natural for rational persons to aim at such representations which are founded upon one another. Confused ideas and contradictions are just as much opposed to nature and to the original requirements of all thinking persons as the absence, the complete death of all representations. Herein lies the potent charm by which perfections attract all minds and the pleasure at rational (verständlichen) perfection is by so far superior to the pleasure at beauty as a positive force rises above its limitation.

In the fifth letter Theodes turns against the accusations of Reason and "Speculative Wisdom" and discusses at length the desire for perfection innate in man and adds in the seventh letter as parts of Theodicee. In the eighth we find that an objection by Euphranor furnishes an excellent transition to the second part, which refutes the theory of the sensations by happily deriving from it a fact that apparently did not agree with it. Euphranor had renounced the opinions which he formerly held but cannot agree

with Theocles that the cause of pleasure is only found in perfection or beauty. Experience teaches that not every pleasure depends upon sensuous perfection. There are sensuous pleasures that are widely separated from all conceptions of perfection, nay, there are even pleasures which seem to rest upon imperfection. "Man is so capricious in his enjoyments that often that which should cause him pain, gives him pleasure, yea at the very moment when it causes him grief" e. g. the performance of a tragedy. Theocles replies that sensuous pleasures are in accord with his theory. The source of pleasure is both in the soul and in the body; both must have that in common from which the effect arises. Physiology teaches that the relation of body and soul is very close and that both are capable of making a lasting impression upon one another. The sensuous pleasures give our soul an indistinct but vivid representation of the perfections of the body and this fact affirms the correctness of the proposition concerning the derivation of pleasure from perfection.

The sensuous pain, on the other hand, adduces nothing except the sensuous Consciousness of an imperfection in the body.

The source of our pleasure is, furthermore, a threefold one: Unity in variety or beauty, harmony in variety or perfection and finally the improved condition of our body or sensuous pleasure. All fine arts must draw from these three fountains. It is in our power to change any and every harmless feeling into pleasure; for to every sense is given a kind of harmony and it is now the business of some fortunate person to discover those secrets of nature.

The twelfth letter contains a physiologico-aesthetical speculation on the reciprocal action of the psychical and physical pleasures. Any event in organic nature can be now the effect now the cause of the same change. If it is clear that every sensuous pleasure, every improved condition of our body fills our soul with a sensuous representation of a perfection of our body, it is certainly also evident that every sensuous

representation of a bodily perfection, must cause some kind of sensuous pleasure. In this manner arises the pleasant affection. The sensuous pleasure makes amends to the body for the loss of pleasure which the indistinctness of conception causes.
The pleasure of the mathematician is of such a nature. Single investigations do not give him any pleasure, they are a mere laborious task for him. But when he is taking a general view of the matter before him, his representation ceases to be distinct and the variety which passes before his eye in the most beautiful order, affords his soul an inexpressible joy.
In the following letters Mendelssohn discusses at greater length the subject which he had already begun in the ninth viz the theory of suicide. The subject is treated in the spirit of a moralizing philosophy and it is superfluous to dwell on it. One passage, however, is of great importance for the understanding of his aesthetical view and clearly

shows that Mendelssohn must not be ranked with the rest of the Popular Philosophers. Euphranor speaks of the satisfactory and pacifying impression which a suicide on the stage makes upon the audience and brings this as an argument in favor of suicide. Theokles replies to him that the drama had its own morality. Nothing, he argues, is morally good in life that is not founded upon a perfection; on the stage, however, every thing is good which is caused by passion. It is the purpose of the drama to arouse passions and the blackest crimes which tend toward the final purpose are welcome on the stage. Herein lies the artifice of the "theatralischen Poesy": the poet must carefully disguise the conflict of true morality with that of the stage if the drama is to be successful. Lappas Sir Samson would cry out to the seducer of his daughter who is about to commit suicide: What does thou, wicked man, with thou atone for one crime by an other? The very same moment both the morality of the stage and the final purpose of the poet would

disappear and our sympathy which had just been aroused would change into disgust as soon as we look into the mirror of true morality.

In conclusion Mendelssohn discusses a subject to which he later on devoted his mature work "Phaedo die" Euphranor accentuates the opposition in which the mixed sensations stood to the theory of Theodes. He does not believe that he could remove the opposition, for the mixed sensations seemed to give us as much pleasure as the perception of a perfection. To be sure, replies Theodes, the soul cannot take pleasure in anything that does not present itself in the form of a perfection. But when we attend a dangerous performance, we experience unconsciously representations which unite in our imagination and participate in our admiration. We are e.g. accustomed astonished at the confidence which the performer has in his skill, at his self-possession and presence of mind. An imperfection considered as an perfection can impossibly cause pleasure but we can accustom ourselves

to direct our attention only to the good which is connected with it. It is different, however, in the case of the productions of a painter or a poet. Here we need not separate our attention, in order to derive pleasure from a said presentation and the danger which is portrayed here cannot increase our satisfaction and pleasure at the artist's skill, for his art might have been displayed to a far greater degree in productions the objects of which are safe and peaceful situations. In these cases sympathy is the soul of our pleasure. The artist & we are in no danger. Sympathy is, however, the only unpleasant sensation which excites us i. e gives us pleasure and the so called tragical terror means a quick and surprising sympathy.

Sympathy is a mixture of pleasant and unpleasant sensations. Our soul filled with love for an object is moved by the idea of an evil, a physical evil which has come upon it undeservedly. That love is based upon the perfections which are peculiar to the beloved object and must necessarily arouse in us a sensation of pleasure.

The idea of an undeserved misfortune naturally enhances the value and excellence of the afflicted one, just as a drop of bitter medicine increases the sweetness of the sugar with which we take it.

The two kinds of sensations which unite in our interior must, however, not be in opposition, for if they are, they do not combine but neutralize one another. The idea of a past imperfection does not contend with a present perfection but the joy decreases when the present good fortune is not perfect.

Sympathy fills our soul with a divine joy both in life and love more so on the stage. For we are often pleased by such sights on the stage which would be intolerable in reality, because the pain which the misfortune of a beloved person causes us, would obscure or perhaps annihilate the pleasure which our love for the person gives us. But in the theater such a delight is possible because the thought that it is but a performance, softens our painful sensations and allows grief only so far as it is required to give the necessary charm and fulness to our love.

Chapter II.

The general Principles of the fine Arts and "belles Lettres".

Here as well as elsewhere Mendelssohn's chief endeavor was to blend the theories of Wolf and Baumgarten with the propositions of the English school, and his very introductory remarks prove this best: "The deepest secrets of our soul lie hidden in the rules of beauty which the genius of the artist perceives and which the art critic dissolves into syllogisms. Every rule of beauty is a new discovery in the field of psychology, for since it contains a prescription under what conditions a beautiful object will have the best effect upon us it must be possible to refer it back to the nature of the human mind and to explain it from the properties of the mind"

Although this work is to be a more aesthetical essay and to give the axioms and outlines of fine arts and not a complete system, a yet is one of the most import

a "I have neither the will nor the ability to work out a system and am satisfied, if I draw the mere outlines of such a system with any accuracy at all"

and and influential works of Pre-Kantian Aesthetics. It is, indeed, wonderful that Mendelssohn who has neither a historical knowledge of art nor stood in any relation whatsoever to art and artists, should discover things which remained hidden from German and English Aestheticians and should overthrow theories and systems that enjoyed the approval of the most of his contemporaries.

Mendelssohn rejects here for the first time the principle which the Frenchman Batteux[a] has established viz: the principle of the imitation of nature and shows its sterility and insufficiency. Our sensations, he explains, are always accompanied by a certain degree of pleasure and it must therefore be possible to explain all various degrees and changes of this pleasure and displeasure from the fundamental faculty of our soul, from the faculty of love and hatred. If it cannot be denied that the fine arts and belles lettres govern our passions, it can also not be denied that they affect the fundamental faculty of our soul. Batteux

a. Kayserling 83; also cf. Mr. Brasch. M.M. 145 Note.

believes that the only means which the artist possesses to please us is the imitation of nature and that this imitation of nature is the common and chief principle of all arts. But, asks Mendelssohn, does not nature herself please us without imitating anything and what means did the omnipotent artist employ to please us? A mere imitation of nature cannot be the chief principle, we must not merely imitate nature, but go to the original laws of nature, to the very types (ideas) of things and must select and separate in nature the objects which are most worthy of imitation.

What, then, have the beauties of nature and art in common and in what manner do they refer to the human soul whereby they please us? For if the pleasure at beauty is innate in man, his soul must be of a nature from which this pleasure must proceed. Every conception of perfection, of harmony is preferred by our soul to one of imperfection, of disharmony and this is the first degree of pleasure

and displeasure which accompany alternately our representations. If this perception of perfection is pleasure, it is called beauty as now shown in the "Letters". Everything, therefore, which is capable of being presented to the senses as a perfection, can also represent an object of beauty.

"We have now found the general means whereby we can please our soul viz the sensuously perfect representation; and since the final purpose of the fine arts is to please, we maintain that the proposition: the essence of the fine arts & belles lettres consists in an artistic sensuously perfect representation a" or in perfection presented by art, is undoubtedly true. Now it is true that the aesthetical representation is often sensuously perfect although its object in nature is neither good nor beautiful as has been shown in the theory of the mixed sensations and we are, therefore, justified in concluding that whenever works of art represent an imitation of an object in nature, this object will excite pleasure in

a. Brasch. M. M. II. 147

in the imitation no matter whether the object is pleasant or unpleasant.

All parts of a correct imitation agree, however, as regards the final purpose viz to represent a likeness of a certain model and for this reason it is necessary that every imitation as such implies a perfection. But since the similarity of the presentation and the original model is only a simple perfection, it excites but a very small degree of pleasure which is often scarcely perceptible and merely touches, as it were, the surface of our soul. To this is, however, added in the productions of art, the perfection of the artist which we perceive in them; for all work of art are the visible impressions of the capabilities of their creator which permits us to see his very soul. This perfection of the mind is of much greater satisfaction to us than a mere similarity because it is richer and more complicated than the former.

Genius demands a perfection of all soulforces and

and their harmonious agruments as regards the final purpose. We take, therefore, so much more delight in the traces of genius which a master's hand has left upon works of art than in the signs of patience and practice which are the requisites of diligence. The qualities of the objects in nature must strike the eye ie. they must be both characteristic and effective, for which reason a great part e.g. the indifferent objects in nature are excluded from imitation. The artistic imitation must, however, unite all requirements of a beautiful object. Mendelssohn arranges these requirements according to the standpoints of the Letters and considers also the Aristotelian demands according to which the beautiful must not overstep the limits of quantity.

It is now clear when and under what circumstances the artist is permitted to leave nature and to present objects in a manner which is not entirely similar to the original state. Beauty of external forms is

naturally) as very insignificant momentum in the immeasurable plan of nature and Mendelssohn infers rightly that the limited space of nature which is perceived by us, cannot necessarily contain all qualities of the ideal beauty.
The human artist choses a circumference suitable to his faculties, for his whole endeavor must be to represent the perceptible beauties in a limited district. Within this district he can give such prominence to the aesthetical view ie. he can concentrate the sensuous perfections in such a manner that he can and does approach the ideal beauty closer than nature herself because he is not induced to deviations by higher purposes and intentions. He will, then, portray a certain object in such a manner as God would have created it, had the sensuous perfection been his prime and highest purpose; for this is the most perfect ideal beauty which we find nowhere in nature except in the whole and which can, perhaps, never be obtained in works of art.

It is true indeed that the manner in which this thought is formulated, still betrays the influence of Wolfian philosophy in which only a subordinate rôle is assigned to beauty, but it is certainly unjust on the part of some critics and especially of Hettner[a] to affirm that the fundamental purpose of this treatise was "the proving and the defence of a shallow Idealism" especially because the character of Grandison is praised as the most admirable work of fiction. This was certainly not Mendelssohn's intention and the character from Richardson's novel must be considered a poorly selected example which was to illustrate the principle that the artist must raise himself above the common reality ie he must beautify nature.

We must consider Mendelssohns teachings in M's spirit and in their connection and not select a few scattered proposition in order to prove our own individual subjective criticism. Hettner e. g. seems not to know of the existence of that passage in

a. Geschichte der deutschen Dichtung.

the Letters in which a distinction is drawn between the morality of life and that of the stage and M.s remarkable essay on Idealschönheit[a] which teaches just the opposite to what Germanys historian of literature derives from a single passage and which he designates as kohler Idealismus, must have entirely escaped his notice. We finds propositions like the following in this very essay: "It seems strange indeed that the most perfect virtues, this infinite beauty of the soul should not be the same archetype for the painter of the mind as the most perfect beauty of figure is for the painter of bodies and why a mixture of the morally bad is expressly demanded of the poet"[b] It is most difficult to attain ideal beauty in all fine arts while the creation of a perfect virtuous character, on the other hand is of no difficulty to the poet. I assert that Richardson experiences less difficulty with his perfect Grandison than with his Clementine .... I conclude that fiction considered as a fine art has an entirely different ideal beauty

a. 66te Liter. Brief. 8. XI. 1759 Brasch M.M. II 283.

b. Brasch M.M. 283.

than the moral perfection of character... If I had the choice I would rather be the pious Aeneas, the severe Cato of Addison than the irascible Achilles or the jealous Othello— but would I prefer to have written?... No, indeed, the latter examples approach much nearer to the ideal beauty, they are perfect in their kind"[a]. These quotations will suffice to show that Mendelssohn had risen to the proposition that the highest final purpose of human art is beauty itself and that art enters thereby into an independent and dignified relation to nature. Art is no longer dependent upon nature but transcends it. Mendelssohn frees from the naturalistic conception has now reached that Idealism[b] in art which was first proclaimed by Winkelmann[c]. His beauty is ideal, his art not an imitation of nature but a completion of nature.

Having overthrown a false aesthetical principle and laid down the highest axiom of art, Mendels-

a, ibid. 284; b. Kayserling 84.

c cf. Bosanquet, History of Aesthetic pp 244 seq.

sohn undertakes in the second part a division of the fine arts into their various classes. The division rests upon the distinction of natural and arbitrary (will kürliche) signs which offer themselves as means of expression for an object to be presented. They are natural when the connection of the sign with the matter designated rests upon the qualities of the matter; these are used when an emotion, a passion is expressed by sounds, gestures, motions which belong to it. Those signs, however, which on account of their nature, have nothing in common with the matter designated, but have been arbitrarily adopted for it, are called arbitrary signs. Such are the articulated tones of language and their pictures ie letters. On this distinction of signs is based the chief division into fine arts and belles lettres (Schöne Künste und Wissenschaften) The latter consists of Poetry and Eloquence. The farthest circumference and, therfore, also the highest rank must be allotted to poetry, for its material is found in the illimited Kingdom of intuitions,

sensations, and thoughts. "All possible real things can be expressed by arbitrary signs as soon as we have a clear conception of them; the province of belles lettres includes, therefore, all thinkable objects. The poet can express everything of which our soul can form an idea. All beauties of nature in color, figure, and tone, the whole glory of creation, the connection of the immeasurable universe, the decrees of God, and his qualities, the passions of our soul, our most subtle feelings, thoughts, resolutions serve as object matter to the poetical imagination." [a]

The fine arts whose forms of expression are the natural signs, have natural limits for every art must be satisfied with that part of the natural signs which it can express. According to the different kinds of these signs the fine arts are divided into music and representative arts. Music discloses to us the beauties of the tones, the various parts of which it presents either as melody or as harmony (accord) The natural signs which affect the eye are also presented either after one another i.e. in

a II 154.

motion or side by side ie in pies. From this results another subdivision. The representative arts are differentiated into those which present to us beauty of motion and into those which present to us resting beauty ie. into the arts of dancing and into the representative arts proper viz. painting, sculpture, architecture, the conception and purpose of which Mendelssohn briefly describes. Having enumerated the beauties which are expressed by the latter, he separates these arts so carefully, that, had he diligently observed this separation, he would have done away with the "ut pictura poesis" of Horace[a] and that dazzling antithesis of Simonides whose overthrow is the lasting gain which modern aesthetics derives from Lessings Laokoon. Mendelssohn says[b]: Since the painter and sculptor expresses the beauties "in der Folge nacheinander" they must chose the moment which is most suitable for their purpose. The entire action must be presented from a single point of view. Everything must be suggestive and so full of importance

a. Ars poetica, 361 b. II 156

that every accessory notion must contribute its share towards the desired meaning. When we look at such a picture attentively, our senses are excited, the faculties of the soul are stirred up, and the imagination can read the past by the present & foretell the future." But after this correct separation he immediately adds: "one must confess that these limits often run into one another, for they must do so on account of the rule of composite beauty."

Here as well as in his remarks on painting Mendelssohn appears as follower of Winkelmann who considered it probable that the limits of the arts of painting are just as remote as those of poetry and that it is, therefore, possible for the painter to follow the poet just as it is for the musician. Mendelssohn's grave error is due to the influence of his teacher Winkelmann, for it is merely paraphrasing[a] his thoughts when Mendelssohn says[b] "It is evident that the arts of painting is not merely occupied with such objects that are visible, even the most subtle, most abstract ideas

a. Kayserling 86 Bosanquet 244ff.; b. Praschek 157.

can be expressed on canvas and can be recalled by visible signs. Herein consists the great secret which enabled Aristides to describe and paint the soul. The artist can do it in various ways. He can refer a certain maxim or abstract idea to a special example and thereby present vividly and intuitively the subtle thought. Another kind of portraying thought is by means of an allegory. The artist collects all qualities and characteristics of an abstract idea and forms of them a whole which he afterwards expresses upon canvas by natural signs".

The rest of the treatise is occupied with the union of two or more arts for which rules must be derived from the nature of the combined perfections. This part deserves little or no mentioning as the discussions are of little interest and worth. Mendelssohn himself felt that he did not treat his subject exhaustively and that the matter deserved a more careful consideration. But modestly he refers the continuation and completion of the work to the greater Lessing. This work has,

however become of greater importance than Mendelssohn in his modesty dared to hope, for Lessings critical genius made use of his results in one of his most important works and Mendelssohn thus became Lessing's forerunner.
Danzel, Lessing's most faithful biographer, considers this treatise the most important achievement in Aesthetics since Baumgarten, because it presents an important link in the development of the ideas whose ripe fruit is offered to us in Lessing's Laokoon.[a]

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a. Danzel & Guhrauer: G. E. Lessing, Sein Leben u. seine Werke

Chapter VII.

On the Sublime and the Naïve in "belles Lettres".

In the preparation of this short treatise Mendelssohn was not influenced by Burke, as is commonly supposed, for it appeared in the beginning of the year 1757, about half a year ere Burke's "A philosophical enquiry into the Origin of our ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful" was brought to Germany. The ideas which are expressed here owe their existence to the influence of Lessing who had proposed the subject to Mendelssohn. They do, however, not compare favorably to the more searching investigations of Kant but were at the time of their appearance new and of a great influence which is especially noticeable in the "Laokoon" and in the aesthetical writings of Schiller. Besides the graceful clearness and vividness of style which Kant admired so very much, it is quite gratifying to notice that Mendelssohn was very careful and happy in the choice of his quotations. Shakespere

is quoted quite frequently and many passages are presented in elegant German garb. The rendering of Hamlets monolog is superb and is by no means inferior to that of Schlegel. Lessing was very much pleased with the accomplishments of his friend and writes to him as follows: "I return herewith your essay on the sublime. I have not the least correction to make, although I read it carefully and often".[a] It is our intention to present only the principle points of the treatise and to omit all minor passages.

The truly beautiful has its definite limits which it must not overstep; if these limits could be more and more enlarged, they would finally disappear and the sensuously immeasurable would then begin. An imitation of the latter by art would merely be the "Grosse" and is accompanied by a sensation of awe and pleasure.

Power, Genius, Virtue possess an immeasurableness that also produces an awful sensation but differs

a. 13. VIII 1757 cf Keyserling, M. M. 87

from the sensuously immeasurable in so far as it does not finally end in satiety and disgust and for this very reason our soul gladly occupies itself with it. The intensively "Grosse" is commonly called the strong and the strong in perfection is called the sublime. We might, therefore, say in general that everything which, as regards the degree of perfection, is or seems to be immeasurable is called sublime.

The sensation which is caused by the sublime is composite and culminates in what we call admiration. If we wished to describe the sublime as regards its effect, we might say that it is the sensuously perfect in art which is able to arouse our admiration. For every perfection which surpasses our expectations or transcends all conceivable perfections is an object of admiration. Both the admiration and the perfection which is presented by it, are of two kinds in the productions of fine arts and belles lettres. The admiration refers either

to the object or to the artist whose skill has elevated the object and shown it in a new light. In the latter case our admiration is not for the object but for the excellent skill of the artist. To the first kind belongs the sublime in poetry, in sentiments, in passions; here we find the cause of admiration in the object itself. The second kind of the sublime is that one in which our admiration is paid to the skill of presentation, to the genius and extraordinary abilities of the artist. We admire his great talents, his inventive genius, the deep insight into the very essence of things, and the noble form in which he presents his excellent thoughts. Klopstock, but above all, Shakespeare must be mentioned in this connection.

The naïve stands in close relation to the sublime. A necessary quality of naïveté is undoubtedly simplicity. But this alone does not suffice, there must lie hidden beneath it a beautiful thought, an important truth, a noble sentiment which

manifests itself in an artless manner. If, therefore, an object can be conceived as noble, as beautiful and is designated by a simple sign, the designation is called naïve. The naïve of the moral character consists in a simplicity of the external which without so desiring it, betrays inner dignity, in an ignorance of the ways and customs of the world, in that confident conduct, which is not due to stupidity but to innocence and goodness of heart.

Grace and beauty of motion are also connected with the naïve, for the movements of the graceful persons must be natural and must unconsciously indicate that the emotions of the heart from which the voluntary movements proceed are just as natural, just as artless. The more we are conscious of them, the more we depart from the naïve. It becomes affected and ceases to be naïve.

The naïve, too, produces a mixed sensation because we find in it the simplicity of the

sign contrasted with the matter designated.
"The subject," says Mendelssohn in conclusion, "deserved a more detailed elaboration, but it does not belong to the final purpose which I have"[a]

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a. II 209

Mendelssohn's Position in Philosophy.

Chapter ~~IX~~. VIII.

Mendelssohn and Kant.

It has been repeatedly mentioned and accentuated in the preceding chapters that Mendelssohn's chief endeavor was directed towards a harmonization of the Leibnitz-Wolfian Philosophy and English Sensationalism. The success which crowned his labors along these lines entitles him to the proud distinction of being a forerunner of Kant whose chief merit consisted in having successfully and completely separated intuition and thinking. There are many passages in Mendelssohn's works which, as Danzel remarks, lack but the vivifying soul of the transcendental standpoint in order to be considered as Kantian. In Mendelssohn's celebrated prize-essay Ueber die Evidenz der metaphysischen Wissenschaften we find thoughts expressed which are so similar to those of Kant that they might be, without any difficulty, ascribed to the greatest mind of humanity.

In aesthetics Mendelssohn represents the connecting link between Baumgarten and Kant. His endeavor to separate the sensation of the beauty of objects from their reality is perfectly in accord with the principle doctrines of Kants Aesthetic. To be sure, Mendelssohn did not arrive at this separation independently but was influenced by Lessing who had first maintained it, but now without the help and assistance of his noble friend, he succeeded in developing theories which were not only known to Kant, but also used by him and which play quite a prominent part in the aesthetics.

Mendelssohn was, e.g. the first to place the "Billigen"[a] between cognition and desire. It is the approval, the pleasure of the soul, which is far removed from desire. We observe, says Mendelssohn, the beauty of nature and art with pleasure and satisfaction, without entertaining the slightest desire for it. It seems to be a special character-

a. Morgenstunden

istic of beauty that it is viewed with quiet satisfaction, that it pleases though we do not possess it and do not even entertain the least desire of possessing it. Comparing the Kantian Rules of Beauty with the above it cannot escape our notice that we must seek in Mendelssohn's theory for the pattern of Kants "interesseloses Wohlgefallen" The pleasure at the beautiful, according to Kant, is as regards its quality uninteresting. The interest is the pleasure which we connect with the representation of the existence of an object. The pleasure at the good and the pleasant is connected with the interest; but that which pleases without any interest or that the representation of which is accompanied by pleasure, is beautiful.

Noting the great similarity of the two views that we feel justified in maintaining that from the very midst of the Baumgarten school a path has been pointed out by Mendelssohn for the

Kantian revolutionizing reforms.
Kant often refers to Mendelssohn and kept up a correspondence with him. He was not only an admirer of Mendelssohn's style,[a] but esteemed him highly as philosopher. When Kant wished to prove the invalidity of the arguments in favor of immortality, he selected those which Mendelssohn brought because he considered them the best representatives of dogmatic philosophy; and though we did not touch upon these proofs in the "Religions Philosophy", it would perhaps be of interest to say a few words in regard to this refutation.
Kant denies in his critical philosophy any and all reality to the soul and deprives thereby rational psychology of all foundation. That Kant went too far in this denial, is best proved by the fact that he himself is not always true to this principle and often contradicts it. His very refutation presents such a contra-

a. cf. Letter to M. Herz mentioned by E. Caird in his Phil. of Kant.

diction.

He says:[a] A common argument for the immortality of the soul is this. The soul is simple, hence it possesses no plurality, no parts, is indivisible and therefore cannot perish by discerption. Mendelssohn saw that this argument is incomplete for it may be said that the soul does not perish by discerption but by vanishing; and so he offers in his Phaedo the following proof of the impossibility of the latter hypothesis. It is admitted that the soul cannot disappear gradually by discerption; now if it does so suddenly - between the moments of its existence and non existence there is no time. But between any two moments there is always time; otherwise the law of continuity is violated. Hence the soul can no more disappear suddenly than gradually and therefore is permanent.

The flaw in the argument consists in the assumption that "the soul has no parts." Even supposing it proved that the soul does not possess extensive quan-

[a] Mahaffy & Zimmer: Kants Kritik 274. seq.

tity, it may yet admit of intensive quantity – that is, degrees of reality in regard to that which constitutes its being. Consciousness certainly admits of degrees and of an infinite number of degrees down to its total disappearance. Consequently the faculty of being conscious admits of like diminution and may, if not by disruption at least by gradual remission of its powers, be finally reduced to nothing. This involves no breach of the law of continuity. So the permanence of the soul beyond life remains undemonstrated and undemonstrable."

It is indeed the infinitely great merit of Kant to have proved in his Kritik that ideas formed by reason as e.g. the idea of the soul as substance which always remains, treat of objects which lie outside of our experience and can therefore be of no theoretical validity. And although the Mendelssohnian proof possesses much that is convincing we must confess the proof does not suffice

to convince us of the immortality of the soul, because it is constructed of ideas that have no foundation in experience. But if the immortality of the soul cannot be an object of a theoretical decision of what value is the Kantian refutation of Mendelssohn's proof and his supposition that the soul changes into nothingness by a gradual remission of its forces? For that which lies beyond our experience and which therefore cannot be decided by experience must, if it be possible at all, be proved by mere conceptions and in this respect Mendelssohn has very ingeniously proved that the soul can neither suddenly nor gradually be annihilated. Kant's supposition that the soul may be destroyed by a gradual remission of its forces requires a more thorough proof in order to be convincing. For the fact that Consciousness has various degrees does not justify us to infer the same of the soul. Consciousness is the entirety, the "ensemble" of all representations. We

know from experience that representations may have various degrees. I have, e.g. a very distinct idea of a certain object. I know from experience that after a period of time, I shall have a less distinct idea of this object, until finally I shall know nothing of it, that is, until my idea of it will have entirely disappeared. But since we do know nothing by experience about the soul as the bearer of representations, we are not justified to infer from the Consciousness to the soul as regards permanence and transitoriness. The attack of Kant is in so far justifiable, as we cannot prove anything by mere ideas without any experience, but while Kant refutes Mendelssohn he lost sight of one of the principles laid down by him when he endeavors to prove that the soul of which we know nothing from experience, may be destroyed.

Note. The scope of this thesis forbids a more exhaustive treatment of the highly interesting subject before us. It is, however, our intention to make the relation

of Handel to Mendelssohn the subjects of a work, to the preparation of which more time and thought will be devoted.

Chapter IX.

Mendelssohn's Position in the History of Philosophy.

What Position must be assigned to Mendelssohn in the history of philosophy? Ere we attempt to answer this query, we must to see on what the importance of a philosopher depends; whether he must establish a new system or no.

Looking over the history of philosophy we meet with an exceedingly great number of systems. These systems has been established in the course of time, had flourished and been esteemed by many; until a new system was introduced which either overthrew the last one entirely or diminished its greatness and importance. If we were to infer from this that the single systems that appeared and again disappeared, were of little or no importance whatever, we would be very much in error; for although no system has

as yet succeeded in discovering the truth in its entirety, each one has helped to find new means, new ways for further progress and has aided in removing the rocks from the path to truth. It is therefore also wrong to suppose that only a complete system can pave the road to truth and that philosophical ideas and theories which a thinker has given occasionally to the world, have been and are without any influence upon the science. An almost dazzling and irrefutable illustration for this assertion is furnished in Leibnitz. He occupied himself but occasionally with philosophy and developed philosophical thoughts in mere sketches. But of what a powerful influence his thoughts were upon the development of philosophy until the time of Kant and how beyond that period! Mendelssohn, also, did not lay down his philosophical thoughts in a complete, finished system and

presented his doctrines and teachings in mere letters, sketches, and short treatises. It would be, however, unjustifiable to deny him on that account a position in the history of philosophy, though it cannot be gainsaid that a philosophizing of such a nature lacks completeness, that many things are necessarily overlooked and omitted and that the same matter is often repeatedly treated.

Having premised these general remarks we feel now at liberty to speak on the importance and place which must be assigned to Mendelssohn in the history of philosophy. The eighteenth century produced a certain tendency in philosophical thought which is generally designated as the philosophy of enlightenment. The real aim and ambition of this philosophy was the improvement of man. Philosophy was to assist man in attaining happiness, for to gain this end was the only purpose

of all cognition and action. Ethics naturally stepped into the foregrounds of philosophy. Psychology, also, and especially the examination of the sensations became the objects of diligent study in order that man might know in and by what manner happiness is to be attained. The aim of all popular philosophers was the same. The difference and importance of the individual philosophers rests upon how successful they were in the realization of this aim.

Moses Mendelssohn is a representation of "Popular Philosophy", but above all things he was human, a human being conscious of his own individuality. Every word he says flows from his inner most being and bears testimony to the high and noble spirit that dwelled in him. Each one of his words does show

Wie frei von Vorurteilen
Sein Geist, sein Herz wie offen jeder Tugend,
Wie empfindsamst mit jeder Schönheit sei!

(Nathan)

With a goal full of love he seeks to give a precise and clear expression to the philosophical thought that has found an echo in his heart. What he cannot comprehend does not trouble him much, but is simply dropped. Just this clearness of expression which leads so often praises, enables us to follow the thought to the farthest regions and shows us how truth and beauty may be united. To be sure, we often find the formal elements too much in the foreground and notice that too much importance is given to language.

Danzel justly points out[a] that it is an unfounded prejudice to consider Mendelssohn a mere popular philosopher and champion of the sound common sense. Mendelssohn himself declares his opposition to a certain kind of popularizing philosophy.[b] "Nowadays it seems to be the fashion to present all sciences in an easy manner, and

a. Danzel. Lessing s. Leben und s. Werke 348
b. XX Literat. Brief

captum, as it is called. It is believed that there by truth can be spread among the people and that it can be extended in all directions although it is impossible to increase its inner value. This prejudice is probably due to the Wolfians. It seems to me, however, that nothing is as harmful as just this royal road to the sciences .... The proofs of the accepted proposition are of little interest because one wishes to be persuaded, still less attention is paid to the difficulties which were eradicated by the favorite system. Truth itself became through the manner in which it was accepted, a prejudice."

As regards the position of Mendelssohn in the history of philosophy we agree with Pfleiderer[a] "that the man who did most to popularize the Leibnitz Wolfian arguments for the existence of God and immortality and, in whose eloquent work the Illumination recognized the most

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[a] Pfleiderer: Philos. of Relig. I 107

adequate expression was the Jewish philosopher Moses Mendelssohn. To sum up: Mendelssohn was a faithful follower of the Leibnitz Wolfian philosophy and by endeavoring to apply this philosophy to English Sensationalism he has become the forerunner of Kant.