

The following is the manuscript (1992) of a paper first published as "Hegel, Jacobi, and Crypto-Catholicism, or, Hegel in Dialogue with the Enlightenment," *Hegel on the Modern World*, ed. Ardis Collins (Albany: SUNY, 1995) pp. 53-72. At the time of the paper's composition, there was no critical edition of Jacobi's works, nor, for that matter, an English translation. The first English translation of Jacobi's main works appeared in 1994: *Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi: The Main Philosophical Writings and the Novel 'Allwill'*, translated with Critical Notes and Bibliography by George di Giovanni (Kingston and Montreal: McGill-Queen's Press, 1994) 683 pp.; includes a monograph, G. di Giovanni, *The Unfinished Philosophy of Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi*, pp. 1-167.

Hegel, Jacobi, and 'Crypto-Catholicism'
or
Hegel in Dialogue with the Enlightenment

1. Although not pervasive, the presence of Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi in Chapter 6 of the *Phenomenology of Spirit* is at least conspicuous.¹ One only has to think of the closing pages of the chapter. There, to resolve the conflicting claims of individuals who are, *qua* individuals, certain to be the repositories of moral truth, Hegel takes a page straight out of the *Woldemar* of 1796.² At that point in Hegel's text the protagonists of his philosophical drama have finally become aware that it is impossible both to hold on to one's particularity, rooted as it must be in the accidentalities of nature, *and* to uphold universal values, without thereby incurring conflict and hence doing violence to one another. In this respect they all stand guilty; and they must be ready, therefore, to make amends. Just like the Woldemar of Jacobi's novel, who finally learns humility and is therefore capable of rejoining the society of friends from whom he has become alienated, the protagonists of the Hegelian confrontation must learn the language of confession and forgiveness. Their words are an

¹ References to the *Phänomenologie des Geistes* are according to the pagination of *Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel: Gesammelte Werke*, Vol. IX, eds. W. Bonsipien and R. Heede (Hamburg: Meiner, 1980), and/or *Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit*, tr. A.V. Miller (Oxford: Clarendon, 1977).

² "... 'Absolutely not!' Woldemar replied. 'Only doing away with the exercise of conscience is pernicious... The letter of reason, of religion, of civil and state law, are all alike; they are all equally capable of little. No man has ever obeyed a law simply as law, but always only the authority that flows from it and accompanies it, always only the vitality which drive, inclination, and habit give to it. Only man's *heart* says directly to him what is *good*; only his heart, his drive, tell him directly that to love the good is his life...'" *Woldemar, Jacobi's Werke*, eds. F. Roth and F. Köppen (Leipzig, 1812-1825), Vol. V, pp. 114-115. This passage comes from a long addition first interpolated into the text in the 1796 edition.

unmistakable echo of Woldemar's.³

There is, however, an earlier confrontation of conflicting points of view in Chapter 6, in which Jacobi's influence, though perhaps not as obvious, is just as unmistakable and important. I am referring to the section of Part II entitled "The Struggle of the Enlightenment with Superstition." Here the two opposing parties are, on the one hand, a typical Enlightenment rationalist (an *Aufklärer*); and, on the other, a religious believer. Behind this passage there is, I believe, an essay of Jacobi's, "Einige Betrachtungen über den frommen Betrug und über eine Vernunft, welche nicht die Vernunft ist," that was published in the *Deutsches Museum* of 1788, and in which we also find a believer disputing with an *Aufklärer*.⁴ In Hegel's passage at issue, just as in the one at the end of Chapter 6, we find no explicit reference to Jacobi. Nor is there (not at least to my knowledge) any external evidence to connect it to Jacobi's essay, no oral or epistolary report, that Hegel had Jacobi in mind when he wrote it. Any philological argument intended to connect the passage with Jacobi's essay would have to be based, therefore, on internal evidences alone, on similarities of language and imagery.

Such similarities do exist, as I believe. To establish them, however, will not be the aim of this paper; at least, not the main aim. Of much greater interest to us—from a historical as well as a philosophical point of view—is that Jacobi's essay was part of a wider reaction against the Enlightenment's attitude towards religious belief that occurred in Germany in the 1780s, on the eve of the French Revolution. In one notorious case, with which the essay is historically connected, the confrontation spilled over into the courts of law. It took the form of a law suit—one, moreover, that

³ "Dear Henriette" [Woldemar] said, "no word can say how I feel! Loudly could I—and *would* I—confess before the whole world that I am the guiltiest among all men...." (p. 461, *Werke* edition). "... 'I will learn humility', he said. 'You bring me back to myself! What in me now [lies] so dead against my own self....That too is pride! Always the same hard, unbending, pride.... I was not good, Henriette! But I shall *become* it: I will learn *humility*; I will be *yours*.... Oh, do *accept me!*'" (p. 476). Cf. *Phänom.* pp. 360-61, § 669 of Miller's translation.

⁴ "Some Considerations on Pious Fraud, or On a Reason which is no Reason," *Deutsches Museum* I.1(1788), pp. 153-184. The essay was republished in Vol. II of *Werke* (1815) but with significant variations.

brought to centre stage the issue of freedom of the press, and of the social role of journalists. Now, even on the highly improbable assumption that Hegel knew nothing of the dispute, or of Jacobi's contribution to it, the fact is that there is a remarkable continuity of themes between Hegel's confrontation between the *Aufklärer* and the believer in Chapter 6 of the *Phenomenology* and the actual dispute. In principle at least, the position that Hegel defends in his imaginary confrontation constitutes a reflection upon, and an indirect criticism of, Jacobi's position in the real one. This is the point that I want to establish. The advantage of thus reading Hegel's text in the light of an actual historical event is that, since it is agreed that in the section of the *Phenomenology* at issue Hegel is debating the meaning of the Enlightenment, we can thereby test the historical relevance of his position. As we shall see, we shall also be able to bring to light elements in the Hegelian dramatic confrontation that directly tie to the other passage of Chapter 6 of the *Phenomenology* mentioned above, in which the direct influence of Jacobi's *Woldemar* on Hegel cannot be disputed.

2. First, a few details about the events that led to Jacobi's essay and which surely constitute one of the most bizarre episodes in eighteenth century German cultural history: the so-called 'crypto-Catholicism dispute'. At its centre stood a certain Johann August Starck (1741-1816), Protestant theologian and from 1781 renowned preacher at the court of Darmstadt.⁵ Starck was a very ambiguous personality. As a theologian, he exhibited in his writings all the traits of a rationalist. Early in his career he was even accused by the orthodox of being a neologist. Yet, from 1761 onward he had been a very active member of the Masonry and, in this capacity, he had zealously conspired to establish within the order an 'ecclesiastical branch' that would incorporate in its ceremonial older Catholic rituals allegedly going back to the Medieval Templars. There is no doubt that Starck used his Masonic connections to gain social and financial advantages, and that, to bolster his position within the order, he consistently indulged in practices worthy only of a charlatan. At one point he

⁵ I am spelling 'Starck' as the name was spelled by Starck himself. In modern German it would be spelled 'Stark'. In the notes that follow, no attempt will be made to modernize or otherwise standardize the often eccentric spelling of eighteenth century German.

found himself competing for credibility with none other than that most notorious of all charlatans, Cagliostro himself. At any rate, in the context of his many Masonic intrigues, Starck maintained that he had been sent by ‘higher authorities’, and this is the claim that, as we shall see in a moment, fuelled later repercussions.⁶ Starck eventually cut all ties with the Masonry.

What had begun as an internecine struggle within the Masonry acquired a new dimension in the middle of the 80s when the term ‘crypto-catholic’ (*heimlicher katholik*),⁷ began to circulate among the learned circles, apparently at the instigation of Friedrich Gedike, the editor of the *Berlinische Monatschrift*, and Friedrich Nicolai, the editor of the *Allgemeine Litteratur Zeitung*, also based in Berlin. These two journals were the *de facto* organs of the so-called ‘popular philosophy’, that mixture of Leibnizian metaphysics, Humean scepticism, Scottish common sense realism, and liberal individualism, that made up the core of Enlightenment rationalism. The leaders of this very loose philosophical movement were worried by the new wave of religious pietism and Christian fundamentalism then sweeping through the German Protestant world, which they considered a threat to their rationalistic beliefs. They began to suspect a plot in it, orchestrated by secret emissaries of the Catholic Church, aimed at undermining Protestant liberal theology and liberal institutions. Their argument (which of course suffered from an undistributed middle) ran somewhat like this: The Roman Church is dogmatic and obscurantist. The new Protestant pietism is anti-rationalist; hence foments dogmatism and obscurantism. Therefore, it has to be drawing its inspiration from Rome. But, of all the dogmatic and obscurantist Catholics, the Jesuits are the most Machiavellian. Therefore, they have to be the ones translating inspiration into strategies of subversion. As Biester put it to Garve, who recommended tolerance, the Enlightenment has made so little inroad into the

⁶ For the whole story, see Jean Blum, *J.A. Starck et la querelle du crypto-catholicisme en Allemagne* (Paris: Alcan, 1912). Also, Valerio Verra, *F.H. Jacobi: dall’illuminismo all’idealismo* (Torino: Filosofia, 1963), pp. 180-182, and note 26.

⁷ The term began to be used in the first of the anonymous contributions to the *Berlinische Monatschrift* that generated the ‘crypto-Catholicism’ dispute (January, 1785, pp. 59-80. Cited after Blum, p. 96).

masses of the nation “that the Jesuits would not be Jesuits if they did not try to take advantage of the darkness that still reigns.”⁸

One of the chief suspects in the ensuing campaign to unmask the plot was Lavater, the pious Zürich pastor who, anxious as he was to witness miracles, was predisposed to accept Cagliostro’s alleged superhuman powers as genuine. Claudius, the renowned Protestant pietist, was also targeted, as was anyone else who objected to the rationalism of the Berliners. Finally, Johann August Starck himself became implicated. Starck’s appeals to secret higher authorities during his Masonic quarrels were interpreted as referring to Jesuit superiors in Rome.

Here the affair took a peculiar new turn. Starck reacted to the accusation by suing Biester and Gedike, who had been instrumental in making it public, for libel. He took them to law in a Prussian court. The move of course offended the *Aufklärer*, who took it as further evidence of Starck’s Catholic despotic tendencies. With his legal action Starck was trying, in their opinion, to muzzle an otherwise free press. At any rate, the suit followed its course, being fought just as bitterly in the headlines as in the courtroom. At the end, in 1787, the court found for the defendants. The judgement declared that Biester and Gedike had had a right to be concerned about the intellectual and moral welfare of their society, and to voice their concerns in public. For Gedike, who gloated in print, the judgement proved that under the enlightened rule of Friedrich the Great the law, and reason, still reigned supreme.⁹

Starck’s reaction was to publish a three volume Apology (the first and the third volumes over six hundred pages strong; the second, about a thousand) in which, to clear his name of false suspicions, Starck documented his past affairs within the Masonry, and also took issue with the

⁸ *Berlinische Monatschrift*, July, 1785, pp. 68-90, p. 73. Cited after Blum, p. 99.

⁹ *Proceß über des heimlichen Katholicismus zwischen dem Darmstädtischen Oberhofprediger D. Starck als Klager, und den Herausgebern der Berlinischen Monatschrift, Oberkonsistorialrath Gedike und Bibliothekar D. Biester als Beklagten, vollständig nebst der Sentenz aus den Akten herausgegeben von den loßgesprochenen Beklagten* (Berlin: Unger, 1787). Cf. the Preface by Gedike, pp. v-viii. Starck was made to pay the costs.

journalists.¹⁰ To Gedike, who had wondered why Starck had thrown a thousand pages at his accusers ("38 Bogen!"),¹¹ Starck replied that he preferred his own exhaustive method to the journalists's practice of making unsubstantiated accusations in pamphlets and newspaper articles.¹² Moreover, it was not his intention to provide copy for the newspaper business and line the pockets of the Berlin book-peddlers (read: Nicolai).¹³ He then launched his attack on the journalists, challenging their moral authority as would-be protectors of the Protestant faith, and accusing them of Inquisitorial and ultimately dishonest tactics against their opponents.¹⁴

I relegate the racy detail to the footnotes in order to move to Starck's main accusation. Nicolai and Biester, he argued, were not only intolerant, unjust and cruel. They were dishonest as well. For, under the guise of protecting what *they* claimed to be true Protestant faith, they promoted a religion of reason, a naturalism and a Deism, that in fact abolished religious faith altogether. The

¹⁰ Johann August Starck, *Über Krypto-Katholicismus, Proselytenmacherey, Jesuitismus, geheime Gesellschaften, und besonders die ihm selbst von den Verfassern der Berliner Monatschrift gemachten Beschuldigungen mit Acten-Stücken belegt*, 2 Parts (Frankfurt and Leipzig: Fleischer, 1787-1788); *Nachtrag über den angeblichen Krypto-Katholicismus, Proselytenmacherey, Jesuitismus und geheime Gesellschaften*, etc. (Giessen: Krieger, 1788).

¹¹ *Proceß über des heimlichen Catholicismus*, pp. xiv-xv.

¹² *Über Krypto-Katholicismus* (1787), Part II, Preface (no pagination). The volume is in five sections, each with independent pagination. (In order to speed up the printing process Starck had commissioned more than one printing house). The references in the notes that follow are to the fourth section, on which Jacobi's essay also seems to be based.

¹³ *Ibid.* Cf. p. 10.

¹⁴ Starck asked who had appointed them the protectors of the Protestant faith. (*Ibid.*, p. 1-3, 24 ff. 36 ff.). He decried the atmosphere of suspicion that their accusations had created, and the seed of discord that they had sown between Catholic and Protestant in an otherwise enlightened and tolerant society. Things had come to a point where three friends could not come together without raising the suspicion of being crypto-Jesuits. (*Ibid.*, p. 16). Nicolai, Biester and Gedike were in fact re-hashing old fears about the Jesuits. Granted his persecutors's behaviour, which exhibited all the traits of *Schwärmerei*, Starck wondered whether Nicolai and company had not hallucinated while reading old literature on Jesuitical conspiracy, and had mistaken the past for the present. (*Ibid.*, pp. 19, 23). At any rate, their method of attack was cruel and unjust, worthy of a Grand Inquisitor. (*Ibid.*, pp. 4, 50). They presumed their opponents guilty, tarnished their reputation with innuendoes and unspecified charges, and then left up to them the burden of proving themselves innocent. (*Ibid.*, pp. 7-8, 37-46).

journalists confronted their Protestant opponents with an impossible choice, itself a technique of the Inquisition. Either, in order to prove that they were not Catholic, the victims of their suspicions had to embrace naturalism and Deism and thereby cease to be Christian; or, to the same end, they had to show zeal in persecuting their Catholic co-citizens, thereby betraying the respect of conscience which is the hallmark of Protestantism. In either case, they were forced to do violence to their Protestant faith.¹⁵

The bizarre turn that the situation had now taken is that Starck, a sometime rationalist theologian and Masonic charlatan, was casting himself in the rôle of defender of Protestant orthodoxy against the *Aufklärer*.¹⁶ And, however cynical this strategy might have been, it worked. Starck did attract the sympathy of many who resented the *Aufklärer*'s simplistic identification of Masonic superstitions with religious practices in general. Among the sympathizers was Johann Georg Schlosser, a well known literary and political figure, and a relation of Jacobi's. In the November issue of the *Berlinische Monatschrift*, Schlosser published an article in which he satirized the Berlin rationalists by a tongue-in-cheek defence of Cagliostro.¹⁷ Jacobi, to whom humour did not come naturally, followed up with his essay on "Pious Fraud," which was intended to ensure that Schlosser not be misunderstood. He wrote it, as he tells us in the introductory paragraph addressed to Schlosser, upon completing the second volume of Starck's *Apology*. Using a Biblical image that we shall find again in Hegel, he tells Schlosser, "Like Moses you have *raised* an iron serpent on

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 7-8, 37-46.

¹⁶ It is very likely that Starck had indeed converted to Catholicism in his youth but had later chosen to forget this early episode for political and social reasons. See Blum, pp. 13-14.

¹⁷ So according to Jacobi's report (*Werke*, II, p. 459). I have not been able to track down Schlosser's article. Schlosser is also the author of a little book in which he reproduces the text of an article defending the identity of true Deism and true Christianity, and then refutes the articles's thesis point by point. *Über die Apologie des Predigtamts des Deismus in dem Braunschweiger Journal v. Stück für 1789* (Frankfurt/Main: Fleischer, 1789). It would be interesting to establish how widespread in Enlightenment literature was the trope of a rationalist in dialogue with a believer.

high, and I hope that a great many sick people will be healed at the sight of it.”¹⁸ In fact, as we shall now see, rather than a clarification of Schlosser’s article, Jacobi’s piece turned out to be a comment on Starck’s *Apology*.

3. Jacobi did not have a high opinion of Starck, whom, after reading the second volume of his *Apology*, he actually accused in private of gross hypocrisy.¹⁹ Yet his antipathy for Starck paled in comparison to the enmity that he felt towards the *Aufklärer*. The Berliners, as he wrote to Stolberg, “were really only trying to throw the cause of Christianity in with the cause of superstition, and bring suspicion upon the spirit of all revelation.”²⁰ Publicly, therefore, Jacobi had to come down on the side of Starck. His essay clearly displays sympathy for him—not, however, without a due amount of criticism. A number of incidental objections apart (among them, that Starck had thrown “five whole alphabets” at his adversaries),²¹ Jacobi challenged the validity of Starck’s complaint that his opponents had surreptitiously identified the religion of reason with true Christian faith: this “pious fraud,” as Jacobi calls it. Starck’s reaction was perhaps in keeping with his ecclesiastical position. Moreover, in calling attention to it, Starck was only following Lessing’s precedent.²² But Starck

¹⁸ *Über den frommen Betrug*, pp. 153-154. I shall be citing from the original edition in the *Deutsches Museum*. On Jacobi’s intent, see also his letter to the Count von Stolberg, 7.May.1788, *Friedrich Heinrich Jacobis auserlesener Briefwechsel*, ed. Friedrich Roth, 2 vols (Leipzig: Fleischer, 1825-27). Vol. II, p. 478.

¹⁹ Letter of 7.May.1788, p. 475. But Jacobi also felt sorry for him, pp. 477-78.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 478.

²¹ *Deutsches Museum*, p. 179. (The letters of the alphabet were used to index the folios of a book for binding purposes. When one alphabet was exhausted, the letters were repeated). Jacobi faults Starck on two counts, one in matter of strategy, and one in matter of principle. Starck’s first mistake was to have given too much to his adversaries. His presentation of evidence might have been exhaustive and accurate. Yet one only had to pull from it a few words here and there and the whole could be made to look like “an eruption of swear words,” “nothing but an expression of plain anger.” (*Ibid.*, p. 150) Ultimately the question was whether anyone would read Starck’s “five alphabets.” The second mistake was to have based his defence on the claim that his opponents were perverting the concept of faith—in effect charging them with lack of faith. This seemed to Jacobi a strange move to make, given that in their contemporary world faith, not the lack of it, was on the defensive. (*Ibid.*, p. 179). I am not following Jacobi’s order of presentation. In fact, for the sake of brevity, I am totally restructuring it.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 156-157. Cf. these passages in Lessing: *Des Andreas Wissowatius Einwürfe wider die Dreyeinigkeit* (1773), *Gotthold Ephraim Lessing: Sämmtliche Werke*, eds. K. Lachmann and F. Muncker

should have recognized that the *pia fraus* in question was a fraud only in the eyes of an orthodox believer. From the point of view of a rationalist—one who sincerely believes that the historical content of Christian faith is nothing but fables and superstitions—nothing would be more natural or innocent than to assume that that faith deserves consideration only to the extent that it conforms to rationalist assumptions. Nothing would be more natural or innocent on the part of the rationalists, moreover, than to exert all their available energy to propagate what to them appeared as the truth, namely the reduction of Christian belief to rationalistic dogma.²³

Jacobi sees nothing hypocritical, therefore, in rationalist propaganda. “Mag ihn [the rationalist] verdammen wer da will, ich hebe keinen Stein gegen ihn auf.”²⁴ But neither will Jacobi cast a stone to silence the adversaries of the rationalists. The believers too have a right to a hearing, and the rationalists ought to put themselves in the believers’ place in order to learn how they (the rationalists) sound to believers. At this point in the article, Jacobi has a fictional believer address a rationalist, whom Jacobi represents as a typical ‘deist’. Like Starck, Jacobi’s believer identifies

(Stuttgart: Göschen, 1886-1924), Vol. XII, p. 96; and, *Von Duldung der Deisten: Fragment eines Ungenannten* (1777), Vol. XII, pp. 270-271. For reasons that I do not understand, Jacobi dropped this reference to Lessing in the *Werke* edition of his essay. For our purposes the reference is very important, because it was Lessing who, with his *Beiträge*, officially initiated, so to speak, the confrontation between believer and rationalist to which Hegel is still harking back in Chapter 6 of the *Phenomenology*.

²³ *Ibid.*, pp. 464-465. Cf. p. 176-177: “Denn es ist die Natur der Meynung zu urtheilen, sie würde die einzige seyn, wenn es den Menschen nicht an Vernunft mangelte: folglich sich mit der Vernunft zu verwechseln.” Though Lessing is not mentioned here, the echo of his words is unmistakable: “Und was ist natürlicher, als daß jeder seine einige Meynung für die vernünftiger hält?” *Des Wissowatius Einwürfe*, p. 93 (lines 33-34).

²⁴ *Über den frommen Betrug*, p. 158. Jacobi was apparently not happy with Starck’s repeated attempt to silence his opponents through administrative means. Jacobi himself had had occasion, only a few years before, to benefit from the freedom of the press enjoyed in Berlin, and he did not fail, at that time, to commend it. The occasion had been the publication of his “Über Recht und Gewalt, oder philosophische Erwägung eines Aufsatzes von dem Herrn Hofrath Wieland, über das göttliche Recht der Obrigkeit,” (anonymous) *Deutsches Museum*, I (1781), pp. 522-554; VI (1781), pp. 419-464. See his letter to C.K.W. Dohm, 3.Dec.1782, in which Jacobi praises “die Berliner Preßfreiheit.” *Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi, Briefwechsel*, I.3, eds. Michael Brügggen and Siegfried Sudhof (Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt: Frommann-Holzboog, 1981), Letter no. 851, p. 100.

‘rationalist’ and ‘theist’, and treats the ‘theist’ as a ‘deist’.²⁵ Despite the rhetorical distance that in the article Jacobi retains *vis-à-vis* his believer, and although we know that Jacobi was not himself an orthodox Christian, we can nonetheless safely assume that the believer’s position is essentially Jacobi’s.²⁶ Here, in telescoped form, is the believer’s address.

“Say,” he asks the rationalist, “how did your reason ever discover such truths as that there is one creator and provident God, or that the soul is immortal? How could it come to these truths only of late, and all at once, whereas they had been hidden to philosophers of old for so long? Of course, common folks have always been in possession of these truths, but this only in virtue of ancient traditions and religious beliefs always associated with a Divine revelation. You now claim, on the contrary, to excogitate them *a priori*, all by yourselves. And you show nothing but contempt for the common understanding that has actually known these truths all along, as if being in possession of them were not in itself a merit. There is something perverse in this attitude of yours—a hidden and totally unwarranted assumption on your part that reason only works in the way you know, that it could not have ways of expressing itself, perhaps, different from your philosophizing.”²⁷

“At any rate, your claim to have arrived at these truths by your unaided reason is highly suspect, for, as matter of fact, reason has no object except what it derives from the senses. It can only taste, so to speak, what its fingers have previously touched. And if this limitation applies to the knowledge of such mundane things as, say, a pineapple, all the more so must it apply to objects of cosmic dimension.”²⁸ New scientific discoveries about the earth and the sun are not made through reason alone but on the basis of more complex sense-experiences that require, in turn, more complex

²⁵ For Jacobi’s distinction between ‘theist’ and ‘deist’, see *Über den frommen Betrug*, p. 164, footnote.

²⁶ I am saying this on the basis of Jacobi’s whole position as evinced throughout his life. Jacobi is a believer in the sense that any true knowledge of God must be based on a positive revelation. All other genuine knowledge, moreover, depends on this true knowledge of God.

²⁷ *Über den Frommen Betrug*, pp. 160-161.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 159-60.

conceptualizations.²⁹

“You make the mistake of thinking that common folk, and we, the believers among them, do not know what it is to reason. On the contrary, we know it very well. To reason is to reflect upon the content of sense experience; to compare its components; to combine and unite them in artificial representations. Common understanding performs this task all the time—we *all* do it, and so do you, the philosophers.³⁰ The only difference in your case is that, in the process, you abstract from the content originally drawn from the senses, and restrict yourselves to the analytical task of systematizing your reflexive representations, thereby creating the illusion, to which you are the first to succumb, that you are generating new knowledge through reason alone. But, in fact, you never have anything new to offer. All your arguments are either sophistic, as a recent critique of your proofs for the existence of God has demonstrated,³¹ or empty, like recognizing the capital letters A, B, C, in the small a, b, c, or spelling out words which you have already learned how to read.³²

“I am not trying to convince you. I am only asking for relief from your unrelenting attacks on historically based religion. Why this venom against us, the believers? Have some tolerance!³³ Historical faiths, indeed, may have been corrupted by superstitions. But then, give me an absurd opinion, a sophistic argument, which has not at some point been defended by some philosopher.³⁴ Our position is simply this: Belief in a personal God is a long standing human phenomenon, apparently motivated by some deeply felt human need. But since neither reason nor ordinary experience can justify the belief, yet its resilience is undeniable, the possibility of a direct revelation of God in human history cannot be dismissed *a priori*. Any historical evidence to this effect would

²⁹ Ibid., p.162.

³⁰ Ibid., p. 161.

³¹ Ibid., pp. 163-164.

³² Ibid., p. 161.

³³ Ibid., pp. 170, 171.

³⁴ Ibid., p. 174.

carry no less, though also no more, weight than any other evidence drawn from the senses.³⁵

“There is another point, moreover, of which you ought to take note. On your assumptions concerning the autonomy and purity of reason, you cannot explain why its light was ever obscured, or, for that matter, why even today, in the age of Enlightenment, error and evil still hold sway.³⁶ Your Cartesian reason (for it is from Descartes that you draw your lineage)³⁷ can explain everything except the possibility of non-reason. By contrast, I, the believer, have no such problem. For I recognize that my reason is a limited power totally dependent for its function on an external nature. And this recognition is especially forced upon me by sleep, which is akin to death, for in sleep, as in death, reason becomes prey to forces that totally overwhelm it. How can you, the rationalist, indulge in dreams or suffer the hallucinations of fever, yet still talk about the infinite power of reason?³⁸ True reason, i.e. my reason, is one which is aware of its limitations.³⁹

“You accuse me of despotic tendencies. The truth is quite the opposite. It is I who have everything to fear from your despotism. I have no objection to others defending views contrary to mine, for I know my limitations and must, therefore, (as a matter of principle) make allowances for the possibility that I am wrong. So far as I am concerned, there is no harm in any view being voiced, provided that equal right is granted to other views as well.⁴⁰ But how could you possibly display a similar tolerance as a matter of principle, when, on your assumptions, any view that fails to conform

³⁵ Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 168-169: “[D]enn die unmittelbare Überzeugung durch Hand und Auge ist nicht stärker, als die unmittelbare durch Ohr.” Jacobi removed these lines from the 1815 edition. He must have recognized the inappropriateness of the claim.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 164. Cf. also, p. 182, where Jacobi speaks in his own name.

³⁷ Descartes is not mentioned by name, except in one place, indirectly, with reference to the “Cartesian or ontological proof.” (*Ibid.*, p. 163). But it is clear that by the reason which is like an “Apollo,” (p. 163) or like a Divinity that shines brighter than the sun, (p. 164) Jacobi means Descartes’s reason.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 162.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 170.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 176.

to the absolute rule of reason (i.e. what *you* decree to be reason) is *ipso facto* an embarrassing aberration, nothing that deserves respect. Expediency alone can stay your hand from persecution, witness the behaviour of your friends in Berlin.... One thing is certain. So far as I am concerned, I had much rather accept clerical despotism, endure the tonsure of clerical obedience, than submit to a reason which, in its pride, has become blind to its own nothingness!”⁴¹

Thus speaks the believer. In Jacobi’s text, the believer waxes eloquent, giving expression both to Jacobi’s respect for the modern sciences (in appropriate citations from Francis Bacon)⁴² and to Jacobi’s personal piety,⁴³ until, in a final outburst of righteous anger at the rationalist, he breaks off. Jacobi then takes over again, speaking in his own person and decrying the way in which journalists manipulate the public under the pretext of safeguarding common freedoms.⁴⁴ He wonders whether German society will ever achieve the level of civility that he once found exemplified in an English journal, where the reviewer of a book by Swedenborg could say of mystics in general: “Let men enjoy their *influxes*; let them converse with their *angels*: let them publish their *collectio somniorum*. What are their *dreams* to us?—If they suffer us to sleep in peace, let them dream on; and we will heartily wish them, good night.”⁴⁵ It was this freedom to sleep and dream, to find repose in a God that transcended reason, that Jacobi was, after all, demanding from his rationalistic adversaries.

The effects of the Starck trial lingered on in the German press until the advent of the French Revolution. One thing is clear. The confrontation between faith and reason that the trial came to symbolize could not have ever come to a head, for, on the understanding that the two warring parties had of each other, neither could explain why the other could and should listen to its remonstrations.

⁴¹ Ibid., pp. 176-177. Also, p. 178, where Jacobi is speaking in his own name.

⁴² Ibid., pp. 167-168.

⁴³ Ibid., p. 165. The relevant paragraph is excised in the 1815 edition.

⁴⁴ Ibid., pp. 179-180. The text is toned down in the 1815 edition.

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 180.

Each party claimed to possess a better understanding of the other's position than themselves had or could have. Each purported to speak in the other's best interest, whether or not the other could recognize it as such. But neither could faith submit to the light of Cartesian reason, nor Cartesian reason recognize itself as a historically determined reality, without each giving up its own identity. Thus, although there certainly were attempts at dialogues made by both sides, the result in all cases was rather two parallel monologues in which each party only talked at its own fictitious reconstruction of the other. The two sides never really communicated on their own terms. The question now is whether Hegel, the master of dialogue, could find for them a meeting point.⁴⁶

4. As I have said, in Hegel's passage on the struggle of the Enlightenment with superstition there are no explicit references to Jacobi. Let us imagine, however, that Hegel is addressing Jacobi directly, and, by means of a judicious use of Hegel's texts, let us imagine what he would say to him. Hegel's words are his contribution to the Enlightenment's debate on the relationship of reason to faith, or, more precisely, since by the time he was speaking the Enlightenment had already run its course, Hegel's words are his *post mortem* on the Enlightenment and the debate. Let us also assume (and for this we need an extra dose of poetic license, because, given what Jacobi had to say upon reading *Glauben und Wissen* about the wretched prose of this Mr. Hegel, it is doubtful that he ever ploughed through the *Phenomenology*)—let us assume that Jacobi has read and understood this work.⁴⁷

“Dear Jacobi,” our reconstructed Hegel begins, “this battle that you are waging against the philosophers is, in fact, a family quarrel. Like every family quarrel, it cannot be resolved on the terms in which it is waged, because the two opposing parties share common assumptions but draw different conclusions from them to justify contrasting particular interests. To each side the other must necessarily appear to dissemble, because, granted its particular interests, the premises from which

⁴⁶ In *Über die Apologie des Predigtamtes des Deismus*, Schlosser asks the Deist whom he can possibly be addressing himself to except the converted, pp. 71 ff.

⁴⁷ For Jacobi on Hegel's style in *Glauben und Wissen*, see Letter to Friedrich Köppen, 10.Aug.1802, in Friedrich Köppen, *Schellings Lehre oder das Ganze der Philosophie des absoluten Nichts, nebst drey Briefen verwandten Inhalts* (Hamburg: Perthes, 1803), First Letter, p. 224, footnote.

the other argues—and which it also understands and accepts—must appear to it as necessarily leading to its conclusions, not the other’s. I am saying, in other words, that the Enlightenment’s problem about the relation of reason to faith is due to a lack of enlightenment about itself.⁴⁸ This applies to both parties in the present dispute, even though, in your case (for I assume that you and your believer are really one person), I must admit that you, Jacobi, show more insight than either the philosophers or the believers. For at least you recognize that it is of the nature of reason to consider its opinion absolute. You speak for the party of faith, and rightly maintain that the believers are no fools. But neither do you cry foul against the rationalists; you do not accuse them of insincerity, as your friend Starck does. You recognize reason’s right to defend its point of view.⁴⁹

“But perhaps I can help in resolving your dispute. I belong to a different age, and distance of time often affords the possibility of a new reflection, a more comprehensive standpoint.⁵⁰ For one thing, I can explain the tendency of reason to absolutism on which you rightly comment. Reason’s power to abstract, which you also duly notice, has a lot to do with it. I shall return to it in just a moment. More to the point right now, however, is reason’s ability to overcome distinctions—the most important being the distinction between subject and object. Because of this ability, reason cannot even admit the possibility of, say, A and B, without at the same time conceiving B in A, and A in B—i.e., in effect, without conceiving the two as a totality, a world unto itself. Any opinion that reason adopts has the tendency to appear to it as the only possible one, for reason could not hold it without at the same time feeling obliged to conceive everything else in the light of it. This characteristic of reason is responsible for what looks to you as its intolerance. You rightly decry this attitude as potentially dangerous, and the Terror of the French Revolution will indeed demonstrate that your fears are justified. But ‘intolerance’ is not the right word for it, for in its self-assurance reason cannot even recognize the possibility of a valid opinion other than its own. Reason is neither

⁴⁸ Cf. *Phänomenologie*, pp. 293.24-294.3; 296.23-32; 306.13-29.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 306.11-27.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 297.11-12.

tolerant or intolerant, though, I agree, it can be unrealistic, even childish at times.⁵¹

“You are right in saying that the ‘reason’ of the rationalists is, in fact, a kind of faith; and that, by opposing their reason to your faith, the rationalists are dissembling. You are right, because the trust that the rationalists have in their opinions is just as immediate and absolute as the trust that the believers have in their beliefs. And in both cases the trust is born of the certainty, which the rationalists and the believers have in common, that in one’s self one also finds a transcendent reality (be it a rational world or your God), and that, contrariwise, in this reality one also finds one’s self. But this certainty belongs to reason by nature. It is true, as you claim, that the rationalists’s reason is like faith; but, in this sense it is also true that the believers’s faith is like reason.⁵² You two, the rationalists and the believers, would not be talking to one another as you do, if you did not implicitly accept this identity.⁵³ Awareness of it has already permeated your whole social structure, and even the minds of the common folk. You both realize this much, for your dispute is a battle for the control of the masses and, through them, of society. It is a battle between Enlightenment’s two different interpretations of itself.⁵⁴

“Now I can return to the issue of abstraction. You absolve the rationalists of Starck’s charge of pious fraud, but accuse them of something even worse: of a perverted reason. You find that there is something wrong in a reason that parades as the God and creator of the universe an object which is, in fact, only the product of an empty abstraction. The *Ens Supremum* of the rationalists is neither a this nor a that. It is the remainder of a total abstraction from everything sensible and concrete—a mere nothingness, in other words, yet, precisely because of this, it is supposed to stand above everything. And this empty figment of rationalistic reason is held out to the believers as if something about God’s transcendence could be learned from it which they, the believers, do not already know

⁵¹ Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 291.36-292.10; 293.27-29; 293.35-296.2; 295.23-24.

⁵² Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 297.20-298.24.

⁵³ Cf. *ibid.*, p. 295.8-11.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 294.4-27.

from their doctrines and pious practices. The rationalists accuse the believers of idolatry. The truth is the very opposite. The believers know very well how to distinguish visible symbol from transcendent meaning in their beliefs and devotions. It is the rationalists who, under the pretext of saving Divine transcendence, make an idol of their impoverished concepts.⁵⁵

“For you, Jacobi, the whole attitude of the rationalists towards the senses is perverse. When the believers appeal to historical witnesses in defence of their faith, the rationalists take refuge in abstractions. They discount positive or sensible evidence because transient and accidental, and hence unreliable as a foundation for the universal truths of reason. Yet, when challenged to produce a content for these presumed truths, the rationalists point to their laws of nature, which they have established, so they claim, on the evidence of the senses. They decree *a priori* what counts as acceptable sensible evidence, decree this according to their theoretical needs. They actually manufacture their supposed sensible nature *a priori*, through a secret art (a veritable “magic,” as you, Jacobi, call it)⁵⁶ whereby the content of experience is first reduced to nothingness through abstraction, and then is made to appear out of this nothingness again—but purified, as, behold, a new creation!⁵⁷

“You, Jacobi, find this way of behaving perverse. And, at one level of analysis, you are of course right. But, you must also consider that abstraction is a necessary condition of reflection. And reflection is not, as you claim, just a way of representing “at second hand” (your expression)⁵⁸ objects that we already know directly through the senses. On the contrary, reflection generates the mental distance between ourselves and our sense-impressions that is required for these latter to

⁵⁵ Ibid., pp. 299.24-300.7.

⁵⁶ *Über den frommen Betrug*, p. 164.

⁵⁷ I am guilty of an anachronism here. Jacobi used this expression only in 1815, *David Hume oder über den Glauben, Vorrede, zugleich Einleitung in des Verfassers sämtliche philosophische Schriften, Werke II* (1815), p. 18.

⁵⁸ *Über die Lehre des Spinoza, in Briefen an Herrn Moses Mendelssohn* (Breslau: Löwe, 1785), p. 162.

assume before us the very shape of *objects*. If the senses have any objective value at all, it is only because, as *senses*, they already are inchoately reflective, i.e. implicitly rational. To be sure, reflection entails negativity. In reflection we stand aside, so to speak, from our sense-impressions or feelings. We *abstract* from them, if you prefer, and by the same means we also disengage them from their immediate context, thereby reducing them to transient determinations that are, in principle, always replaceable. The over-all result is that dissolution of the solidity, which nature otherwise has in the eye of naïve consciousness, that you (rightly enough) decry as the nihilating power of reason. But, without this loosening of the bonds of phenomenal nature; without this ability of ours to treat given natural determinations as mere accidents, to set them in motion, so to speak, and make them flow into one another—without, in other words, this dissipation of positivity, nature would not manifest itself to us in all its possibilities. These possibilities, dear Jacobi, are *our* possibilities, the marks of our ability to invest nature, through action, with our meanings and values and thereby turn it into a human world.⁵⁹

“I know, Jacobi. You will say that I am preaching an empty freedom, that I am putting the negative freedom *not* to be anything in particular above the positive one (which is the one that really counts) of *being something*. But you fail to recognize the positive side of reflection. You fail to see that, if am free not to be this or that, if I can abstract from any given situation, I am *ipso facto* equally free to accept *anything* that history might deal to me as the occasion of my salvation—for what that ‘thing’ actually is depends on what I do with it. The journalists, incidentally—that damned race of gossips that in our days has replaced the courtiers of old—have had their social role to play too. For their incessant talk, in which every opinion is at one moment defended and at another equally condemned, has made our culture aware of the frailty of the customary language of virtue and vice. Indirectly, they have pointed to the one place where stability can be found, and that is in us, in the

⁵⁹ Cf. *Phänomenologie*, p. 303.16-37.

power of reason to bind and to set loose.⁶⁰

“You are being disingenuous, dear Jacobi, when you accuse the rationalists of ambiguity in their treatment of sense-evidence. How can you charge them of dissemblance in this regard when your believers eat bread, and drink wine, and at the same time claim that the bread they eat, and the wine they drink, are not just food but miracles of God’s presence among us?⁶¹ And how can you accuse them of manufacturing the evidence allegedly provided by the senses, as contrasted to your simple trust in the events of history, when you, in fact, are constantly being faced with the problem of distinguishing true from false prophecy? To resolve the problem, do you not rely on what amounts to a simple insight into the truth—in which case, you are not unlike the *Aufklärer*⁶²—or on tradition, in which case you would be admitting that what counts as true and false depends on the judgement of a community?⁶³ You should not be afraid to concede this much, for you, Jacobi, were the one who introduced the language of the “I and the Thou” as a way out of subjective idealism.⁶⁴ You cannot make this move and not admit at the same time that the acceptance of truth is socially conditioned.

“But I am back to my first point. Your dispute with the rationalists, dear Jacobi, is a family quarrel. You are right in blaming Descartes for it. For both you and your opponents have been affected by the Cartesian truth—which you, however, both fail to comprehend—that thought is ‘the thing’, and the thing is ‘thought’. But, whereas your opponents capitalize on the destructive power that this truth has on the common view of the sensible world, you, by contrast, take comfort in the certainty that the Divine is everywhere in the world that that same truth also imparts. And unless you

⁶⁰ Cf. the section in the *Phänomenologie*, Ch. 6, on the language of wit (pp. 283 ff.). Hegel obviously has *les beaux esprits* in mind, but the journalists were part of this cultural phenomenon.

⁶¹ Cf. *Phänomenologie*, p. 300.8-18.

⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 301.8-21.

⁶³ Cf. *ibid.*, p. 298.12-24.

⁶⁴ *Über die Lehre des Spinoza* (1785), p. 163. In the *Vorrede* of the *David Hume* of 1815, Jacobi claimed that Kant’s “Refutation of Idealism” in the second edition of the *Critique of Pure Reason* was dependent on his thesis in the *Lehre des Spinoza*. *David Hume, Werke*, II, p. 40, footnote.

both give up the particular interest that commits you to your standpoint, neither of you will ever be able to understand the other.

“In the meantime the dispute will go on. I admire your tolerance, dear Jacobi. And I have a special weakness for the richness of historical faith. But let me warn you that the future does not augur well for you. To be sure, there is something childish—peevish, I would say—about your opponents’ claims to truth. Their complacency betrays a lack of experience. But the rationalists have the means to learn—and they will learn.⁶⁵ They will test the power of their reason by learning the language of the ‘useful’—a language which, I know, you especially dislike but which is, in fact, the secular equivalent of your sacramentalism.⁶⁶ And they will suffer from the terror that their abstract rationality will unleash (as you, Jacobi, have already prophesied). They will learn with their bodies what you already know, that God’s judgement cuts deep to the sinews.⁶⁷

“Moreover, you, noble Jacobi, have already lost. You lost the moment when, in your magnanimity, you acknowledged your opponents’ right to their opinion. You lost the moment you accepted to do battle on *their* ground by disputing with them, the moment your friend Starck went to court. For argument is the work of reflection, and simple faith cannot withstand its pressure. Reflection will spread into faith and take hold of it, because, like an infectious disease in a healthy body, reflection feeds on its own element.⁶⁸ You reserve for yourself, dear Jacobi, the right to sleep and dream. So be it! You can afford that privilege, since God is already with you. But remember that, while you sleep, reason works.⁶⁹ And, on one fine morning (“whose noon is bloodless if the infection has penetrated to every organ of spiritual life”),⁷⁰ you will discover that the world of faith you hold

⁶⁵ Cf. *Phänomenologie*, p. 307.14-19.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 305.17-35; 313 ff.

⁶⁷ Cf. *Ibid.*, pp. 321.21-24; 322.27-31.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 295.8-296.7.

⁶⁹ Cf. *ibid.*, p. 310.13-21.

⁷⁰ Miller’s translation, p. 332.

so dear has all but vanished, preserved only in memory. It was a serpent of wisdom that your friend Schlosser had raised on high for adoration, and, during the night, while you slept, the serpent simply cast a withered skin.”⁷¹

5. Hegel, the great demythologizer, has granted everything to Jacobi, yet has also taken everything away from him, for in Hegel’s hands Jacobi’s faith now turns out to be reason itself. But Hegel is not perpetrating the *pia fraus* with which Starck had charged the *Aufklärer*, for the ‘reason’ at issue here is no longer the same as *their* reason. In this respect, the last word in Hegel’s dialogue with the Enlightenment belongs to Jacobi.

To see why we have to return to the other passage in the *Phenomenology* with which we began, and in which Jacobi’s influence on Hegel is indisputable. We must also keep in mind that Hegel echoes Jacobi’s complaint to the effect that the rationalists only deal in abstractions—that they do not know how to return from their heights of reflection back to the real world of the senses. Hegel’s only point in favour of the *Aufklärer* is that, although they and Jacobi equally labour under reason’s self-totalizing tendency, they alone are so far explicitly aware of it.⁷² But the *Aufklärer*’s contention that reason is absolute is bound to remain a hollow claim unless it is shown that the real world can be recognized in reason’s ideal constructions. And the *Aufklärer* cannot satisfy this requirement without at the same time meeting Jacobi’s objections—without, in effect, showing how a world supposedly governed by reason, and reason alone, can be reconciled with the undeniable reality of error and evil.

It is in the resolution of this problem that Hegel took his page from the *Woldemar*. In the essay on *Pious Fraud* Jacobi’s solution is simply to acknowledge that reason is essentially limited, hence fallible. As he says, “true reason is one that recognizes its limitations.”⁷³ One can hear an echo from Kant in these words, and it is indeed likely that in the passage Jacobi was indirectly appealing

⁷¹ *Phänomenologie*, p. 296.4-7.

⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 306.13-27.

⁷³ P. 170.

to his authority. Kant's full claim, however, was that reason is infinite precisely *because* it can recognize its limits and hence contain them. Kant reaffirmed reason's self-sufficiency in the face of its limitations, and in this he remained a rationalist. Hegel's own solution *vis-à-vis* the *Aufklärer* does not, in form at least, differ from Kant's. But Hegel learned from the *Woldemar* how to translate Kant's abstract formula in real language. It was Jacobi, as we have already mentioned, who had made rationality the function of the mutual recognition between subjects who, together, constitute a world of consciousness. On this assumption, the problem of how to reconcile reason's absolute claim with the obvious irrationality present in the real world turns into a problem of how to conceive a society in which individuals, however much they *do*, and even *must do*, violence to one another, are capable nonetheless of retaining the social bonds that hold them together. In Jacobi's *Woldemar* this problem gets resolved using the language of confession and forgiveness which, as we have seen, we also find at the end of Chapter 6 of the *Phenomenology*. It is the language of a society which, far from abolishing conflict, recognizes it rather as unavoidable, and, crucially, has learned how to contain it in a spirit of respect for the limitations of individuality.

By the end of Chapter 6 Hegel is ready, as we know, to turn his attention to religious consciousness. A religious community is one that knows that the Spirit abides with it, because it knows that it has the power to bind and to forgive. In the *Woldemar* this is in effect Jacobi's definition of society as such. Hegel simply takes it over. What Hegel adds to it, however, (and in this he reaches back to the *Aufklärer*) is the recognition that at the heart of that perfect society, and at the source of its infinite power, lies nothing but reason itself.

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