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## What Does It Mean to Orient Oneself in Thinking?

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However exalted the application of our concepts, and however far up from sensibility we may abstract them, still they will always be appended to *image* representations,<sup>a</sup> whose proper function<sup>b</sup> is to make these concepts, which are not otherwise derived from experience, serviceable for *experiential use*. For how would we procure sense and significance for our concepts if we did not underpin them with some intuition (which ultimately must always be an example from some possible experience)? If from this concrete act of the understanding we leave out the association of the image – in the first place an accidental perception through the senses – then what is left over is the pure concept of understanding, whose range is now enlarged and contains a rule for thinking in general. It is in just such a way that general logic comes about; and many *heuristic* methods of thinking perhaps lie hidden in the experiential use of our understanding and reason; if we understood how to extract these methods carefully from that experience, they could well enrich philosophy with many useful maxims even in abstract thinking.

Of this kind is the principle to which the late Mendelssohn expressly subscribed for the first time, so far as I know, in his last writings (the *Morning Hours*, pp. 164–165, and the *Letters to Lessing's Friends*, pp. 33 and 67):<sup>1</sup> namely, the maxim that it is necessary in the speculative use of reason (which Mendelssohn otherwise trusted very much in respect of the cognition of supersensible objects, even so far as claiming for it

<sup>a</sup> *bildliche Vorstellungen*

<sup>b</sup> *Bestimmung*

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the evidence of demonstration) to **orient** oneself by means of a certain guideline which he sometimes called *common sense* or *healthy reason* (in the *Morning Hours*), and sometimes *plain<sup>c</sup> understanding* (*To Lessing's Friends*). Who would have thought that this admission would not only have a destructive effect on his favorable opinion of the power of *speculative* reason when used in theological matters (which was in fact unavoidable), but that even common healthy reason, given the ambiguous position in which he left the employment of this faculty in contrast to speculation, would also fall into the danger of serving as a principle of enthusiasm in the dethroning of reason? And yet this happened in the controversy between Mendelssohn and Jacobi, chiefly through the not insignificant inferences of the acute author of the *Results*;<sup>\*</sup> even though I do not ascribe to either of the two the intention of bringing such a destructive way of thinking into currency; rather I prefer to regard the latter's<sup>d</sup> undertaking as an *argumentum ad hominem*,<sup>c</sup> which one is justified in using merely as a defensive weapon, so as to use one's opponent's vulnerabilities to his disadvantage. On the other hand, I will show that it was in fact *only* reason – not any alleged private sense of truth, not any transcendent intuition under the name of faith, on which tradition and revelation can be grafted without reason's consent – which Mendelssohn affirmed, staunchly and with justified zeal; it was only that genuine pure human reason which he found necessary and recommended as a means of orientation. Yet here the high claims of reason's speculative faculty, chiefly its exclusive authority to command (through demonstration), obviously fall away, and what is left to it, insofar as it is speculative, is only the task of purifying the common concept of reason of its contradictions, and defending it against its *own* sophistical attacks on the maxims of healthy reason. – The extended and more precisely determined concept of *orienting oneself can* be helpful to us in presenting distinctly the maxims healthy reason uses in its workings toward cognition of sensible objects.

<sup>\*</sup> Jacobi, *Letters on the Doctrine of Spinoza*. Breslau, 1785. – Jacobi, *Against Mendelssohn's Imputations Regarding the Letters on the Doctrine of Spinoza*. Leipzig, 1786. – *The Results of the Jacobian and Mendelssohnian Philosophy Critically Investigated by a Volunteer* (Leipzig, 1786).<sup>2</sup>

<sup>c</sup> *schlicht*

<sup>d</sup> i.e. Wizenmann, who in the *Results* had accused Mendelssohn, in his appeal to “healthy reason,” of relying as much as Jacobi on religious faith.

<sup>e</sup> argument directed to the man

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In the proper meaning<sup>f</sup> of the word, to *orient* oneself means to use a given direction<sup>g</sup> (when we divide the horizon into four of them) in order to find the others – literally, to find the *sunrise*. Now if I see the sun in the sky and know it is now midday, then I know how to find south, west, north, and east. For this, however, I also need the feeling of a difference in my own subject, namely, the difference between my right and left hands. I call this a *feeling* because these two sides outwardly display no designatable difference<sup>h</sup> in intuition. If I did not have this faculty of distinguishing, without the need of any difference in the objects, between moving from left to right and right to left and moving in the opposite direction and thereby determining *a priori* a difference in the position of the objects, then in describing a circle I would not know whether west was right or left of the southernmost point of the horizon, or whether I should complete the circle by moving north and east and thus back to south. Thus even with all the objective data of the sky, I orient myself *geographically* only through a *subjective* ground of differentiation; and if all the constellations, though keeping the same shape and position relative to one another, were one day by a miracle to be reversed in their direction, so that what was east now became west, no human eye would notice the slightest alteration on the next bright starlit night, and even the astronomer – if he pays attention only to what he sees and not at the same time to what he feels – would inevitably become *disoriented*. But in fact the faculty of making distinctions through the feeling of right and left comes naturally to his aid – it is a faculty implanted by nature but made habitual through frequent practice. If only he fixes his eye on the Pole Star, he will be able not only to notice the alteration which has taken place, but in spite of it he will also be able to *orient* himself.

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Now I can extend this geographical concept of the procedure of orienting oneself, and understand by it orienting oneself in any given space in general, hence orienting oneself merely *mathematically*. In the dark I orient myself in a room that is familiar to me if I can take hold of even one single object whose position I remember. But it is plain that nothing helps me here except the faculty for determining position according to a *subjective* ground of differentiation: for I do not see at all the

<sup>f</sup> *Bedeutung*

<sup>g</sup> *Weltgegend*

<sup>h</sup> *keinen merklichen Unterschied*

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objects<sup>i</sup> whose place I am to find; and if someone as a joke had moved all the objects around so that what was previously on the right was now on the left, I would be quite unable to find anything in a room whose walls were otherwise wholly identical. But I can soon orient myself through the mere feeling of a difference between my two sides, the right and left. That is just what happens if I am to walk and take the correct turns on streets otherwise familiar to me when I cannot right now distinguish any of the houses.

8:136 Finally, I can extend this concept even further, since it could be taken as consisting in the faculty of orienting myself not merely in space, i.e. mathematically, but in *thinking* in general, i.e. *logically*. By analogy, one can easily guess that it will be a concern of pure reason to guide its use when it wants to leave familiar objects (of experience) behind, extending itself beyond all the bounds of experience and finding no object<sup>i</sup> of intuition at all, but merely space for intuition; for then it is no longer in a position to bring its judgments under a determinate maxim according to objective grounds of cognition, but solely to bring its judgments under a determinate maxim according to a subjective ground of differentiation in the determination of its own faculty of judgment.\* This subjective means still remaining is nothing other than the feeling of reason's own need. One can remain safe from all error if one does not undertake to judge where one does not know what is required for a determinate judgment. Thus ignorance is in itself the cause of the limitations of our cognition, but not of the errors in it. But where it is not arbitrary<sup>m</sup> whether or not one will judge determinately, where there is some actual *need* – and moreover one attaching to reason in itself – which makes it necessary to judge, and yet we are limited by a lack of knowledge in respect of factors which are necessary for the judgment, there it is necessary to have a maxim according to which we may pass our judgment; for reason will be satisfied. For if it has been previously made out that here there can be no intuition of objects<sup>n</sup> or anything of the kind through which we can present a

\* Thus to *orient* oneself in thinking in general means: when objective principles<sup>k</sup> of reason are insufficient for holding something true, to determine the matter according to a subjective principle of reason.<sup>l</sup>

<sup>i</sup> *Objecte*

<sup>j</sup> *Object*

<sup>k</sup> *Principien*

<sup>l</sup> *Princip*

<sup>m</sup> *willkürlich*

<sup>n</sup> *Objecte*

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suitable object to our extended concepts and hence secure a real possibility for them, then there is nothing left for us to do except first to examine the concept with which we would venture to go beyond all possible experience to see if it is free of contradiction, and then at least to bring the *relation* of the object to objects of experience under pure concepts of the understanding – through which we still do not render it sensible, but we do at least think of something supersensible in a way which is serviceable to the experiential use of our reason. For without this caution we would be unable to make any use at all of such concepts; instead of thinking we would indulge in enthusiasm.

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Yet through this, namely through the mere concept, nothing is settled in respect of the existence of this object and its actual connection with the world (the sum total of all objects of possible experience). But now there enters *the right* of reason's *need*, as a subjective ground for presupposing and assuming something which reason may not presume to know through objective grounds; and consequently for *orienting* itself in thinking, solely through reason's own need, in that immeasurable space of the supersensible, which for us is filled with dark<sup>o</sup> night.

Many supersensible things may be thought (for objects of sense do not fill up the whole field of possibility) to which, however, reason feels no need to extend itself, much less to assume their existence. In the causes of the world, reason finds enough to keep it busy with those which are revealed by sense (or at least are of the same kind as those which reveal themselves to it), without having any necessity to make use of the influence of pure spiritual beings in nature; the assumption of these spiritual beings would rather be disadvantageous to the use of reason. For since we know nothing of the laws according to which they would operate, whereas we know – or at least we can hope to find out – a lot about the others, namely the objects of the senses, presupposing them would rather violate the use of reason. Thus that is not a need at all, but merely impertinent inquisitiveness straying into empty dreaming to investigate them – or play with such figments of the brain. It is quite otherwise with the concept of a first *original being* as a supreme intelligence and at the same time as the highest good. For not only does our reason already feel a need to take the *concept* of the unlimited as the ground of the concepts of all

<sup>o</sup> *dicker*

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But one can regard the need of reason as twofold: first in its *theoretical*, second in its *practical* use. The first need I have just mentioned;

8:138 \* Since reason needs to presuppose reality as given for the possibility of all things, and considers the differences between things only as limitations arising through the negations attaching to them, it sees itself necessitated to take as a ground one single possibility, namely that of an unlimited being, to consider it as original and all others as derived. Since also the thoroughgoing possibility of every thing must be encountered within existence as a whole – or at least since this is the only way in which the principle of thoroughgoing determination makes it possible for our reason to distinguish between the possible and the actual – we find a subjective ground of necessity, i.e. a need in our reason itself to take the existence of a most real (highest) being as the ground of all possibility. Now this is how the Cartesian proof of God's existence arises, since subjective grounds for presupposing something for the use of reason (which always remains a ground only within an experiential use) is taken to be objective – hence *need is taken for insight*. Just as it is here, so it is also with all the proofs of the worthy Mendelssohn in his *Morning Hours*. They accomplish nothing by way of demonstration. But they are not for that reason by any means useless. For not to mention the fine occasion which such acute developments of the subjective conditions of the use of our reason provides for the complete cognition of this faculty of ours, of which they are lasting examples, a holding of something true on subjective grounds of the use of reason – if we lack objective ones and are nevertheless necessitated to judge – is always of great importance; only we must not give out what is in fact only a necessary *presupposition* as if it were a *free insight*; otherwise we needlessly offer the opponent with whom we are *arguing dogmatically* weaknesses which he can use to our disadvantage. Mendelssohn probably did not think about the fact that *arguing dogmatically* with pure reason in the field of the supersensible is the direct path to philosophical enthusiasm, and that only a critique of this same faculty of reasons can fundamentally remedy this ill. Of course, the discipline of the scholastic method (the Wolffian, for example, which he recommended for this reason) can actually hold back this mischief for a long time, since all concepts must be determined through definitions and all steps must be justified through principles; but that will by no means wholly get rid of it. For with what right will anyone prohibit reason – once it has, by his own admission, achieved success in this field – from going still farther in it? And where then is the boundary at which it must stop?

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but one sees very well that it is only conditioned, i.e. we must assume the existence of God *if we want to judge* about the first causes of everything contingent, chiefly in the order of ends which is actually present in the world. Far more important is the need of reason in its practical use, because it is unconditioned, and we are necessitated to presuppose the existence of God not only if we *want* to judge, but because we *have to judge*. For the pure practical use of reason consists in the precepts of moral laws. They all lead, however, to the idea of the *highest good* possible in the world insofar as it is possible only through *freedom: morality*;<sup>p</sup> from the other side, these precepts lead to what depends not merely on human freedom but also on *nature*, which is the greatest *happiness*, insofar as it is apportioned according to the first. Now reason *needs* to assume such a *dependent* highest good, and for its sake a supreme intelligence as the highest *independent* good; not, of course, to derive from this assumption the binding authority of moral precepts or the incentives to observe them (for they would have no moral worth if their motive were derived from anything but the law alone, which is of itself<sup>q</sup> apodictically certain), but rather only in order to give objective reality to the concept of the highest good, i.e. to prevent it, along with morality, from being taken merely as a mere ideal, as it would be if that whose idea inseparably accompanies morality<sup>r</sup> should not exist anywhere.

Thus it is not *cognition* but a felt\* *need* of reason through which Mendelssohn (without knowing it) oriented himself in speculative thinking. And since this guiding thread is not an objective principle<sup>s</sup> of reason, a principle of insight, but a merely subjective one (i.e. a maxim) of the only use of reason allowed by its limits – a corollary of its need – and since *by itself alone*<sup>t</sup> it constitutes the whole determining ground of our judgment about the existence of the highest being, and its use as a means of orientation in attempts to speculate on this same subject is only contingent, so Mendelssohn erred here in that he nevertheless trusted this

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\* Reason does not feel; it has insight into its lack and through the *drive for cognition* it effects the feeling of a need. It is the same way with moral feeling, which does not cause any moral law, for this arises wholly from reason; rather, it is caused or effected by moral laws, hence by reason, because the active yet free will needs determinate grounds.

<sup>p</sup> *Sittlichkeit*

<sup>q</sup> *für sich*

<sup>r</sup> *Moralität*

<sup>s</sup> *Princip*

<sup>t</sup> *für sich allein*



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speculation to the extent of letting it alone settle everything on the path of demonstration. The necessity of the first means could be established only if the insufficiency of the latter is fully admitted: an admission to which his acuteness would ultimately have brought him if he had been granted, along with a longer life, also that agility of mind, found more often in youth, which facilitates the alteration of old, habitual ways of thinking to accord with alterations in the state of the sciences. In any case, he retains the merit of insisting that the final touchstone of the reliability of judgment is to be sought in *reason alone*, whether in the choice of its propositions it is guided by insight or mere need and the maxim of what is advantageous to reason itself. He called reason in its latter use “common human reason”; for this always has its own interest before its eyes, whereas one must have left the course of nature behind if one is to forget this interest and look around idly among concepts from an objective viewpoint, merely so as to extend one’s knowledge, whether or not it is necessary.

8:141 Since, however, in the question before us the expression: *pronouncement of healthy reason* always remains ambiguous and can always be taken either – as Mendelssohn himself misunderstood it – for a judgment of *rational insight* or – as the author of the *Results* appears to take it – for a judgment from *rational inspiration*, it will be necessary to give this source of judging another name, and none is more suitable than **rational belief or faith**.<sup>u</sup> Every belief, even the historical, must of course be *rational* (for the final touchstone of truth is always reason); only a rational belief or faith is one grounded on no data other than those contained in *pure reason*. All believing is a holding true which is subjectively sufficient, but *consciously* regarded as objectively insufficient; thus it is contrasted with *knowing*. On the other hand, when something is held true on objective though consciously insufficient grounds, and hence is merely *opinion*, this *opining* can gradually be supplemented by the same kind of grounds and finally become a *knowing*. By contrast, if the grounds of holding true are of a kind that cannot be objectively valid at all, then the belief can never become a knowing through any use of reason. Historical belief, e.g., of the death of a great man, as reported in some letters, *can become a knowing* if his burial, testament, etc. are announced by the local authorities. Hence what is held true historically based on mere testimony – e.g.

<sup>u</sup> *Vernunftglaubens*

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that somewhere in the world there is a city of Rome – can be believed, and yet someone who has never been there can say *I know* and not merely *I believe* that Rome exists – these can very well be compatible. By contrast, pure *rational faith* can never be transformed into knowledge by any natural data of reason and experience, because here the ground of holding true is merely subjective, namely a necessary need of reason (and as long as we are human beings it will always remain a need) to *presuppose* the existence of a highest being, but not to demonstrate it. A need of reason to be used in a way which satisfies it *theoretically* would be nothing other than a pure *rational hypothesis*, i.e. an opinion sufficient to hold something true on subjective grounds simply because one can never expect to find grounds other than these on which to *explain certain given effects*, and because reason needs a ground of explanation. By contrast, *rational faith*, which rests on a need of reason's use with a *practical* intent, could be called a *postulate* of reason – not as if it were an insight which did justice to all the logical demands for certainty, but because this holding true (if only the person is morally good) is not inferior\* in degree to knowing, even though it is completely different from it in kind.

A pure rational faith is therefore the signpost or compass by means of which the speculative thinker orients himself in his rational excursions into the field of supersensible objects; but a human being who has common but (morally) healthy reason can mark out his path, in both a theoretical and a practical respect, in a way which is fully in accord with the whole end of his vocation; and it is this rational faith which must also be taken as the ground of every other faith, and even of every revelation.

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The *concept* of God and even the conviction of his *existence* can be met with only in reason, and it cannot first come to us either through inspiration or through tidings communicated to us, however great the authority behind them. If I happen to have an immediate intuition of such a kind that nature, as I am acquainted with it, could not provide it, even so a concept of God must serve to gauge whether this appearance agrees with all the characteristics required for a Deity. Now even if I have no insight at all into how it is possible for any appearance to present, even

\* To the *firmness* of belief belongs the consciousness of its *unalterability*. Now I can be wholly certain that no one can ever refute the proposition *There is a God*; for where will he get this insight? Thus it is not the same with rational faith as with historical belief – where it is always possible that proofs of the contrary might be found out and where one must always harbor the reservation that one might alter one's opinion if our information about the matter should be extended.