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Truth, Knowledge, and “the Pretensions of Idealism”:
A Critical Commentary on the First Part of Mendelssohn’s *Morning Hours*
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[“Truth, Knowledge, and “the Pretensions of Idealism””: A Critical Commentary on the First Part of Mendelssohn’s *Morning Hours*.” Ed. Corey Dyck and Heiner F. Klemme. *Kant-Studien* 109/2 (2018): 329-51.]

Moses Mendelssohn’s *Morning Hours* contains, as the full title indicates, lectures on the proof of God’s existence. Perhaps understandably, research on the work has largely focused on the Second Part of the text, both because it contains those proofs and because it contains his elaboration of a purified pantheism, a central element of his contribution to the notorious “pantheism controversy” between him and Jacobi. By contrast, the First Part of the text has received only passing attention¹. Yet the First Part deserves a better fate, since it contains Mendelssohn’s mature views on truth, knowledge, and the dispute between idealists and dualists. The aim of the following article is accordingly to provide a critical commentary on four central themes of the First Part, namely, Mendelssohn’s treatments of (1) thinkable truths, (2) actual truths, (3) the types of knowledge, and (4) the case against idealism.

1. Thinkable truths and contradiction

Mendelssohn opens the First Part of *Morning Hours* with a discussion of truth. The discussion begins with truth in the sense of ‘truthfulness’ where a person “says nothing other than” what she “thinks”. But he immediately shifts his attention from the truth or candidness of the speaker to the question of truth as a matter of what the speaker says. Mendelssohn entertains two possible ways of defining truth in this sense, one involving four elements (words, thoughts, things and their agreement) and one involving three elements (words, thoughts, and their agreement). Setting the stage for the question of idealism that preoccupies him for much of the work, Mendelssohn makes the observation that we have direct access to thoughts but not to the things they allegedly designate. Hence, he concludes, we have no way of comparing things directly to thoughts to see if the latter are accurately represented by the thoughts (supposing the things exist at all). Hence, without disputing the correctness of the former definition, he deems it “unfruitful” and opts for understanding truth as the agreement of what is said with the thoughts designated by the speech. Thus, on the opening pages of *Morning Hours*, the leading question is that of truth without qualification (hence, the opening section’s title: *Was ist Wahrheit?*) but Mendelssohn proposes to answer it in terms of “truth in talking” (*Wahrheit im Reden*) or “truth in speaking” (*Wahrheit im Sprechen*)².

Yet, while interesting in its own right, Mendelssohn’s way of steering the definition of truth in general towards the relation of thoughts and words, is misleading as an introduction to the ensuing discussions. It is misleading since, after stating that truth can be determined by comparing thoughts with words, he promptly leaves this general definition behind and turns – without further explanation – to thoughts alone. He observes that thoughts can be considered from two different sides, namely, in terms of either their thinkability or their actuality. By actuality is meant the truth of what is thought and said insofar it is a way of thinking and speaking about things, what we might deem *actual truth* (despite our lack of direct access to the things). But there is also a way of attributing truth to thoughts simply, namely, in terms of their thinkability. Accordingly, Mendelssohn also entertains a category of *thinkable truth* that

includes the truths of the different types of thoughts, i.e., concepts, judgments, and inferences respectively. He begins with an account of the latter types of thinkable truths.

When we entertain a concept, we think of various characteristics (*Merkmale*), e.g., when we entertain the concept of circle, we think of figure, curvature, and so forth. A concept is true if its characteristics do not cancel one another out, making it possible to think of them at the same time. The determination of conceptual truth thus turns on specifying (defining) the characteristics of a presumed concept and examining their compatibility. What is thought or entertained in the definition or specification of the concept of a circle ('plane figure,' 'all the points of which are equidistant from a center point') is thinkable, what is entertained in that of the concept of the greatest speed is not. (The concept of the greatest speed requires thoughts of the smallest time and the greatest space, both of which are separately unthinkable, let alone together.) The concept of circle is, Mendelssohn submits, a true concept, whereas that of the greatest speed is not³.

A judgment is true when characteristics contained in the total concept of the subject are "asserted" individually of it and false if something other than a characteristic of it is asserted of it. So the judgments 'human beings can laugh' and 'human beings can make use of grammar' are true, whereas the judgment 'dogs can, too' is not. A judgmental truth is thus closely tied to a conceptual truth; in Kant's terminology we might say that Mendelssohn takes judgmental truths to be analytic in the sense that they presuppose the analysis of the concept indicated by the grammatical subject of the corresponding sentence. In contrast to his gloss on conceptual truth, Mendelssohn explicitly appeals to verbal phenomena – i.e., what is "asserted" – to characterize judgmental truths. Yet he does so without relating the account of this particular, thinkable truth back to the general definition of truth. The same holds for his account of inferential truths.

Just as analysis of the relevant concept or concepts is required to determine a concept's truth or a judgment's truth, so, too, the truths of inferences are "grounded upon a correct analysis of concepts"⁴. Mendelssohn in fact envisions a system of rational inferences, modeling it (like Descartes' *arbor sapientiae*) as a tree with common characteristics (the trunk) running through all the divisions and subdivisions (limbs, branches of limbs, branches of branches, and so on). On this model, what is said of the higher concepts (the trunk or the central branches) pertains to all the lower concepts but obviously not vice versa. "The truth of rational inferences consists, therefore, in nothing less than the possibility or impossibility of unifying certain concepts and characteristics in thought"⁵.

The truths of concepts, judgments, and inferences are, in sum, a matter of thinkability. Every instance of human knowledge concerned solely with what is thinkable or not, such as that found in "mathematics and logic," acquires or preserves its certainty through the principle of contradiction (the ultimate criterion of joint thinkability) that brings with it "the highest degree of evidence"⁶. The common mark of these truths is, he adds, the fact that they are "necessary and immutable and thus independent of time"⁷. Although these truths are necessarily thinkable, they are obviously not necessarily thought. To the contrary, thinking these thoughts is something that comes to be and passes away, without undermining their necessity.

2. Actual truths and induction

The sphere of actual truths is more limited than that of thinkable truths. Whereas everything actual must be thinkable, the reverse does not hold. Being non-contradictory secures thinkability but not actuality. Mendelssohn accordingly reasons that some principle other than that contradiction is needed for determining truths about what is actual.

We have to look for another basic principle that might provide the boundary-line between the actual and non-actual with the same precision that the principle of contradiction distinguishes what can be thought from what cannot⁸.

The place to start to locate that principle is, he submits, our knowledge of ourselves insofar as we actually think and represent things. In this respect, Mendelssohn maintains, we can distinguish between an ideal and a real actuality. Whereas a person's thoughts and representations of things, even true thoughts and representations, have merely an ideal actuality as the object of her thinking and representing, they come to be and pass away in the person herself whose "actuality...is not merely ideal but real"⁹.

But just as the person is not simply a changing thought but the thinking being who endures (i.e., something really actual), so the possibility presents itself that what is thought or represented is really actual as well – albeit, to be sure, not insofar as it is simply thought. This possibility brings us back to the question of actual truth:

But how are we convinced [*überführt*] that these things
(Q₁) outside of us also have an actual existence and are
something more than mere thoughts in us?¹⁰

Q₁ may be construed as Mendelssohn's version of the question of our knowledge of the external world. Yet, notably, he does not frame the question, at least immediately, as a matter of knowledge. Whereas our nature compels us, he notes, to assume the relevant actual existence of many things and to do so confidently, the question remains of the reasons "why we have no doubts regarding them"¹¹. As this last remark (together with Q₁) suggests, Mendelssohn's concern here is with the reason (*Grund*) or warrant (*Rechenschaft*) for believing or being convinced that certain thoughts have the status of actual truths, i.e., that what is thought is in some respect not merely ideally actual but, like ourselves, really actual. The operative thought seems to be that the reasons would be sufficient (*hinlänglich*) in some respect for us, as a matter of fact, to harbor no doubts regarding the things for which they are reasons. Yet he is careful not to say that, given those reasons, we *cannot* have any such doubts. Since the question here concerns actual truths, i.e., the truth about actual things, the sufficiency of any such reasons is by no means absolute. Presumably, having reasons that are sufficient in some respect for belief is tantamount to knowing for Mendelssohn where 'knowing' is, it bears noting, a matter of warranted, i.e., more or less justificatory beliefs¹².

The question of actual truth (Q₁) obviously arises with regard to objects that seem to make an impression upon us, since we often merely imagine, dream, or delude ourselves into thinking objects of this sort to be really actual. We distinguish the objective order of our impressions when we are alert and awake from the purely subjective order of experiences characteristic of states of passion, drunkenness, rapture, madness, and dreams. In these states, under the thrall of imagination or various interests, we entertain "thoughts and actions that do not correspond to the actual state of things" (even leading in some cases to somnambulism and the like)¹³. These considerations correspond to Mendelssohn's characterization (noted above) of representations as

ideal actualities. In line with this characterization, he distinguishes the *mere representation* (*Vorstellung*) of something from the *exhibition or display* (*Darstellung*) of it. Errors and deceptions occur on this level (i.e., in regard to actual truths) when a representation, of itself indubitable, is supposed also to exhibit or display something on hand outside us¹⁴.

One apparent way to differentiate these sorts of mental images that have only an ideal actuality from representations of actual things – i.e., differentiate mere representations of something from representations that display it – is to heed the degree of agreement (“customary combination”) of different senses. “What we know through a sensation alone has for itself merely the supposition of actuality, a supposition grounded on the customary combination of sensory appearances”¹⁵. Suppose that someone first enters a dark room and, without seeing anything or anyone, she feels and hears something scurrying about her feet. The combination of feeling a more or less familiar touch and hearing a more or less familiar sound in close temporal and spatial proximity gives her reason to believe that something (a cat?) is in the room. If, as her eyes become adjusted to the faint reddish light in the room, she detects the shadow of a figure corresponding to a cat, she has additional reason. Mendelssohn’s own examples are the touch, sight, and smell of a rose or a piece of salt, encountered at various distances and through different media (air, water, glass).

Informing ourselves of the impressions that the same objects make on others and even animals (imagine her friend or her dog accompanying her into the dark room) provides further evidence that certain sensory representations depict things actually on hand outside us¹⁶. The degree to which we concur in relevant respects despite occupying diverse points of view brings us one step closer to a complete induction¹⁷. This movement towards more complete inductions corresponds to what Mendelssohn regards as “the positive power of the soul” to grasp what is not merely a matter of its perspective and limitations¹⁸. “The more agreement that is found in all this, the more we believe ourselves assured of the external actuality,” just as the more that we find discordance, the more dubious we become of its external actuality¹⁹.

Once we have reason to believe in the existence of the object, we can apply all the truths of mathematics that apply to the concept of the object. Thus, the concept of a rose includes geometrical concepts, e.g., size, shape. So, too, applying the principle of contradiction, we can sort out what does and what does not belong to the concept in question. From these applications, we arrive at true propositions (*Wahrheitssätze*), the subjects of which have the evidence of sensory knowledge, and the predicates of which are due to applied mathematical and logical rules. With these propositions in hand, we proceed to inferences that lead to the doctrinal edifice (*Lehrgebäude*) of applied mathematics and logic in physics. Regrettably, Mendelssohn does not give any examples here. Nonetheless, his general message is clear and compelling, namely, that necessary and universal claims have a place within physics insofar as the physical concepts are logically and mathematically analyzable.

But there is far more to the scope of actual truths, Mendelssohn insists, than logical and mathematical analysis of concepts affords. Experience of the appearances of an object enable us to determine further (a) the object’s properties or, more precisely, the properties of the sort of thing it is and (b) the probabilities of combinations of it (or its properties) with other objects (or their properties) in various circumstances. The greater the frequency of the combination or succession of appearances, the more confidence we have of iterations of the same. Such

experiences lead, Mendelssohn notes, to “endless” propositions in ordinary life and physics, allowing us to make inferences that, while lacking “the irrefutable certainty” of logic and mathematics, have “the degree of conviction that is founded on the doctrine of probability and is called ‘induction’”²⁰.

By induction, Mendelssohn chiefly understands an inference grounded on the frequency of a sequence. He appeals, as noted above, to a form of induction based upon iterations of combinations of senses in oneself, others, and animals to establish the probable veracity of certain sensory experiences (“what we know through sensation alone”). But induction also serves importantly as the basis for establishing relations among the things known through sensory experiences. From the fact that a foregoing appearance of a certain sort (cause) is frequently succeeded by a subsequent appearance of a certain sort (effect), we come to the “grounded supposition” (*gegründete Vermuthung*) that they stand in connection with one another²¹. He introduces the concept of a “ground” to identify the characteristic in a cause from which an effect may be inferred. From the nourishing features of bread, we can infer that its consumption will provide nourishment. In this way, “every effect is grounded in its cause”²².

This inference from a ground is, Mendelssohn submits, what distinguishes human knowledge from an animal’s expectations of similar effects from similar causes. Whereas the experience of the precariousness of a sharp incline leads animals to “associate” the idea of falling with that of an incline and to react with fear at the sight of the latter, an analogous experience leads humans to “form for themselves the universal rational proposition: ‘all heavy bodies slide down surfaces on an incline’”²³. That proposition is the first premise of the inference that heavy bodies will slide down the incline presently encountered. The experience also leads human beings to suppose that there is something in the idea of the incline that makes comprehensible the possibility of falling. A philosopher can add knowledge of the ground on the basis of mechanics, thereby bringing “the general proposition closer to purely rational knowledge”²⁴. Yet, while someone with knowledge of physics can subsume it under laws of motion, gravity, and the like, the ground of the proposition, like that of those laws themselves, is, Mendelssohn submits, “not scientific, not purely rational knowledge, but an incomplete induction that must take the place of pure reason”²⁵.

Mendelssohn is quick to add that such induction, while incomplete, frequently remains utterly persuasive, particularly the more it approximates a complete induction. Consider, he suggests, the certainty of dying or of being able, in the presence of an infant, to conduct business that must be kept secret. The conviction built upon these incomplete inductions falls “only marginally below mathematical evidence”²⁶. Nevertheless, when it comes to any science of actual things, our knowledge has “a mixed make-up,” composed of elements from immediate sensory experience, “pure reason,” and principles grounded on complete or incomplete induction²⁷.

Yet “with what reason,” Mendelssohn asks, “are we justified to make inferences in these cases” of incomplete induction? The question replicates Hume’s question in §4, Part II of his *Enquiry concerning Human Understanding*. Not coincidentally, for Mendelssohn’s complete answer to this question, he refers his readers to his essay *On Probability* where he cites and presumes to remove Hume’s “skeptical doubts” that there is a reason (and not simply a lively feeling). Nonetheless, on the final pages of the second chapter of *Morning Hours*, he provides what he

takes to be the essential elements of the answer given in that essay. When a coin is tossed, the odds of it coming up heads or tails are the same, all things being equal. If it repeatedly comes up heads, then we have reason to suppose that, far from being a matter of chance, there is some internal, determining ground for this outcome. (If the person tossing the coin repeatedly bets on heads, then we have reason to think that he is doing something to bring this about.) From this contrast between being and not being a matter of chance, Mendelssohn concludes that we are justified in supposing that regularities are due, not to “contingent causes,” but to “a reason for the connection”²⁸. The more often the connection holds, the greater our certainty that an instance of it will be repeated²⁹.

Mendelssohn thus contends that the experience of the difference between probabilities and their absence gives us *reason* to endorse talk of causal grounds and powers (rather than simply a non-rational custom or habit of doing so, as Hume would have it). “The convincing power” (*Überzeugungskraft*) of probability, as he puts it, is itself ultimately based on a conception of the nature of human intelligence:

It is in keeping with the nature of the human intellect [*der Natur des menschlichen Verstandes gemäß*], not to ascribe a detected agreement to blind chance but instead, wherever a manifold concurs, to seek the ground of the concurrence³⁰.

Curiously and without further qualification, this remark could be endorsed by Kant and Hume, in different ways, to be sure.

Yet, as an answer to Hume’s skeptical doubts and solution to the problem of induction, the argument seems deeply flawed, as many authors have pointed out. For Hume, there is no non-circular way of demonstrating the validity of induction. Past resemblances do not establish unqualifiedly that the present or future will resemble the past. Contra Mendelssohn, neither the degree of human reliance upon induction nor the amount of iterations in the past suffices to establish its validity. “[E]ven after we have experience of the operations of cause and effect,” Hume contends, “our conclusions from that experience are *not* founded on reasoning, or any process of the understanding”³¹. Hume makes clear that he is not denying that we infer from past experience that like causes will have like effects in the future. Nor does he deny a “probability of causes,” i.e., that we have a preference for what “has been found most usual.” His contention is simply that, since experience only informs us of past instances and not of the future, the basis for the inference is wanting. In short, he fails to find any “proposition” or “intermediate step” connecting the proposition about the past with the proposition about the future. Any appeal to probability (“probable arguments”) is pointless, he adds, since it begs the point in question³².

Hume’s solution to the doubts raised is itself “skeptical,” as he puts it, since it appeals not to any reason or reasoning but to custom and belief. Custom is the propensity to expect the future to resemble the past and belief is the sentiment that custom produces. Custom (a customary conjunction) leads me to associate snow and cold, so that I am led to believe (and not merely imagine) that it will be cold to the touch. These operations of the soul, Hume concludes, are “a species of natural instincts, which no reasoning or process of the thought and understanding is able either to produce or prevent”³³.

From the fact that my experience of the causal relation is not necessary, it does not follow that the relation itself is not necessary. Part of Kant's criticism of Hume's analysis of causal reasoning moves along these lines. While not accepting Kant's categorial conception of the necessity of the causal connection, Mendelssohn disputes Hume's contention that no reasoning or process of understanding is able to produce the requisite belief. In the wake of past experience of the regular succession of instances of two specific sorts of events, it is reasonable and, indeed, frequently a basis for reasoning to the conclusion that a similar succession is forthcoming and thus not merely coincidental. Mendelssohn accordingly thinks that he has provided the reason and species of reasoning that Hume finds missing but necessary to justify inductive inferences.

However, Hume's concern is, as reviewed above, the normative question of what legitimates an inductive inference. Scholars of Hume debate whether he intends that legitimation in the form of a deductive inference or not and whether he sees it as requiring the Uniformity of Nature as a universal and necessary or merely probable claim³⁴. Yet, however one comes down on these debates, his argument appears incontrovertible. No amount or degree of evidence can legitimate an inductive inference since the legitimation would have to take the form of such an inference. In other words, it would have to presuppose that the future will or likely will resemble the past in ways sufficient to justify the inference. To the extent that Mendelssohn proposes a probabilistic argument to justify induction, he thus begs the question, taking for granted what Hume puts in question³⁵.

3. Types of Knowledge

Following his accounts of thinkable and actual truths, Mendelssohn outlines his theory of knowledge. As noted above, he seems to understand knowledge in a broad sense as having a reason or warrant for believing something (in short, warranted beliefs). When he turns to the types of knowledge, the operative word is the evidence in each case. He identifies three different types of knowledge, based upon the corresponding evidence.

The first is "sensory knowledge or immediate consciousness of changes in us" *while* we have sensations, experience pleasures and pains, feel desire and repugnance, hope and fear, and make judgments and inferences. If the 'or' designates a genuine disjunction, Mendelssohn is presumably including under this first type of knowledge not only knowledge of seeing and sight, hearing and sound, and the like, but also – or even primarily – our awareness of *changes* in a range of different conscious states, including but not restricted to seeing, hearing, and other such sensations or perceptions. He attributes all these sorts of consciousness to "immediate knowledge of the outer and inner sense"³⁶.

On this reading, what is particularly striking about this first type of knowledge is its object as well as its range, and Mendelssohn's non-reductive account of it. By no means confining immediate consciousness to sensory impressions simply, he extends it to the awareness of changes that we experience in ourselves within a particular mental state. Presumably, he has in mind such experiences as hearing a sound more clearly, feeling the heightening of a desire, shifting from premise to conclusion while inferring as well as the transition from one such state to another. This awareness undoubtedly presupposes awareness of the respective state and content in the former case or states and contents themselves in the latter case. The forms of consciousness that he mentions broadly correspond to his division of mental powers into powers

of cognition, desire, and approval³⁷. This sort of immediate knowledge of the changes in the mental states we find ourselves in might be dubbed “apperception,” in Leibniz’s sense of the reflexivity of a conscious state (*la connoissance réflexive*), i.e., a consciousness of being conscious in a certain way or, better, a consciousness of changing states and contents of mind³⁸.

Three further aspects of Mendelssohn’s account of immediate knowledge are worthy of note. The first aspect, already flagged with respect to the determination of actual truths, is the way that an individual’s awareness of alterations in her mental states goes hand-in-hand with an awareness of herself as unchanging, at least relative to the changes. Awareness of changes requires awareness of something unchanging and, in the case of immediate knowledge, what does not change, Mendelssohn submits, is something about myself³⁹.

The second aspect of immediate knowledge is a specific indubitableness. Mendelssohn contends that there is nothing erroneous or deceptive about instances of this immediate knowledge, considered simply as representations in the soul (*Vorstellungen in der Seele*). When I see or hear, when I feel pleasure or pain, when I hope or fear, it is – he claims – “beyond doubt” that I do so⁴⁰. Yet, as discussed below, the claim does not rule out the possibility of being deceived on some level by the senses (a possibility that goes hand-in-hand with the following aspect).

The third aspect of immediate knowledge is the difficulty of its determination, given the way it amalgamates with understanding. After noting the extent to which understanding corrects for sensory illusions, Mendelssohn observes that, as a result, the understanding is in large part combined so intimately with the sensory that the “boundaries” between them are “no longer recognizable”⁴¹. The implications of the observation are significant, at the very least as a reminder of the difficulty of sorting out what is immediately known in a strict, pre-rational sense from what is known immediately but in a broader sense that includes the help of the understanding, something that can take the form of what Mendelssohn dubs “sound human understanding”⁴². Thus, the lines between immediate, non-inferential and immediate inferential knowledge are typically blurred. The observation also underlies Mendelssohn’s contention that incomplete induction is a principal source of sense deception, something that can obviously occur in instances of the broader sense of immediate knowledge.

Whereas the first type of knowledge is “immediate” (whether narrowly or broadly conceived), the second type of knowledge is mediated. This second type is composed of judgments and inferences about what is thinkable and unthinkable. These judgments and inferences are generated from the knowledge of the first type “by the correct use of the understanding” and, hence, Mendelssohn labels this sort of knowledge “*rational knowledge*”⁴³.

This second type of knowledge corresponds to thinkable truths, the third type of knowledge to actual truths. This type of knowledge is knowledge of “what is *actual* outside us,” knowledge of representations that we have by virtue of finding ourselves in a physical-actual world, producing and undergoing changes. He also dubs this third sort of knowledge “knowledge of nature”⁴⁴. Presumably, it is possible for immediate knowledge in the broad sense (where it and understanding are indistinguishable) and this third type of knowledge to overlap or combine with one another.

Knowledge generally, Mendelssohn adds, is limited both by the reach and by the feebleness of our powers of knowing. Uncertainty and proneness to error pervade and bedevil all three types of knowledge. At this juncture he returns to the concept of truth, this time with a view to relating the type of truth to the respective type of knowledge as well as to its respective opposites.

Whereas *truth* is any item of knowledge, “any thought which is an effect of the positive powers of our souls,” *untruth* is any thought produced by the incapacity or limitations of those powers. In the case of the understanding or reason, the untruth is an *error*; in the case of the senses (i.e., where they mislead), the untruth is an *illusion or deception* (*Verblendung oder Sinnenbetrug*) – though it is also possible for a line of thinking to be composed of both error and illusion⁴⁵. In these ways Mendelssohn emphasizes the limitedness of knowing and he does so by underscoring the co-existence of truth and untruth in any instance of knowledge.

Any given item of human knowledge is, therefore, partially true and partially untrue, since it is the effect of a power that has its own bounds and limitations⁴⁶.

As noted earlier, Mendelssohn’s conception of knowledge hardly conforms to a proto-Platonic conception of it as suitably justified, true belief. In the opening chapters of *Morning Hours*, he appears to equate knowledge with having reasons or warrant for belief. The present passage (from the third chapter) complements the treatment from the opening chapters by noting that the reasons or warrant are always incomplete and defeasible.

Notably, Mendelssohn advances this claim for all three types of knowledge. Despite being indubitable in a certain respect (as noted above), sensory knowledge is open to illusion thanks to the feebleness of our sensory powers and their contingent dependency upon a particular position in the environment (e.g., we see something as round when it is really square, in part because we are seeing it from afar – though seeing it *as far* seems to betray the role of conceptuality and understanding). Similarly, rational knowledge is prone to mistaken calculations, inferential fallacies, and the like, in each case failing to abide in practice to the indubitable principle of contradiction⁴⁷. Actual knowledge must have recourse to induction that is always incomplete. Just as there is a kind of sensory knowledge that is indistinguishable from its mediation by the understanding, so there are illusions and deceptions on this level whose “principal source” is incomplete induction.

A chart of Mendelssohn’s conceptions of truth and knowledge

<u>truth</u>	<u>criteria</u>	<u>knowledge</u>
		(a) immediate, non-inferential, sensory and/or apperceptive
(1) actual	induction induction	(b ₁) immediate, (tacitly) inferential, sensory (common sense) (b ₂) mediated, (explicitly) inferential, sensory and rational
(2) thinkable	contradiction	(c) mediated, (explicitly) inferential, rational

As this chart indicates, Mendelssohn's account of the two types of truth does not coincide neatly with the three types of knowledge. Presumably, however, the first two types of knowledge – (a) and (b) – generate actual truths, while the third (c) alone generates thinkable truths.

4. Existence and “the pretensions of idealists”

Mendelssohn defines ‘existence’ (*Dasein*) as “merely a common term for affecting and suffering” (*würken und leiden*), doing something to something and having something done to oneself. This definition is misleading, however, if taken to mean that existence is nothing over and above acting upon and being acted upon, i.e., if taken to mean that acting and being acted upon do not entail an agent and recipient, respectively. Mendelssohn immediately adds that we are conscious, at every moment of our life, of acting upon something or undergoing something. This qualification strongly suggests that he understands acting and undergoing (as we might also translate *leiden*) in phenomenal terms, i.e., in ways inseparable from the consciousness of them. Presumably, this reference to consciousness is a reference to our awareness of what it feels like to be affecting or suffering something, contemporary and coincident with awareness of itself or, equivalently, its existence as common to both operations (that of affecting or suffering)⁴⁸.

Yet these observations are misleading, insofar as they suggest an equivalence if not an equation of existence with consciousness, the consciousness of acting and/or suffering. As discussed below, Mendelssohn plainly rejects an idealist argument along these lines (i.e., an argument insisting on an equation of existing and consciousness). In addition, shortly before the discussion where he identifies existence as the “identifying mark” of acting and suffering, Mendelssohn argues that “my own existence” is a necessary condition of thinking at all. If the existence of changes in me (e.g., “thoughts and sensations”) is undeniable, so, he contends, is the I that “suffers” them. He seems, in other words, to accept that a full account of doing entails consideration of the doer, just as a full account of suffering entails consideration of the sufferer. While existence is always a matter of doing or undergoing, it also a matter of who or what respectively affects and is affected in the process. So, too, in the case of the ego, existence is not simply the consciousness of acting or undergoing but the presence, indeed, the ongoing presence of that consciousness.

Further supporting this interpretation is Mendelssohn's claim that “where changes exist, a subject must also be on hand there”⁴⁹. In other words, the onhandness of the subject (or what he elsewhere dubs its “real actuality”) is a necessary and necessarily constant condition of changes. This reading is consistent with the fact that Mendelssohn not only endorses the Cartesian dictum “I think, therefore I am,” but also emends it to the effect that it is no less true that “I hope, therefore I am; I fear, therefore I am; and so on”⁵⁰. Whatever the sort of consciousness, it entails (and thus is distinguishable albeit inseparable from) the existence of the subject of that consciousness⁵¹. At the same time, this reading leaves open the possibility – rejected by Leibniz – of the existence of something that acts or suffers not only unconsciously but in ways not analogous to a spiritual substance. As discussed below, Mendelssohn's argument against idealism appears to rely upon this possibility, though his appeal to it proves problematic in certain respects.

Mendelssohn gives the preceding gloss on the conception of existence in the fifth chapter of the First Part of *Morning Hours*. In the final two chapters, with this conception of existence in hand,

he specifically targets idealism⁵². He does so, at least in part, because of its proximity to his own views. Idealists countenance, he notes, three features in common with his own position: (a) the distinction between the actual existence of the thinker and the ideal existence of the thinker's thoughts (representations), (b) the possibility of other such thinkers (thereby rejecting solipsism), and (c) the difference between the objective order of ideas in a waking state and the subjective order of them in altered states⁵³. What the idealists deny and Mendelssohn accepts (at least at this stage in his dialectic) is the existence of material substances as well as spiritual substances. Taking their cues from the fact that our immediate knowledge of existence is the knowledge that we have of thinking, idealists question whether there is any reason to extend existence to what does not think but is only thought.

Mendelssohn counters with the observation that we have strong, inductive reasons for supposing that not everything that we represent to ourselves is the product of perspective and illusion. The agreement we find in our representations (individual and shared) points to "a common ground...outside us"⁵⁴. Nor can the dualist (someone who countenances both material and spiritual substances) be charged with transferring her own experiences of extension and motion, as modifications of her conscious representations, to these substances. When she attributes motion and extension to material substances, she is merely saying that they manifest themselves as mobile and extended, and that they do so to any thinking being – to the best of our knowledge or, better, to the best of our personal and collective inductions, we might add.

A final idealist objection, addressed by Mendelssohn in the final chapter of the First Part, is particularly significant, since his way of addressing it introduces two problems with his account. The first problem concerns a possible equivocation in his appeal to existence. The second problem concerns the unresolved character of the dispute between idealists and dualists, leading him to entertain a novel, meta-philosophical viewpoint that can be interpreted as distancing his own settled view from idealism, dualism, or any of their philosophical competitors (materialism, skepticism, solipsism).

The objection surfaces after Mendelssohn has the dualist chastising the idealist for pretending that there is something more to words like 'extended' and 'mobile' when they are attributed to the material substance, since the attribution draws (according to the idealist) on their attribution to ourselves as spiritual substances. The idealist replies that it is Mendelssohn who is guilty of linguistic confusion by confusing the idea of the substance itself with what it does. The idealist then poses the question:

All of the properties ascribed by you to this prototype are, by your own admission, mere accidents of the soul. We want to know, however, what this prototype itself is, not what it might do⁵⁵.

Q₂ is an idealist objection to Mendelssohn's defense of dualism up to this point. The objection presents him with two alternatives. Since the relation of accidents to a subject is, the idealist submits, understandable to us on the level of spiritual substances, either that relation is surreptitiously invoked by the dualist or, if not, the dualist owes us an account of that relation (an account that does not piggyback on the experience of ourselves as spiritual substances). To the extent that Mendelssohn does not provide such an account, his account confounds a meaningful use of the terminology depicting a substance-accident relation with one lacking meaning.

Mendelssohn responds to this criticism by invoking his account of existence – or at least part of it – from chapter five, arguing that once it has been settled what a thing does or undergoes, the question of what it is “in and for itself” is unintelligible, containing “empty words” devoid of sense⁵⁶. This response is problematic, for reasons of both consistency and substance. In chapter five, as noted above, he appears to acknowledge, in the case of spiritual substances, the distinction between the substance’s existence (regardless of its relation to consciousness) and its actions and undergoings. Even if inseparable, the existing subject and its changing properties are distinct and thus distinguishable from one another, prompting a veritably intelligible question of what the subject is “in and for itself”. Yet Mendelssohn, in reply, seems to make matters worse in two ways, first by denying that a material substance (in contrast to its supposed accidents) can be an object of knowledge at all (“we stand at the limits of knowledge”), and second by accusing the idealist of asking for a concept that is actually no concept. The former reply does not help the dualist since it surrenders the idea of knowing material substances. Nor is the latter reply helpful since it plays into the idealist’s hand by denying the conceivability of such substances⁵⁷.

Mendelssohn’s initial response to the idealist objection (Q₂) is muddled in the ways just outlined. However, as if aware of its inadequacy, he immediately cites a remark that casts a pall on the entire dispute, including his own part in it. That remark (attributed to an unnamed “philosopher”) is the suggestion that all such quarrels are merely verbal disputes, more befitting linguists than philosophers⁵⁸. Little is said to follow up this remark, at least in the final chapter of Part One, leaving readers rightly puzzled about the force of the remark.

However, he returns to the dispute in chapter ten of the Second Part. But he does only after noting a further argument in the idealist’s favor, namely, the alleged superfluity and vacuity of the notion of a material substance. Iterating a point already made in the First Part, Mendelssohn concedes that idealists accept the difference between the subjective and objective order of ideas, and do so without recognizing material substances. Hence, they regard positing material substances as superfluous and even vacuous since the prototype supposedly underlying the objective series “provides him with nothing more to think since he knows no way of making any representations of it beyond the depiction of it that is to be found in his soul”⁵⁹.

Mendelssohn hopes to respond to these objections by means of the image of a room adorned with mirrors, each depicting the same object, doing so from the mirror’s respective location. Knowers, conceived as mirrors, cannot determine whether the image they depict is based upon a real object or not (Mendelssohn supposes some sort of unexplained contrivance whereby the depicted image could be the result of an artist’s depiction.) However, as the idealists contend, the determination is of no consequence to them, i.e., to their ability to distinguish truth from illusion or, more generally, the objective from the subjective order of ideas. Rather unpersuasively, Mendelssohn responds that since the idealists are able to make this distinction, any further disagreement on their part is “a mere grumbling over words”⁶⁰. This remark iterates Mendelssohn’s initial move of attributing the linguistic confusion to the idealist alone rather than attributing the entire dispute (as the unnamed philosopher does) to linguistic confusion. Mendelssohn’s final remark about the idealist position on this score shows his hand even more clearly. Since the idealists can make the appropriate discriminations on the basis of agreements in their depictions, what justifies, he asks, their denial of the material substance “as the ground of their agreement”⁶¹? Yet

appealing to material substances in this way simply begs the question, presuming what the idealists are calling into question.

In sum, Mendelssohn does not fare well in his attempt to refute the idealist position head-on. In addition to begging the question, he is impaired by ambiguities both in his account of existence and in his charges of linguistic confusion.⁶² Not to be overlooked in all this, however, is the fact that he himself is the source of the strong case for the idealist position. Without question, moreover, there is a certain degree of rhetorical guile at work, since he clearly wants to give the nod to common sense (sound common understanding) over rational speculation when they are at odds⁶³. Such is the message of the much-discussed allegory, also in chapter ten, where he treats common sense and reason. In chapter three he contends that “sound human understanding and reason are at bottom one and the same”, their difference consisting merely in the fact that common sense rushes in, where reason is plodding, treading fearfully⁶⁴. For most of life, we have to rely upon common sense inferences, where reason has not had the time to make all the distinct inferences called for, should that be possible at all⁶⁵.

¹ For exceptions in this regard, see Astrid von der Lühe, “‘Cartarcticon’ oder ‘organon’: Kausalität und Induktion bei Hume und Mendelssohn” in *Moses Mendelssohn im Spannungsfeld der Aufklärung*, hrsg. Michael Albrecht und Eva Engel (Stuttgart-Bad Canstatt: fromann-holzboog, 2000), 137-58 and – more recently – Corey Dyck, “Turning the Game against the Idealist: Mendelssohn’s Refutation of Idealism in the *Morgenstunden* and Kant’s Replies” and Reinier Munk, “‘What is the Bond?’ The Discussion of Mendelssohn and Kant 1785-1787” in *Moses Mendelssohn’s Metaphysics and Aesthetics*, ed. Reinier Munk (London/New York: Springer, 2011), 159-182, 183-202; and Paul Guyer, “Mendelssohn, Kant and the Refutation of Idealism” in *Kant and his German Contemporaries, Volume One: Logic, Mind, Epistemology, Science, and Ethics*, ed. Corey Dyck and Falk Wunderlich (Cambridge University Press, 2018), 134-154.

² Moses Mendelssohn, *Morgenstunden oder Vorlesungen über das Dasein Gottes* (Berlin: Voss, 1786); *Gesammelte Schriften Jubiläumsausgabe*, Band 3.2, hrsg. Leo Strauss (Berlin: Akademie, 1929ff), 1-175; *Morning Hours: Lectures on the Existence of God*, trans. Daniel O. Dahlstrom and Corey Dyck (Dordrecht/New York: Springer, 2011), 3. Since the English translation contains the pagination of the Strauss edition embedded in the text, reference is made hereafter simply to ‘*Morning Hours*’ followed by the page numbers of the English translation.

³ Curiously, for the most part Mendelssohn does not explain conceptual truth in terms of the general definition of truth, as he might well have done. Thus, he might have stressed the role of words in specifying or defining the relevant concept. Conceptual truths would then be determined by comparing what the words name with what can be thought. In other words, instead of speaking of what is thought or contained in the definition of the concept, he might well have spoken of what is named in it. For example, what is *named* in the definition or specification of the concept of a circle (‘plane figure’ ‘all the points of which are equidistant from a center point’) is thinkable, what is *named* in that of the concept of the greatest speed is not. In his gloss on the concept of doubt, he does state that it is a true concept because it is equivalent to the sentence (*Satz*) ‘A limited being can lack the grounds of truth’ that is to be affirmed rather than denied. In this instance at least and in his talk of conceptual falsehoods as contradictory (*widersprechend*), it may be argued that he does appeal to partly verbal phenomenon to character conceptual truth; see *Morning Hours*, 4.

⁴ *Morning Hours*, 4.

⁵ *Morning Hours*, 4.

⁶ *Morning Hours*, 4.

⁷ *Morning Hours*, 5.

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ *Morning Hours*, 6.

¹¹ *Ibid.* So phrased, the question anticipates Dilthey’s query in “Beitrag zur Lösung der Frage vom Ursprung unseres Glaubens an die Realität der Außenwelt und seinem Recht” (1890) in *Gesammelte Schriften*, V. Band (Stuttgart: Teubner, 1974), 90-135.

¹² Thus, Mendelssohn apparently does not conceive *erkennen* (knowing) along the lines of some absolutely or even suitably justified, true belief; being suitably justified, at least when it comes to actual truths, suffices.

¹³ Mendelssohn distinguishes somnambulism (which he considers an “illness”) from dreaming. He also recognizes that, although dreaming is an “eccentric move into a series of things, different from that surrounding us”, it can contain examples of rational reflection; see *Morning Hours*, 35-37.

¹⁴ *Morning Hours*, 18, 26f.

¹⁵ *Morning Hours*, 37f.

¹⁶ As Guyer points out, the appeal to the testimony of others is question-begging if they are taken themselves to be external objects, as Descartes in fact supposes in his *First Meditation*; see Guyer 140n23.

¹⁷ *Morning Hours*, 60: “Through the agreement of the inner and outer sense, the agreement of all senses, indeed, the agreement of all human beings and other living entities familiar to us, sound human understanding assumes the actual being of such an object and is very much justified in assuming as much”. The unfailing agreement of “beings of a higher order than ourselves” would yield “the highest degree of evidence,” on the order of “an almost complete induction” that the assumption of the existence of things outside us is not the result of our limited powers and perspective, but instead “common to every thinking being” (*Morning Hours*, 38). Those beings of a higher order may be the angels (*mal'ach*) in Maimonides’ sense. In any case his account is complicated, if not confused, since he adds in the following paragraph that corroboration by the supreme intellect also lends our assurance the highest degree of evidence, capable of no further increase.

¹⁸ *Morning Hours*, 24.

¹⁹ *Morning Hours*, 6. Mendelssohn does not take the trouble to differentiate explicitly the determination that something is from the determination of what it is, presumably because those determinations in his view coincide. What tells me that something exists is also what tells me that it is a rose or a piece of salt.

²⁰ *Morning Hours*, 7.

²¹ *Morning Hours*, 9.

²² *Ibid.*

²³ *Ibid.* Following Hume, Mendelssohn speaks here of the idea of falling and slipping as the “liveliest” idea. Yet his contrast of the animal’s “association” of the ideas with the human’s formulation of a general principle likely repeats a criticism of Hume that he makes in his essay *On Probability*. The criticism is directed at Hume’s contention that our tendency to draw causal connections is merely a law of “association” and that it has a non-rational basis, namely, instinct. For a nuanced reading of Mendelssohn’s criticisms of Hume in the *On Probability* essay, see Manfred Kuehn, “David Hume and Moses Mendelssohn,” *Hume Studies* 21 (1995): 206-208; see, too, note 28 below.

²⁴ *Morning Hours*, 9; making up “a threefold source of knowledge” here, as Mendelssohn puts it with respect to the incline, are (i) animal instinct involving an association of ideas, (ii) experience involving ordinary practical use of a principle based upon experience, and (iii) philosophical insight into the principle, e.g., in terms of mechanics. For a gloss on this differentiation and its Leibnizian heritage, see von der Lühe, 152-154.

²⁵ *Morning Hours*, 11. The possibility of a complete induction obviously affords itself in the case of a finite number of sequences that fall under a general principle (e.g., the induction that everyone in the theater at a given performance purchased a ticket). Whenever the induction extends to a sequence involving the future (e.g., the induction that everyone in the theater at the next or subsequent performances purchased a ticket), it is necessarily incomplete.

²⁶ *Morning Hours*, 12.

²⁷ *Morning Hours*, 11. Sorting out these elements in various cases is a task of the science of the soul and morals, Mendelssohn observes, that he is unable to pursue in *Morning Hours*.

²⁸ Mendelssohn adds that the degree of conviction in that reason is proportional to certainty as the number of observed instances n is to $n + 1$. For critical commentary on Mendelssohn’s mathematics, reasoning, and starting assumption (based upon his argument in *On Probability*), see Edith Sylla, “Mendelssohn, Wolff, and Bernoulli” in *Moses Mendelssohn’s Metaphysics and Aesthetics*, 47-52; on the historical background and influence, see too, von der Lühe, 158n48 and Hans Lausch, “Moses Mendelssohn und die zeitgenössische Mathematik” in *Moses Mendelssohn im Spannungsfeld der Aufklärung*, 133-135.

²⁹ *Morning Hours*, 13: “We suppose, therefore, that the inner, constant properties of A have brought about the appearance B. That is to say, we infer a causal connection; let us call A the cause, B the effect, and let us call the constant properties of A or their enduring presence in A the power”. Mendelssohn does not specify how this concept of power differs from that of ground. The difference may lie in his association of power with the potential for producing an effect. Thus, he speaks of the fire’s power to expand bodies where the outcome has not yet occurred or been experienced. But he also uses ‘ground’ and ‘power’ in ways that seem interchangeable. Thus, as an example of power, he speaks of the “internal make-up” of bread that brings about its nourishing effects. Yet after claiming that these considerations underlie all the laws of nature, he makes the supposedly explanatory observation: “Similar subjects will have also similar predicates by virtue of the inner ground, i.e., reason for the connection” (*Morning Hours*, 14). Ambition, for example, is a common ground of several different actions of the same person.

³⁰ *Morning Hours*, 15.

³¹ David Hume, *Enquiries concerning Human Understanding and concerning the Principles of Morals*, third edition, ed. Selby-Bigge and revised by P. H. Nidditch (Oxford: Clarendon, 1973), 32.

³² *Ibid.* 32-39; 57f. Hume also supposes the lack of any known connection between sensible qualities and “secret powers” (*ibid.* 33).

³³ *Ibid.* 43-50.

³⁴ See Peter Millican, “Hume’s Argument Concerning Induction: Structure and Interpretation” in *David Hume: Critical Assessments*, volume 2, edited by Stanley Tweyman (Routledge, 1995), 91–144.

³⁵ In Mendelssohn’s defense, it deserves noting that Hume himself does not always neatly separate the normative from the factual question. Hence, as von der Lühe puts it, Mendelssohn does not regard the “psychological” dimension as merely irrational; see von der Lühe, 153f.

³⁶ Revisiting this first type of knowledge in a later chapter, he speaks of “immediate sensory knowledge” and “intuiting knowledge”, spanning sensations of the outer sense and perceptions of the inner sense; see *Morning Hours*, 26.

³⁷ See “On the ability to know, the ability to feel, and the ability to desire” in *Philosophical Writings*, trans. D. Dahlstrom (Cambridge University Press, 1997), 309f. Since Mendelssohn reckons all these forms of immediate knowledge to intuitions of inner and outer sense, it is possible that he thinks of them as all having a sensory component or something akin to that. However, at least in *Morning Hours*, he does not explicitly state as much.

³⁸ See G. W. F. Leibniz, “Principes de la Nature et de la Grâce, fondés en raison” in *Philosophischen Schriften*, Band 6, hrsg. C. I. Erhardt (Berlin: Weidmann, 1885), 600.

³⁹ The apperceptive character of immediate knowledge thus entails self-consciousness. My consciousness of being conscious of change and, indeed, of being so repeatedly suffices for my identification of myself as the enduring subject. Precisely on this score Kant differs, as his “Refutation of Idealism” attests.

⁴⁰ *Morning Hours*, 26; see, too, *Morning Hours*, 28: “Empfindungen können nicht trügen.” Mendelssohn stresses the importance of this indubitableness for taste and moral sentiments; see *Morning Hours*, 27f.

⁴¹ *Morning Hours*, 17.

⁴² *Morning Hours*, 20f; see, too, n. 16 above.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ *Morning Hours*, 17f; Mendelssohn iterates these definitions of truth and untruth at the end of the chapter; see *Morning Hours*, 21.

⁴⁶ *Morning Hours*, 18. The analogue to Heidegger’s conception of being at once in the truth and in the untruth, revealing and concealing, is noteworthy.

⁴⁷ *Morning Hours*, 26f.

⁴⁸ This consciousness may explain his remark that existence is the “identifying mark” of these two behaviors, a remark reinforcing the conclusion that ‘existence’ is not simply an unqualified term for them. The point would then be that I am always conscious of either acting upon something or suffering

something, such that these alternatives are distinct, exhaust the possibilities, and yet have consciousness in common. Note, too, that this characterization of existence, when applied to ourselves, corresponds to Mendelssohn's characterization of immediate knowledge as awareness of changes in our consciousness.

⁴⁹ *Morning Hours*, 29. This phrasing suggests a difference between 'existence' and 'being on hand' (Heidegger's *Vorhandensein*), though he also appears to use the terms synonymously. On the reading suggested here, Mendelssohn's views would coincide with Wolff's general account of substance as a "perdurable and modifiable subject", exemplified by a rock; see Christian Wolff, *Philosophia Prima, sive Ontologia* (Frankfurt/Leipzig: Regner, 1736), §768, S. 574; see, too, *ibid.*, 575: "Et ex determinationibus constantibus & variabilibus in eodem subjecto coexistentibus colligimus entis substantialitatem".

⁵⁰ *Morning Hours*, 29.

⁵¹ 'Entail' may be the wrong term here. Sometimes, to be sure, Mendelssohn speaks in terms of a condition that seems to serve as an enthymeme, e.g., if there are changes in my thoughts, then there must be an unchanging thinker (*Morning Hours*, 29). But he also speaks of these thoughts as "dwell[ing] inwardly in me...perceived [as] alterations in my faculty of thinking" (*meinem Innern beywohnen, und als Abänderungen meines Denkvermögens von mir wahrgenommen*); *Morning Hours*, 5.

⁵² For obvious reasons, he also labels idealists "spiritualists," distinguishing them from "materialists" (*Morning Hours*, 41f). Whom precisely does he have in mind? Although Mendelssohn does not say, the most likely candidates, it would seem, are adherents of Leibniz's or Berkeley's thought. In differentiating his view from Leibniz on this score, Mendelssohn would be in line with Wolff; for the relevant difference between Wolff and Leibniz, see Jean École, "Cosmologie wolffienne et dynamique leibnizienne: Essais sur le rapport de Wolff avec Leibniz," *Les études philosophiques*, 19 (1964), 5 and Charles A. Corr, "Christian Wolff and Leibniz," *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 36/2 (1975), 256. Dyck takes Kantian, transcendental idealists as well as Berkeleyian empirical idealists to be the target of Mendelssohn's refutation of idealism, as part of a strategy of undermining Kant's attempt to differentiate the two forms of idealism; see Dyck, 166-68. Guyer notes the deep similarity of Mendelssohn's construal of idealists with that of Baumgarten; both argue for dualism on the basis of the greater perfection of a world housing both material and spiritual substances; see Guyer, 144f.

⁵³ On this last point of agreement, see *Morning Hours*, 62.

⁵⁴ *Morning Hours*, 39; see, too, *ibid.* 121. Mendelssohn also affirms both my existence and my mutability; see *Morning Hours*, 61; see, too, *ibid.* 61: "If I am mutable, then diverse, opposite predicates are at the same time thinkable within me as subject".

⁵⁵ *Morning Hours*, 41.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.* The demand for answers to this question presumably reflects what Mendelssohn dubs "the pretensions of the idealists" (*Morning Hours*, 38). Notably, his rejection of the question's presumption – namely, that things are knowable in themselves – indicates a level of agreement with Kant. From the fact that Mendelssohn sees this boundary of knowledge as applying to all knowers, not only human knowers, Dyck infers that these lines are directed at "the Kantian idealist," see Dyck, 172f. Guyer also instructively relates Kant's refutation of idealism to Mendelssohn's account in *Morgenstunden*, pointing out how they differ in (a) their embrace of idealism and (b) their views of self-knowledge. Thus, (a) whereas Kant insists on the non-spatial and non-temporal character of things in themselves, Mendelssohn countenances a modest idealism ("the anodyne truth of idealism" (Guyer 143), i.e., the truism that we can only know things as we represent them) and (b) self-knowledge, while dependent for Kant upon belief in the existence of enduring objects, follows for Mendelssohn simply from an individual's perception of changes in her thoughts and representations as changes in herself as the one – and, indeed, the same one – thinking those thoughts (Guyer 151-153). Both of Guyer's points are well-taken, although it deserves noting (as Guyer himself does, to be sure) that Mendelssohn, far from describing his own position as idealism, roundly criticizes it.

⁵⁷ *Morning Hours*, 41f.

⁵⁸ *Morning Hours*, 42.

⁵⁹ The full text deserves citing; *Morning Hours*, 62f: “The idealist denies merely the actual existence of an object that is supposed to serve as the prototype for these true depictions and, indeed, for this reason, because this prototype provides him with nothing more to think since he knows no way of making any representations of it beyond the depiction of it that is to be found in his soul.”

⁶⁰ *Morning Hours*, 63.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

⁶² As Dyck rightly points out, the full argument for our knowledge of the existence of things outside us depends for Mendelssohn upon the possibility of proving the existence of “an infinite intellect,” whereby the induction is complete. The proof itself is fraught, however, not least by its dependence upon the dubious notion that what is thinkable must be thought; see *Morning Hours*, 103-105 and Dyck, 168-170.

⁶³ For an insightful discussion that also points to the meaning and importance of common sense for Mendelssohn in this context, see Munk, 197-200.

⁶⁴ *Morning Hours*, 20f. Cassirer makes much of this rationalist core of Mendelssohn’s commitments; see Ernst Cassirer, “Die Philosophie Moses Mendelssohns (1929)”, in *Gesammelte Werke*, Bd. XVII: Aufsätze und kleine Schriften (1927-1931), hrsg. Birgit Recki, bearbeitet von Tobias Berben (Hamburg: Meiner, 2004), 115-137.

⁶⁵ To the extent that common sense immediately makes indistinct inferences that it would take reason more time to make distinctly, the two sorts of inference can be said to differ, as Paul Franks aptly puts it, phenomenologically but not epistemically; see Paul Franks, “Divided by Common Sense: Mendelssohn and Jacobi on Reason and Inferential Justification” in *Moses Mendelssohn’s Metaphysics and Aesthetics*, 205f.