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The Enlightenment under Attack

I. Kant's Early Reception

Hegel's *Lectures on the History of Philosophy* is seldom more dramatic than in his description of the deleterious effects of the philosophies of both Kant and Jacobi on the stature of philosophy in the minds of the learned public. Schelling grew up in the atmosphere Hegel describes; what lessons did he take from the attack on some of the most cherished beliefs of the Enlightenment, represented by Kant's attempt to limit reason and Jacobi's bid to discredit it entirely? Answering this question will require some familiarity with the intellectual battles being waged in the last two decades of the eighteenth century. Hegel makes his opinion exquisitely clear:

> . . . until the Kantian philosophy was reached the interest in philosophy was general, it was accessible, and men were curious to know about it, it pertained to the ordinary knowledge of a man of culture. Formerly men of business, statesmen, occupied themselves with philosophy; now, however, with the intricate idealism of the philosophy of Kant, their wings droop helpless to the ground. Hence it is with Kant that we first begin to find a line of separation which parts us from the common modes of consciousness; but the result, that the Absolute cannot be known, has become one generally acknowledged. With Fichte the common consciousness has still further separated itself from philosophy. . . . The public was through the philosophy of Kant and Jacobi

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> strengthened in its opinion . . . that the knowledge of God is immediate, and that we know it from the beginning and without requiring to study, and hence that philosophy is quite superfluous.[1]

How did philosophy conspire to in effect bring about its own demise? What was the influence of these developments on the philosophical outlook of the young Schelling, who began his career an admirer of both Kant and Jacobi? These are the topics of this chapter.

Kant was less than fortunate in the early reviews of the first *Critique*, although he found support and some understanding in the person of Christian Gottfried Schultz, the editor of the *Jenaische Allgemeine Literaturzeitung*, a journal in which Kant had occasionally published. Despite several well-meaning but more or less uncomprehending reviews which appeared in the *Allgemeine Literaturzeitung*, the general reaction of the learned public was accurately reflected in the preface to Karl Leonhard Reinhold's *Essay towards a New Theory of the Faculty of Representation*: "Never, with one exception, has a book been so wondered about, admired, hated, criticized, hounded and—misunderstood."[2] Reinhold's "Letters on the Kantian Philosophy," published 1786–87 in installments in the *Teutschen Merkur*, were the first interpretation of Kant to achieve any popular success.[3] In striking contrast to the later emphasis on the epistemological implications of the critical philosophy, Reinhold's "Letters" emphasized the moral and religious aspects of the first *Critique* and were written in a style almost entirely free of the ponderous scholarly jargon Kant favored. It is certainly hardly coincidental that it was to be precisely these Kantian teachings which were most grossly misrepresented and misunderstood, not least in Tübingen, a state of affairs Schelling later satirized in his "Philosophical Letters on Dogmatism and Criticism."

Reinhold's fame was secure after his "Letters" were publicly praised by Kant.[4] Beginning in the winter semester of 1787, Reinhold held an extremely popular *collegium*

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publicum at the University of Jena; several other professors, among them G. G. Schutz and K. F. C. Schmid, became interested in Kant around this time. "In this way Jena soon became a center for dissemination of the new doctrine and of the philosophical life in Germany in general."[5] The "classical era"[6] in Jena, where Fichte and Schelling were later to teach, had begun.

As I remarked above, Reinhold was initially attracted to the first *Critique* because of its guarantee of the unassailability of moral and religious beliefs. Yet by the time of the publication of the *Essay towards a New Theory of the Faculty of Representation* of 1789, the correctness of Kant's conclusions is no longer the central concern; Reinhold has discovered that Kant's philosophy still lacks a systematic scientific foundation and proposes to provide it. In his preface to the *Essay*, which first appeared in the *Teutschen Merkur* under the title "Concerning the Fate of the Kantian Philosophy," Reinhold speculates about the reasons why Kant's philosophy has not yet found wide acceptance and decides that the underlying reason has to do with Kant's inadequate explanation of his central concept of representation (*Vorstellung*).[7]

The task which Reinhold sets himself is the discovery and grounding of the premises upon which Kant's theory of representation rests, which in turn is the key to his theory of knowledge.[8] In Reinhold's view, that Kant himself did not do this is only natural: "That the actual premises of a science are first discovered after the science itself is nothing new, but rather is a necessary consequence of the analytical course that is prescribed for the progress of the human spirit by its own nature."[9] Recognition of the necessity of an original first principle for philosophy was regarded by Reinhold, as well as both his admirers and his critics, as his unique contribution to philosophy.

Inasmuch as it was the idea of the need for a first principle, not the details of the execution of Reinhold's elementary philosophy (*Elementarphilosophie*) which were of value, in Schelling's view, I will not examine it more

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closely here.[10] Schelling's appraisal of Reinhold's contribution is clearly stated in a letter written to Hegel in 1795:

> With respect to Reinhold's attempts to retrace philosophy to its ultimate principles, your suspicion that they would lead the revolution born of the Critique of Pure Reason no further has certainly not misled you. However, *that* too was one stage through which science had to pass, and I don't know whether or not it may be Reinhold we have to thank [for the fact] that we will so soon, as it must happen, according to my most certain expectations, be standing upon the highest point.[11]

What was this step? It was the contention that philosophy could not be a science until it rested upon a single principle, and the need to locate this principle in consciousness itself (although the two elements of this claim are not always clearly distinguished by Reinhold).

II. Jacobi and the Pantheism Controversy

A second extremely influential factor, which was eventually to dovetail with the concern for a single original principle of philosophy, was the complex of issues raised by the Spinoza renaissance, itself a result of the conflict between Jacobi and Mendelssohn and the publications connected with their feud. The significance of this event can hardly be overestimated in its significance for virtually every German thinker of the time.[12] Mendelssohn's *Morning Hours: Or Lectures on the Existence of God* and above all Jacobi's *On the Doctrine of Spinoza, in Letters to Moses Mendelssohn* (or the so-called *Spinoza-Büchlein*) made it possible for the all-but-forgotten Spinoza to achieve "universal historical influence . . . and soon, next to the *Critique of Pure Reason*, it became the fundamental intellectual power of the epoch."[13]

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Jacobi's *Spinoza-Büchlein*, the first published result of his quarrel with Moses Mendelssohn, was unquestionably the beginning of the renewal of interest in Spinoza in the 1780s. In that work and in "David Hume on Belief or Realism and Idealism" (1787), as well as other shorter works, Jacobi developed his polemical interpretation of Spinoza. It became a general attack on all forms of rationalism, which in turn produced the extremely influential notion that all philosophical systems could be classified as one of two diametrically opposed types: realistic or idealistic. Finally, the notion that all philosophical systems had to belong to one of two utterly opposed types led to a heightened focus on the role of intuition in philosophy, for it was this, in Jacobi's view, that constituted the most fundamental difference between philosophies.

Jacobi used his views on rationalism, speculative philosophy, and the role of intuition in knowledge to criticize Kant, and all three elements of Jacobi's *Kantkritik* were widely discussed and influenced Kant's contemporaries as they struggled to come to terms with the critical philosophy. Today the understanding of all three has substantially changed from that of the late eighteenth century, and although it cannot be claimed that Jacobi himself was a philosopher of the first rank, he nevertheless formed the way the generation after Kant would understand their own philosophical task to a much greater extent than is now recognized.

It cannot be denied that the effort to find in Jacobi something approaching a characteristic philosophical standpoint leads to a certain sympathy with writers such as Ernst Cassirer, who see him as a polemicist or intellectual troublemaker, more gifted at criticizing others than at producing independent intellectual work. He was a "brilliant stimulus," although "between that which Jacobi is as a thinker and writer and the historical results which developed out of his teaching there exists a peculiar contradiction. . . . The movements he had called into life always after a short time grew beyond him, beyond his

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own basic intuitions, wishes, and inclinations."[14] Jacobi's defenders have usually claimed that he was ahead of his time; yet even among the more recent writers who are attempting to research and view Jacobi as a forerunner of *Lebensphilosophie*, it is not uncommon to find reservations. Gunther Baum's observation is to the point: "He who closely examines Jacobi's writings will soon begin to doubt whether it is sensible and justifiable to speak of Jacobi's philosophy."[15]

The renewal of interest in Spinoza occasioned by the pantheism conflict was, after the ferment stirred up by Kant, the most important philosophical movement of the late eighteenth century. Its significance for Schelling is hinted at in his often-repeated desire to be a "Spinoza in reverse"; to make it intelligible how a thinker born in 1775 could have nursed such an ambition after Spinoza had been ignored for almost a century requires an understanding of how "a seemingly provincial cultural-historical event"[16]—the public discussion of whether G. E. Lessing had been a Spinozist in the last years of his life—could have revived such widespread interest in Spinoza. The pantheism conflict is the first and clearest illustration of the singular antithetical effect Jacobi had on his contemporaries. That he, although a bitter opponent of Spinozism (which he identified with fatalism and atheism), had raised the issue of Lessing's Spinozism in order to refute pantheism in any form once and for all, only to produce an enchantment with Spinoza in comparison to which there has been "in recent cultural history no other event of comparable breadth of influence,"[17] is typical of this atypical thinker.

It is difficult to assess Jacobi's motives for publishing the *Spinoza-Büchlein*. At least three important factors are involved. On the personal level, Jacobi was almost certainly desirous of settling old scores with Mendelssohn, who had criticized his 1782 article "Something Lessing Said."[18] At the very least it should be remarked that the pattern of argumentation in the earlier controversy eerily prefigured that of the pantheism con-

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troversy, as Altmann has shown.[19] Less important than this, however, was the sense of mission informing Jacobi's crusade to expose the poverty and pernicious consequences of the Enlightenment worldview and at the same time advance his own solution to what he saw as the threat of rationalism.

Having heard through a mutual friend that Moses Mendelssohn was contemplating writing a biographical tribute to the recently deceased Lessing, Jacobi offered Mendelssohn his own recollections of several conversations he had had with Lessing as material for the planned biography. Through their mutual friend he hinted that Lessing had been a Spinozist, which at that time would have been understood to mean "crass atheist," "hypocrite," and "blasphemer," as Mendelssohn was later to express it in "To Lessing's Friends";[20] this too came in time to Mendelssohn's ears, as Jacobi had intended that it should, and a correspondence began between the two. As Jacobi began to suspect that Mendelssohn would publish something on Lessing and Spinoza without informing him, he quickly assembled their correspondence and published it, without Mendelssohn's knowledge or permission, in 1785; this was the original *Spinoza-Büchlein*. One month later Mendelssohn's *Morning Hours* appeared instead of the announced Lessing biography.

Without going too far afield into Lessing's own reputation, it can be said that he was one of the most prominent figures of the Enlightenment; therefore a profession of Spinozism would easily have been interpreted at the time as a betrayal of, or loss of faith in, the ideals of the Enlightenment of which he had seemed to be the ardent champion in such works as "Nathan the Wise."[21] Lessing was the perfect foil for Jacobi, for he could be used to achieve all three of Jacobi's purposes. Firstly, since Lessing had been a close friend of Mendelssohn's, the revelation of his Spinozism would be almost certain to shock and dismay Mendelssohn, both because of Spinozism's unsavory reputation and because Lessing had not confided his change of heart to him. Certain remarks in the

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Spinoza-Büchlein to the effect that Lessing had felt that he dared not communicate his true views to Mendelssohn were doubtless included to this end, as well as Jacobi's asking Lessing "whether he had never told Mendelssohn about his own system [of philosophy]? 'Never,' answered Lessing, 'Only once did I mention to him that which attracted your attention in *The Education of the Human Race.* We could not come to any agreement, and I left it at that.'"[22]

Secondly, by focusing on the person of Lessing, Jacobi was able to dramatize the complete opposition of the Enlightenment worldview to his own and at the same time to avoid the necessity of presenting very much in the way of sustained argumentation, which had never been his forte. He had shrewdly guessed that it would not be the question of Lessing's Spinozism itself that would be the aspect of the controversy that would exert a lasting fascination; the conversations were reproduced from Jacobi's extensive notes so faithfully that agreement on the veracity of Jacobi's report was all but unanimous among those who had known Lessing. What was shocking was rather the implication that Lessing had rejected the values of the Enlightenment, as Mendelssohn had recognized when he set aside his planned Lessing biography to write the *Morning Hours*, and then what was to be his last work, the brief "To Lessing's Friends." When Mendelssohn suddenly died as the manuscript was still in the process of being printed, the sense that Jacobi was to blame extended far beyond just the circle of Mendelssohn's friends.[23]

Jacobi served his hidden agenda of calling the ideals of the Enlightenment itself into question by employing the fragmentary and anecdotal form of letters, letters supposedly concerned chiefly with the opinions of a single person. It was clearly Jacobi's intention to quarrel with the worldview of the Enlightenment in the person of Lessing when he recalled saying to Lessing, in what one imagines was a tone of the most plaintive sincerity: "It was the furthest thing from my mind, to find a Spinozist or pan-

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theist in you. . . . I came in large part to seek your help against Spinoza."[24]

When it is recalled that Jacobi was at the time the comparatively unknown author of various articles, chiefly on political and theological topics, it is easier to understand why he might have been inspired to involve the famous and controversial Lessing as the central character in what turned out to be an intellectual morality play on that age-old theme, the quarrel of faith and reason. Thus it strengthened Jacobi's hand that Lessing's last work, *The Education of the Human Race*, had been greeted with puzzlement; moreover, his involvement as editor of the notorious *Wolfenbüttler Fragmente*, which contained biblical criticism similar in spirit to that of Spinoza's *Theological-Political Tractatus*, as well as attacks on the doctrine of the Trinity, had elicited considerable unfavorable reaction.

Thirdly, and least successfully, Jacobi appears to have used Lessing as at least indirectly endorsing his own views, insofar as Lessing is depicted as agreeing with Jacobi's interpretation of what Spinozism really meant: that there are only two possible philosophical positions, one based on faith and the other on reason. Ironically, Jacobi's own care in recording his conversations with Lessing may have betrayed him here, for it often seems clear that Lessing is not making the concessions that Jacobi assumes he has. Therefore it was not very difficult for Mendelssohn, among others, to take issue with Jacobi over how well he had actually understood what Lessing had said. As Altmann[25] and Allison[26] have shown, he attributed contradictory statements and extremely vague ideas to Lessing and did not always realize when he was being teased, all of which contributes to the impression that the *Spinoza-Büchlein* reveals more about Jacobi than it does about Lessing.

There is an additional irony, which can be fully appreciated only by understanding that Schelling, in his attempt to deal with the implications of the false dilemma of the choice between faith and reason Jacobi set up,

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turned to Leibniz's sophisticated theory of the development of rationality in order to escape it. According to Allison, in the *New Essays on Human Understanding*, Leibniz defended the idea that true ideas are often present in the soul in obscure form and may eventually be developed into rational concepts. In Leibniz, therefore, "there is no longer a radical opposition, as with Descartes, Spinoza, and again with Kant, between sense or feeling and reason, but only a difference in the degree of clarity with which the same fundamentally rational content is apprehended. Thus the obscure or pre-rational, that is feeling, is seen to contain an implicitly rational content . . . "[27] Allison also cites Kurt Hildebrandt to the effect that "Lessing was the first to grasp this aspect of Leibniz's thought and . . . the failure of others, like Kant, to do so, was one of the sources of the opposition between the advocates of pure reason and the champions of creative thought and intuition in German intellectual life of the 18th century."[28] Thus one means of resolving the dilemma the *Spinoza-Büchlein* creates could have been found in a more profound understanding of its nominal central figure, Lessing; but this avenue was to remain unexplored until Schelling developed his philosophy of nature.

In order to understand the impact of Jacobi's Spinoza interpretation, which equated Spinozism with rationalism and determinism in their most consistent possible form (i.e., as irrefutable by argument) *and* presented it as the final flower of a mystical pantheism with its roots in Plotinus and the kabbala, something of the view of Spinoza prevailing in Germany at that time must be sketched. When the Lessing of the *Spinoza-Büchlein* said: "People always speak of Spinoza as if of a dead dog,"[29] he was referring both to the assumption that Spinoza had been conclusively refuted by Wolff in his *Theologia Naturalis* and to his more general reputation as an atheist. Since Spinoza's works had become a bibliographical rarity early in the eighteenth century, Wolff and Pierre Bayle's *Dictionnaire* articles on Spinoza were almost the only sources

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of information generally available to the learned public. When Herder has Philolaus criticize Spinoza, he also shows him reflecting on the misfortune suffered by the great metaphysician at the hands of "that sprightly busybody, Bayle," especially since "so few read the obscure works of Spinoza, while all the world reads the manifoldly useful, varied and pleasant Bayle!"[30]

Since virtually all that was known about Spinoza was his supposed atheism, it was easier for Jacobi to make his interpretation seem convincing, particularly because the texts of Spinoza's works had become so rare. The *Spinoza-Büchlein* was widely thought to be "a thorough interpretation,"[31] incredible as that now seems. Fritz Mauthner included a cautionary observation with his 1912 edition of the Pantheism Controversy texts: "One ought not, in reading all these writings and letters, to forget for a moment that Spinoza was far less well known to the combatants and their supporters than he would be today to any ordinary candidate for a philosophy degree."[32] Jacobi himself was the major source of information about Spinoza for most of his contemporaries, even for Schleiermacher.[33]

What then were the main points of Jacobi's Spinoza interpretation? He seems most familiar with *The Ethics* and *On the Improvement of the Intellect*, although it is difficult to be certain because, as with most other authors he discusses, Jacobi vastly prefers extensive paraphrase to quotation. He stresses the identification of Spinozism with pantheism and of both with rationalism in its most extreme form in the first long letter he wrote in response to Mendelssohn's question about the manner and circumstances in which Lessing had supposedly divulged his Spinozism. Mendelssohn anticipates and tries to answer this line of argument in the sections of *Morgenstunden* in which he defends an "enlightened pantheism"[34] and concedes that Lessing may have been a pantheist in the sense that he held the existence of all things to be immanent in God. But such a "refined pantheism," Mendelssohn argued, could "very easily coexist with the truths of religion

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and morals"[35] because such subtle speculation would have no direct bearing on human conduct or happiness.

Mendelssohn was indirectly replying, with his championship of an "enlightened" Spinozism, to Jacobi's account of his conversation with Lessing, in the course of which he attempts to prove that all pantheistic systems are imperfect forms of Spinozism. Spinoza, according to Jacobi, was the most consistent of pantheists and rationalists, and his works reveal most clearly what pantheism and rationalism, properly understood, *must* imply—atheism and fatalism. When Jacobi depicts himself as saying to Lessing: "I believe I know him [Spinoza] as only very few have known him," he did not mean that he had discovered that Spinozism was atheism, but rather that it was Spinoza's *method* of rational demonstration which leads to atheism. "For the determinist, if he wants to be consistent, must become a fatalist."[36] That is, if rationalism is to be consistent (and Jacobi holds Spinoza's to have been the most consistent), it must be capable of explaining everything without exception. Once the mind sets itself to understand the universe and refuses to give up the principle *a nihilo nihil fit*, then it cannot rest until everything has a rational explanation. According to the argument of the *Spinoza-Büchlein*, because free will and a personal God cannot even in principle be rationally explained, they are denied any reality in Spinoza's system. Rationalism cannot allow "something out of nothing" to be postulated; it must deny "every transition from the infinite to the finite."[37] It can accomplish this only by means of a concept of being that possesses neither reason nor will, "a first cause, of an infinite nature . . . [a] first, general, original stuff."[38] Jacobi concludes triumphantly: "Whoever can accept this fatalism cannot be refuted. He who cannot accept it must become Spinoza's antipode."[39] The gauntlet had been laid down—all philosophy must champion either faith or reason. It was here, in Jacobi's *Spinoza-Büchlein*, that the consequences of the opposition between faith and reason that Kant's philosophy had implied became crystallized in the form

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which engaged the attention of virtually every thinker of the time.[40]

Appended to the first (1785) edition there were six principles which were Jacobi's attempt to sum up his own position by emphasizing the unbridgeable gap between the orthodox concepts of divinity, which are based on revelation and faith, and the atheism to which every form of rationalism must necessarily lead.

1. Spinozism is atheism.
2. The kabbalistic philosophy, qua philosophy, is nothing but undeveloped Spinozism or a confused version of it.
3. The Leibniz-Wolffian philosophy is no less fatalistic than Spinoza's philosophy, to whose principles the persistent researcher will find it inevitably leads.
4. Every manner [of philosophizing that is based on the method] of demonstration ends in fatalism.
5. We can demonstrate only similarities; and every proof presupposes something already proven, the very first principle of which is revelation.
6. The fundamental element of all human action and knowledge is belief (*Glaube*).[41]

This is the essence of Jacobi's message, that the most fundamental question of all, that of the relation of the individual to the Absolute, can at bottom be answered in only two ways. The Enlightenment and everything it stands for has been shown to be not just deeply mistaken but pernicious, for the ultimate consequence of the use of reason is despair, fatalism, sterility, death; faith alone can maintain a vital, living connection with reality. The dilemma Jacobi presents is a false one, but it is thrust upon the reader with an unmistakably genuine urgency. I suggest that it had the influence it did in part because of its content: it succeeded in capturing the flavor of a growing disillusionment with the Enlightenment and the claims of reason rampant at the time. Yet the seductiveness of the form in which the opposition of faith and rea-

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son was presented ought not to be overlooked: the either/or, the mutually exclusive alternatives, had seldom if ever been stated in such starkly dramatic terms; the repercussions are still being felt today.

III. Faith or Reason?

It may seem peculiar at best that Jacobi thought that a book in the format of a lengthy correspondence would be the most effective way to showcase his interpretation of Spinoza's philosophy. The choice could be attributed to the great haste in which he had to prepare the manuscript in order to make his accusations public before Mendelssohn could publish a defense of Lessing; but it ought also to be borne in mind that the *Spinoza-Büchlein*, depicting Spinozism as the inevitable and catastrophic culmination of the dogmatic, rationalistic, and pantheistic thought of the Enlightenment, was but one expression of Jacobi's long-cherished anti-Enlightenment views, albeit the most influential. He had realized, like the other so-called philosophers of belief (*Glaubensphilosophen*),[42] J. G. Hamann and J. G. Herder, that since the Enlightenment was synonymous with an overemphasis on reason, it might be the case that a demonstrative rational argument would be the least effective way of revealing its weaknesses.

For all three thinkers the triumph of the Enlightenment meant a devaluation of what each of them held to be the center and foundation of human life: faith, feeling, and immediate intuitive connection to God, or the supersensible. The importance of challenging the most basic assumptions of the Enlightenment in a new way is illustrated at its most brilliant and excessive in Hamann's *Socratic Memorabilia* of 1759, which was an extended meditation, quarrel, act of provocation, and allegorical crusade against Kant, Hamann and Kant's mutual friend, Behrens, and the Enlightenment in general.[43] Neither the impact of its message nor its unique stylistic pyrotechnics can be summarized here; indeed, I can think of no

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philosophical work less amenable to summary. Yet the claim made by James O'Flaherty, echoing Hegel, to the effect that Hamann does not *have* a style, he rather *is* style through and through,[44] indicates that the unprecedented and idiosyncratic style of the *Socratic Memorabilia* is anything but unrelated to its anti-Enlightenment content.

Herder, a former student of Hamann's, most resembled his master in that he possessed a genuinely original turn of mind; however, the conclusions he reached in his published works were by no means always to Hamann's liking. His prize essay, *On the Origin of Language*, written for the 1770 competition of the Akademie der Wissenschaften in Berlin, contained a sophisticated argument for a naturalistic theory of language which was also an attack on the view that language is the creation and gift of God. If, Herder argued, language has a natural rather than a supernatural origin, it has a discoverable genesis and history, which can be studied. And since reason is expressed through language, it must also have a history and undergo change and development. This was the seed of Herder's concept of genetic method, a method which led him to stress the significance of social and historical factors in understanding any phenomenon, including the human race. Herder's contribution to the pantheism controversy is to be found in his *God: Some Conversations*, influential on all the post-Kantians, but it was not just the vitalistic theory of nature defended in that work which was an inspiration to Schelling; the genetic method was also to prove fatefully important.[45]

Jacobi was no Hamann in terms of intellectual ability or literary gifts, nor did he have Herder's wide-ranging erudition, but he does seem to have appreciated the difficulty of making his case against the Enlightenment by using the Enlightenment's own weapon of rational argument. Therefore I suggest that his fourth principle (above), according to which all demonstration leads to fatalism, be seen as a declaration of the bankruptcy of reason. The proof of the pernicious consequences of rationalism and the argument that Spinozism is the irrefutable (on rational

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grounds) final result of consistent rationalism were necessary presuppositions for Jacobi; if he had not insisted on the rational unimpeachability of Spinozism he could not have presented his own irrationalistic philosophy of belief as the only alternative.

Only this initially concealed purpose can explain the spectacle of Mendelssohn and Jacobi, both declared opponents of the archatheist Spinoza, publicly quarreling about the best method of refutation. Mendelssohn had attempted a speculative criticism of Spinoza along the lines of those offered by Wolff and Leibniz; but Jacobi could not give up his insistence on the impossibility of refuting Spinoza rationally, for he had no other way of forcing the issue of the unavoidability of his *salto mortale*, a nonrational leap of faith, as the only possible alternative to Spinozism. He later admitted as much: "My letters on Spinoza's doctrine were . . . written . . . in order to demonstrate the impossibility of overcoming Spinozism by means of the logical use of the understanding" (Jacobi 4:xxxvii). The complete opposition and irreconcilability of the rational and the irrational were the necessary presuppositions for Jacobi's conclusion that consistent rationalism can be overcome only by consistent irrationalism, which for Jacobi was Christian personalism, and his own emphasis on feeling and belief as the only means of unmediated access to reality.

However, the learned public had to wait until 1787, for "David Hume on Belief or Idealism and Realism," to learn more about Jacobi's philosophical ideas than the few hints that could be gleaned from the *Spinoza-Büchlein*, where Jacobi had insisted on the reality of belief and freedom on the grounds that the deterministic alternative was completely unacceptable: "It is impossible, that everything is nature and not freedom, because it is impossible that everything which elevates and ennobles man—the true, the good, and the beautiful—are only illusion, deception, and lies. This is the case, if there is no freedom" (Jacobi 2:3–4). That the polemical rejection of the consequences of rationalism, without suggesting

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anything in its place other than affirmation of a vague belief, was not enough to convince most readers was later acknowledged by Jacobi when he described the reaction to the *Spinoza-Büchlein*: "The claim made in the work on the doctrine of Spinoza by the author: all human knowledge arises out of revelation and belief, aroused general indignation in the German philosophical world" (Jacobi 2:3–4). Jacobi denies in the passages immediately following that he was "an enemy of reason" or that he had ever taught a blind belief, and announces "David Hume on Belief" as his answer to these accusations.

The dialogue explains, with the help of excerpts from Hume and Thomas Reid, Jacobi's concept of belief as the feeling of necessary connection to the real: a nonrational, immediate, intuitive conviction. At this point (at the latest) it becomes clear that Jacobi is not using the terms "idealism" and "realism" in any of their more familiar senses; for the appeal to belief, to intuitive knowledge, is also clearly an appeal to the real. Jacobi describes how he came to philosophy:

> As long as I can recall, it has been a part of my character that I could understand nothing of concepts whose outer or inner object I could not intuit through sensation or feeling. Objective truth and reality seemed the same thing to me, just as a clear representation and knowledge are. Every demonstration, which could not, proposition for proposition, be made graspable to me in this fashion; every explanation which could not be intuitively compared to an object, which was not genetic: to these I was blind and closed. (Jacobi 2:178)

Thus reason is for Jacobi always a means to an end and never superior to intuitive knowledge. Those systems which allow reason in the form of abstract ideas to reign over intuition are by their nature atheistic because their guiding force is the desire to explain everything. Several statements in the *Spinoza-Büchlein* are comprehensible

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for the first time against this background, especially the definition of philosophy's proper task:

> The greatest merit of the philosophical scholar is not to establish abstract conceptions nor to spin systems of them. His ultimate aim is pure absolute being; his greatest merit is to unveil and reveal that which can never be conceptualized, explained, deduced, in short to reveal the undissectable, the immediate, the simple.[46]

Jacobi's unwavering adherence to this basic insight also sheds light on his subsequent literary efforts, the philosophical novels *Allwills Briefsammlung* and *Woldemar*. According to George di Giovanni, Jacobi was the first to conceive of the idea of a philosophical *roman* and deserves to be compared with Kierkegaard in his innovative use of the form,[47] although there is ample circumstantial evidence that he may have been familiar with Herder's thesis in *Vom Erkennen und Empfinden* that the best understanding of life is to be found in literature.[48]

For Jacobi, to expose the speciousness and partiality of abstraction is implicitly to claim that another kind of approach to truth is more adequate. In his novels, his political writings with their profusion of historical illustrations, and of course in the letters which comprise the main body of the *Spinoza-Büchlein*, we see his strong attraction to the concrete and sensually graspable. Truth is most real when it comes to life in particular individual people and situations. Paradoxically, then, if there is to be any access to universal truth about the human condition, it will have to be found in the words and actions of individual people; but perhaps this is no more paradoxical than the fact that the universal desire to know is always and only instantiated in actual living persons. Thus it might be argued that for Jacobi, the novel is not just one perspective on the truth, but the closest it is possible to come to truth.

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Herman Nohl finds Jacobi to have been "the most important philosophical critic of this [post-Kantian] generation"[49] precisely because he rejected the rationalism of the Enlightenment and insisted upon the fundamental role of experience, of feeling, and of faith. The terms rationalism and idealism appear to have been used interchangeably by Jacobi to characterize those systems not based on intuitive knowledge but depending to a greater or lesser extent on abstraction. The intuited is the undeniably real, the abstracted the ideal or rational.

Only the clear definition of these terms can make Jacobi's characterization of idealism as a "Spinozism in reverse" (Jacobi 2:10) understandable; what Spinoza and Fichte have in common for him is the desire to explain everything in terms of a single principle. Since such radical philosophies cannot succeed by appealing to intuition, they must both appeal to abstraction by means of concepts and are at bottom both speculative attempts to carry to its limits the principle *a nihilo nihil fit*. As Jacobi explained in a letter to Fichte:

> It is undeniably the spirit of speculative philosophy, and therefore has been from the very beginning its unceasing effort, to make the common man's originally *equal* certainty of these two principles: I am, and there are things outside of me, *unequal*. It must seek to subordinate one of these principles to the other. . . . In their basic thrust they [materialism and idealism] are in no way divergent, but rather gradually approach one another to the point of touching and commingling. The metaphysics of speculative materialism, in realizing its own consequences, must become transfigured idealism . . . (Letter of 3.3.1799, in Jacobi 3:10ff.)

Thus it can be seen that Jacobi's opposition of idealism and realism, despite his idiosyncratic definition of the terms, is of interest for the study of later idealists for

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two reasons. The *Spinoza-Büchlein* contained the earliest attempt of a contemporary author well known to Fichte and Schelling to set up an opposition between two *types* of philosophical systems,[50] which, by the fundamental nature of the choice between them, are at once mutually exclusive and incapable of refuting one another rationally. As can be seen in the letter cited above, Jacobi continued to uphold the thoroughgoing and necessary character of this opposition in his later writings. Still more important was Jacobi's insistence that one system can be seen to be superior to the other by virtue of the values it embodies; in the case of his "realistic" theory, freedom and a personal God.

Jacobi's *salto mortale* is the first "practical" solution to the difficulty of having to choose between mutually exclusive philosophical systems; rationalism is not rejected on theoretical grounds but rather because it denies freedom and the possibility of knowledge of a personal God. One must rescue oneself from these consequences, even if by means of an irrational "head-first leap."[51] Some of the implications of what it means to reject a philosophical view because of its practical or moral significance for the person who holds it were explored by both Fichte and Schelling; Jacobi was their model in this, not Kant.[52] After reading the second edition of the novel *Woldemar*, Fichte wrote enthusiastically to Jacobi, whom he had never met: "Yes, dear noble man, we are in complete agreement, and this agreement with you proves to me more than anything else that I am on the right track. You too seek all truth where I seek it: in the innermost sanctuary of our own being."[53]

Jacobi also seems to have been the first to employ the term "practical" to describe the unique advantage belief enjoys over reason when he claims "man must either participate in the divine nature or the divine must become flesh and blood. This practical way can neither be praised nor achieved by that impoverished reason which has decayed as it has become speculative."[54] Only with this background in mind can the ambiguous heritage of Kant's

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