THE NEW SPINOZISM

‘Our world is the material of our duty made sensible’.

Fichte, *On the Basis of Our Belief in a Divine Governance of the World*[1]

‘The objective world is simply the original, as yet unconscious, poetry of the spirit; the universal organon of philosophy . . . *is the philosophy of art’*.
Schelling, *System of Transcendental Idealism* (1800)[2]

1. It was in 1935 that Paul Hazard famously spoke of a ‘crisis of the European mind’[3] to describe the transition from the earlier confessional era – when reason was still taken to be subservient to faith, and political power to the rule of God and the Church – to the Enlightenment, when reason reversed that relation by asserting its autonomy with respect to religious belief and philosophers began to look at reason’s rule for the authentication of political power. Hazard himself dated that transition to around 1680.[4] Recent scholarship has pushed this date back to 1650, and has also refined the layout of the crisis. The tendency now is to consider it as a global European phenomenon, rather than to break it down into to the various lands and linguistic groups that made up seventeenth century Europe.[5] There is also a greater sensitivity now to the variety of the strands of thought that caused it. Some of these strands were especially reluctant to forge compromises with the tradition of the past, and, among these, the one of which Spinoza was both the spiritual father and the continuing inspirational force – the so called ‘radical

[1] *J. G. Fichte – Gesamtausgabe der Bayerischen Akademie der Wissenschaften*, eds. Reinhard Lauth & Hans Gliwitzky (Stuttgart–Bad Cannstatt, 1977 ff), cited as GA, followed by Series number (Roman numerals), Volume within Series, and page number. GA I.5.353

[2] Tr. Peter Heath (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1978), p. 12.

[3] *La crise de la conscience europèenne* (Paris, 1935)

[4] *La crise*, Vol 1, pp. i-ii. English tr.: *The European Mind (1680-1715)*, tr. J. Lewis May (London: Hollis & Carter, 1953), pp. xv-xvi.

[5] This is the thesis developed by Jonathan I. Israel, in *Radical Enlightenment: Philosophy and the Making of Modernity 1650-1750* (Oxford: University Press, 2001); see specifically p. 20, 22.

Enlightenment' – was especially uncompromising.[6]

But, although greatly refined, Hazard's thesis remains essentially unchallenged. It is tempting indeed, if we consider the course that philosophy took in Germany in the final decades of the eighteenth century during the so-called High Enlightenment, to take the year 1800 as the signal date for another crisis – a crisis this time of the very reason that had originally made the Enlightenment.

[6]On this theme, see Margaret Jacob, *The Radical Enlightenment* (London, 1981), pp. 20-23, 93; and J. I. Israel, *Radical Enlightenment*, pp. 11-13.

Evidence for such a crisis is abundant, especially within the just indicated limits of the German *Aufklärung,*[7] but it is of a mixed nature that makes it difficult to interpret. Quite in general, a new awareness of the limits of reason had taken hold of philosophers and poets alike – a new willingness to grant to the irrational an irreducible place in experience. But the question is whether this new awareness, this new willingness, marked a retrenchment on the part of the hitherto triumphant reason; whether reason's crisis, in other words, was one of self-confidence, or whether, on the contrary, it was the effect of a new *prise de conscience*, of reason's recognition that the faith and the irrationality that it had been fighting all the while had been in fact an inevitable product of its own rationality; that its past struggle had been in fact a struggle with itself, and the forces that it had demonized the indirect effect of its power. Taken in this sense, the crisis was one more episode in the radicalization of the Enlightenment: the final episode that brought it to an end as a recognizable cultural phenomenon. The *prima facie* evidence that such was indeed the case is twofold. On the one hand, there is the fact that Spinoza, the father of the Radical Enlightenment, was the one who presided in spirit over the chain of events that finally precipitated the crisis. On the other hand, it is also a fact that Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi,[8] by far the most perceptive critic of the *Aufklärung*, saw the new interest of the philosophers in faith and the irrational precisely in this light, namely as reason's final attempt to pre-empt whatever grounds there were still left for the faith of old. It did this by re-creating that faith from within after its own image, a creature of its needs as reason.

2. I have just mentioned the name of Jacobi. Although Spinoza was already everywhere present in the intellectual Germany of the second half of the eighteenth century, Jacobi

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[7]These limits are purely strategic. They are dictated by the theme of the present essay. But the point could be argued that the Enlightenment, its global European nature notwithstanding, assumed in Germany in the final three decades of the eighteenth century a unique form of its own which was then reflected in the German philosophy of the subsequent century.

[8]For a study in English of F. H. Jacobi, see George di Giovanni, *The Unfinished Philosophy of Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi*, in *Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi: The Main Philosophical Writings and the Novel 'Allwill'*, tr. ed. George di Giovanni (Kingston and Montreal: McGill-Queen's Press, 1994), pp. 1-167.

was to be the one responsible for giving to this presence the peculiar significance that it assumed in the concluding years of the *Aufklärung*, and also for implicating it in the reception of Kant's Critique of Reason.[9] As we shall soon explain, that presence was to be, paradoxically enough, curiously non-Spinozistic in character. But then, from the beginning Spinoza had worked his magic in Germany in unique ways. Mendelssohn had tried to domesticate him, so to speak, as early as 1761, by interpreting all that he had said about the relation of substance to attributes and modes as directly applying only to the internal life of God – to God's knowledge of himself, in other words. It did not in any way preclude the possibility of a created and finite world that would be distinct from the divine life itself. On this reading of Spinoza, his otherwise offending monism could be brought well in line with more common and more orthodox ways of thinking.[10] This was indeed Mendelssohn's intention, preoccupied as he was with the prospect that the charge of impiety normally brought against Spinoza would be automatically extended to the Jewish community at large with which his figure was associated in everybody's mind. But for a younger generation of intellectuals the charge posed no threat. Goethe was a notable case in point. To him the same monism of Spinoza that had brought the charge of impiety provided instead the required philosophical language for expressing the divinization of nature that fueled his *Sturm und Drang* art. The young Goethe considered himself a Spinozist, and Spinoza had been indeed the subject of the emotionally charged discussion that took place between him and Jacobi (his senior contemporary) on the occasion of his visit at the latter's Pempelfort country house in 1774.

For the events that were to follow, that visit was fateful. For we can safely surmise that it was during that visit that Goethe had handed over to Jacobi the manuscript of his poem *Prometheus*. This is the same poem with which Jacobi was then to confront Lessing during his own visit at the latter's Wolfenbüttel house in the summer of 1780, allegedly exposing his host's Spinozism. And it was still the same poem,

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[9]This is the title by which Kant's critical project was at the time referred to as a whole.

[10]*Philosophische Gespräche* (Berlin: Voß, 1761). Lessing had objected to this reading of Mendelssohn. See *The Unfinished Philosophy*, p.72, note 13.

unnamed and without attribution to Goethe,[11] with which Jacobi prefaced in 1785 his famous little book, *Concerning the Doctrine of Spinoza in Letters to Herr Moses Mendelssohn*.[12] This is the book that brought to public attention the controversy that had been brewing in private between him and Mendelssohn, after the death of Lessing in 1781, on the subject of the Spinozism. Jacobi claimed to have evidence that Lessing had been a Spinozist; Mendelssohn denied that he had ever been such. In the still deeply religious culture of the day, Jacobi's allegation was especially serious because, since Lessing was the acknowledged foremost representative of the *Aufklärung*, his supposed Spinozism would have reflected on what Jacobi claimed to be the Spinozism implicit in the whole of the *Aufklärung*. 'Spinozism', 'pantheism', and 'atheism', were widely accepted at the time to be synonymous terms. Now in 1785, when Jacobi's book was published, Kant's Critique of Reason had already made inroads in the German intellectual landscape. Karl Leonhard Reinhold – a sometime Viennese priest who had sought refuge in Protestant Germany and was eager to forge a philosophical career for himself – had the idea of using it as the basis of a possible reconciliation between what was taken to be Jacobi's fideism and Mendelssohn's rationalism – a way of granting the logical force of Spinozism while metaphysically and morally disarming it at the same time.[13] Reinhold's idea, as developed in a series of letters published in the *Teutscher Merkur*, proved to be highly successful in attracting public attention. And so it is that Spinoza came to be implicated in the new Idealism that followed upon Kant's

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[11]In the first edition, but not in the subsequent ones, Jacobi prefaced the book with two of Goethe's poems, one attributed and the other (i.e. the *Prometheus*) without attribution. For the details, and the contrast that the two poems created, see *The Unfinished Philosophy*, pp. 70-71; for the two poems, see *The Main Philosophical Writings*, pp. 175-177; 185-186.

[12]*Über die Lehre des Spinoza in Briefen an den Herrn Moses Mendelssohn* (Breslau: Gottl. Löwe, 1785). A much enlarged second edition was published in 1789. An English translation of the first edition, and excerpts from the second, are included in *The Main Philosophical Writings*.

[13]*Der Teutsche Merkur* (Weimar, 1786): Bd. III, pp. 99-127; 127-141; (1787) Bd. I, pp. 3-39; 117-142; Bd. II, pp. 167-185; Bd. III, pp. 67-88; 142-165; 247-278. A much augmented version of these letters was later published in book form: *Briefe über die Kantische Philosophie*, Vols 1-2 (Leipzig, 1790 and 1792).

transcendental form of it.

This is, of course, only a one-sided way of telling the story. Spinoza had been part of the German intellectual landscape long before Kant. As we have just said, the young Goethe had already made of his pantheism the intellectual manifesto for the new and more tragic sense of the human situation to which his art gave expression. This sense was directly opposed to the florid, but stylized and psychologically well ordered, cult of feeling which was still fashionable at the time, itself only the sensuous counterpart of the rationalism of the age.[14] In the Germany of the time, this cult had centered around the figures of such as C. M. Wieland and W. L. Gleim. Jacobi, and his brother Georg, belonged to the circle of those gravitating around them. Indeed, especially remarkable about the friendship that suddenly sprang into being in 1774 between Jacobi and Goethe (but soon cooled off and was to have a thorny history of ups and downs) is that Goethe had recently lampooned this Wieland circle, taking explicit aim at the Jacobi brothers.[15] To what extent, therefore, in raising the issue of Lessing's alleged Spinozism, Jacobi was also aiming his attack at Goethe and Goethe's vision of humanity is a possibility well worth pondering. Be that as it may, the point now is that one can think of Kant as being implicated and interfering with the reception of Spinoza just as much as one can think of Spinoza as being implicated and interfering with the reception of Kant, and that in either case, whether one takes Kant or Spinoza as the main point of reference, Spinozism was being reinterpreted in view of interests that would have been totally foreign to Spinoza himself. They reshaped it in ways that to him would have made it unrecognizable. What these new interests were, and what difference they made to Spinozism, can be seen in two works that were both published in 1800 and which, viewed retrospectively, were to set up the intellectual tone in Germany for the century to come. One was by Fichte and the other by Schelling – both self-professed disciples of Kant; both claiming to have brought his idealism (and, in the case of Schelling, Spinoza's monism as well) to a logical conclusion. We shall turn to these works in due time. But even more important is

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[14]See footnote 126 of *The Unfinished Philosophy*. Goethe was to criticize the cult as a form of narcissism.

[15]In *Das Unglück der Jacobis* (1773) and *Götter, Helden, und Wieland* (1773).

the historical and conceptual context that made them possible in the first place. In fact, the problem that motivated them had already been set up for them by Goethe's *Prometheus* and Jacobi's reaction to it.

3. Just how Goethe's poem could possibly have been taken as a statement of Spinozism was a question that at least one reviewer of Jacobi's book raised immediately upon its publication.[16] But neither did the public know at the time that the poem was Goethe's, nor was it yet cognizant of the new sense in which the name of Spinoza had become a shibboleth for both Goethe and Jacobi. The poem itself was a *cri de cœur* – the heroic testimony of a man who, as a child, used to revere the immortal gods on high, but now, whetted by the experiences of life, felt nothing but contempt for them. They too, like him, are subjected to Fate, to the anonymous course of Time. But they, feeding as they do on the fat sacrifices that foolish men offer to them, lack one advantage that he enjoys – namely that he, though seeing the 'budding dreams' of his youth shattered, can nonetheless go on striving, suffering and weeping, and yet, in these travails, still rejoice and boldly shape a race of Men in his likeness. 'Here sit I, shaping Men/ In my likeness:/ A race that is to be as I am,/ To suffer and weep./ To relish and delight in things . . .'[17] The mention of Fate, which evokes the idea of determinism, was the note in the poem that brought Spinozism into play. Of course, the belief that all that happens in the universe is pre-ordained and works for the perfection of the whole – in other words, that everything is as it must be – was typical of the German Enlightenment. It was shared by such contrasting personalities as the theologian J. J. Spalding (about whom more later on), the first in 1748 to raise the issue of the vocation of humankind (*Die Bestimmung des Menschen*),[18] and Adam Weishaupt, the founder of the *Illuminati*.[19] But in the minds

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[16]Cf. *The Unfinished Philosophy*, p. 68.

[17]*The Main Philosophical Writings*, p. 186.Translation by my late colleague Jeremy Walker.

[18]J. J. Spalding, J. J. *Die Bestimmung des Menschen* (Leipzig, 1748). For a discussion of Spalding and his place in the German Late Enlightenment, see George di Giovanni, *Freedom and Religion in Kant and His Immediate Successors: The Vocation of Humankind, 1774-1800* (Cambridge: University Press, 2005), especially Chapter 1.

[19]For Adam Weishaupt, see *Freedom and Religion*, pp. 104-105, and *passim*.

of most, this determinism was still taken to be personal in nature, simply the metaphysical counterpart of the Christian belief in Providence. What made it specifically Spinozistic in Goethe's poem was the impersonalism that attached to it precisely by being associated with Fate and Time. Spinoza had clearly severed whatever ties still held between metaphysics and Christian religious beliefs. It was in the shared recognition of this fact that Goethe and Jacobi could have found in their 1774 meeting a true meeting of minds but also, because of their differing reactions to it, a profound emotional discord. At least, this is what we can surmise from the way in which Jacobi was to use Goethe's poem to challenge Lessing in 1780.

Jacobi's Spinoza differed in two ways from how he was normally received at the time.[20] For one thing, when Spinoza was not simply dismissed as a perfidious Jew, the tendency was to show that his pantheism was in fact a conceptually unnecessary variant of the accepted metaphysics that respected God's transcendence. Mendelssohn's already noted attempt in this vein was especially imaginative. Jacobi took instead a directly contrary view. According to him, Spinoza's pantheism was rather the logical conclusion of the assumption that underlay classical metaphysics. This assumption – as stated in the classical formula, *gigni de nihilo nihil, in nihilum nil potest reverti* – in fact preempted the possibility that anything genuinely new would ever occur in reality.[21] In one way or another, classical metaphysics had either denied the reality of becoming or had reduced it, at best, to a phenomenon *bene fundatum*. Spinoza deserved admiration, according to Jacobi, precisely because he had had the mental clarity and the courage to recognize this consequence. The classical assumption, according to Jacobi, was itself the product of reason's natural desire to attain perfect explanation. But to explain means to reduce particular representations to more universal ones that contain them. And since this reduction can be performed only by abstracting from the determinations that otherwise

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[20]Apart from the fact that Jacobi had a truly scholarly acquaintance with the texts.

[21]Cf. *The Main Philosophical* Writings, pp. 204-205. '*Unum & idem*' is another formula that Jacobi also uses to describe the tendency of metaphysics to reduce everything to identity. *Ibid.*. pp. 222-223. In this, he can be taken to anticipate the criticism leveled against the thought of the Enlightenment by such as Theodore Adorno.

individuate the more particular representations, it inevitably entails a loss of representative content. The process of explanation, if allowed to follow its inner logic, thus necessarily culminates in a perfect abstraction (such as Spinoza's 'substance') that explains everything *in toto* but by the same token nothing in particular. *That* there are particular determinations is itself reduced to an irrational surd. Each determination is only explainable by being externally referred *ad hoc* to another in a series that, since it proceeds *ad infinitum*, must ultimately fail to secure the being of any of them. It must fail precisely because it lacks an ultimate term, both *a quo* and *ad quem*. Each individual determination is thus reduced to a disappearing event. This, according to Jacobi, was the general outline of Spinoza's system. The system had brought to a logical conclusion the tendency already at work in all metaphysics to subordinate the requirements of existence to those of explanation, thus forcing upon reality a structure that in truth belongs only to the realm of representation.

Existence, according to Jacobi, requires irreducible individuation. His criticism of Spinoza differed in this other way from any before him. According to Jacobi, Spinoza's system undermined the possibility of human agency because it compromised the individuation of any presumed subject of action. Since it reduced the identity of any such subject to a mere semblance, it made impossible the attribution of action – at least, in a way that would make the subject truly responsible for it. As Jacobi was to say to Lessing, when confronting the latter with the implications of what he took to be his sympathies for Spinoza, in a Spinozistic universe one cannot say that anyone in particular painted the 'School of Athens' but must say, rather, that a sequence of anonymous events resulted in an appearance which we call 'the School of Athens' and which we choose to attribute to someone called 'Raphael' as its author.[22] In other words, it was not primarily the fear of denying *God's* transcendence *vis-à-vis* nature that motivated Jacobi's criticism of Spinoza, as it had motivated the criticisms of many before him, but rather the fear of denying *Man's* transcendence *vis-à-vis nature*. Actually God's and Mans's transcendence *vis-à-vis* nature went hand in hand in Jacobi's mind. For significant individuation requires opposition. There is no 'I' without a 'Thou'

[22] Cf. *Main Philosophical Writings*, p. 189.

confronting it, according to the formula which Jacobi himself was the first to articulate.[23] It is, therefore, only to the extent that finite Man is confronted by the utter otherness of God, and defines himself precisely with reference to this otherness, that he stands as an irreducible individual, and hence also as a responsible agent, both before God and in contrast with mere nature.

Jacobi was a deeply pious man.[24] Nothing could have been further removed from Goethe's paganism than his religiosity – nothing more dissonant than their respective emotional reactions to Spinoza. Yet one can see how in 1774 the two men would not only have had a meeting of minds but, at an emotional level, would also have felt, if not sympathy for each other, at least a certain affinity – an affinity at a distance, so to speak. Intellectually, they both understood that the Spinoza type of determinism had nothing to do with the determinism which was part and parcel of the Enlightenment's vision of the universe. This universe was pervaded by rational intentions that assured that all things would work to the perfection of the whole and the appropriate good of each of its parts. It was on the supposed efficacy of these intentions that those such as Spalding and Weishaupt, to whom we have already referred, rested their hopes for happiness. In the universe of Spinoza there were, on the contrary, no such intentions at work within. Events happened just because they happened, all equally driven by an infinite power that worked its efficacy without the encumbrance of either pre-ordained plan or pre-ordained limits – all equally caught up in a concatenation of other events, and all only externally linked together. Spinoza's determinism was truly a form of Fatalism. Both Goethe and Jacobi understood this much. But the young Goethe had accepted this Fatalism enthusiastically, for it suited his at the time heroic view of Man. The *amor fati* that his poem expressed, the rebellious pride with which the protagonist accepted his situation and even took joy in it[25] – this was his way of rescuing Man from the impersonalism of

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[23]In *Letters to Herr Moses Mendelssohn*; *Main Philosophical Writings*, especially pp. 230-231.

[24]When Goethe visited Jacobi in Pempelfort, he found him attending a gathering of the local congregation of Pietists.

[25]Cf. Nietzsche: 'One thing is urgently needed. To give style to one's character – a great and rare art! It is practiced by those who take stock of the strengths and

Spinoza's universe. Jacobi's religious piety did not allow him this solution. And since Jacobi could not fall back upon the sophisms of classical metaphysics, which he believed to be a self-deceiving form of Spinozism, his reaction was rather to reject rather the false reason which he took to lie behind both that metaphysics and Spinoza's Fatalism. It was a reason that subordinated existence to explanation. Accordingly, in 1789, when Jacobi met Lessing, what he proposed to him as an antidote to his perceived Spinozistic inclinations was an act of faith that would reverse precisely that order.[26] Whereas explanation requires the rule of the universal, Jacobi was to declare himself the champion of the exception.[27] Now, in 1774, no two attitudes could have been more opposed than Goethe's and Jacobi's. The affinity lay nonetheless in the fact that both men made the dignity of the human individual the centrepiece of their humanism, and that both based it, not on any vocation presumably pre-appointed for humankind in general within the greater scheme of nature's mechanism, but on the existential attitude

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weaknesses that their nature has to offer and then fit them into an artistic plan until every one of them appears as art and reason, and even weakness delights the eye'. *The Gay Science* § 290. 'I want to learn more and more to see what is necessary in things as beautiful [. . . .]. *Amor fati*: let that be my love henceforth! [. . . .] I will one day to be only a Yes-sayer'. § 276. (My translations)

[26]Jacobi did not think of himself as an irrationalist – and with good reasons. As far as he was concerned, the philosophers were the ones who generated irrationality because of their formal rationalism. They walked on their heads. Only a *salto mortale* would have redressed their stance, allowing them to walk again with their feet on the solid ground of common sense. For the image of the *salto mortale* (a kind of somersault), see *The Main Philosophical Writings*, p. 189.

[27]He did this emphatically in his open letter to Fichte of 1799, at the height of the Atheism Dispute. Cf. *Jacobi to Fichte* (Hamburg: 1799), in *The Main Philosophical Writings*, p. 516: 'Yea, I am the atheist and the Godless one, who, against the *will that wills nothing*, will tell lies, just as Desdemona did when she lay dying; the one that will lie and defraud, just as Pylades did when he passed himself off for Orestes; will murder, as Timoleon did; or break law and oath, like Epaminondas, or John de Witt; commit suicide like Otho, perpetrate sacrilege like David--yea, I would pluck ears of wheat *on the sabbath* just because I *have hunger, and the law is made for man, not man for the law*. I am this godless man, and I scoff at the philosophy that calls me godless on this account. I scoff at it and at its highest Being, for I know, with the most sacred certainty that I have in me, that the *privilegium aggratiandi* for such crimes against the pure letter of the absolutely universal law of reason is man's true *right of majesty*, the seal of his worth, of his divine nature'.

that the individual himself assumed with respect to the latter – on his capacity to disentangle himself from it, whether in pride (as for Goethe) or faith in a personal God (as for Jacobi), and however much (at least in the case of Goethe) nature itself was divinized or Man himself seen to be *in fact* inextricably bound to it. In this, both Goethe and Jacobi set the tone of much that was to come. Spinoza himself, of course, would not have recognized himself in the persona that he was made to assume in this new set of historical circumstances. Spinozism was donning a new mask. But then, there were aspects of his thought that logically lent him to this persona. As we shall see, these same aspects were responsible for an element of affinity even between Spinoza and Jacobi.

4. To see the nature of this affinity, and how it facilitated the transition to the Idealism of Fichte and Schelling, one must recognize how Reinhold's intervention in the Jacobi-Mendelssohn dispute, despite its wide public acceptance, was strangely anachronistic. Kant had famously used his professed 'critical ignorance' about the 'thing in itself' in order to make available to reason an ideal space where the latter could introduce conceptual constructs for which no objective truth could be claimed. They could nonetheless be subjectively justified on the basis of moral or other interests of reason. It must be said that to justify truth claims pragmatically was in line with the generally practical bend of mind of the Enlightenment. But Reinhold was now using Kant's strategy of critical ignorance in effect to reintroduce beliefs about the order and rationality of things which were still typical of the Enlightenment, except that they now came indexed as subjectively required for moral praxis.[28] He was to extend this practice to the point of reintroducing issues and disquisitions which only a faint obeisance to critical ignorance saved from old dogmatic modes of thought. A case in point was the bitter dispute regarding the nature of human freedom in which he became involved with his Jena colleague C. C. Schmid around 1790. The dispute became all the more bitter as others joined it, until a halt was put to it by the intervention of public authority. At issue

[28]The situation was well documented by Schelling, bitterly writing to Hegel from his Tübingen Seminary in January 5, 1795: 'Here there are Kantians in droves. [...] All imaginable dogmas have been stamped as postulates of practical reason, and wherever theoretical and historical proofs are lacking, the practical Tübingian reason cuts the knot. [...] Before you know it, the *deus ex machina* pops up, the personal individual *being who sits up there in heaven*!' *Briefe Von und An Hegel*, J. Hoffmeister ed. (Hamburg: Meiner, 1961), Vol. I, p. 13.

was whether freedom of choice requires that the will has the capacity, first to remain indifferent to two possible alternatives of choice, and then to determine itself *on its own* for either one or the other. Reinhold argued for this capacity, accordingly rejecting Kant's identification of will and reason. Schmid argued instead for a strict determinism. He made freedom rest instead on the spontaneity with which the will makes its choices on the strength of tendencies naturally inherent in it, according to a pre-appointed order of things. There was no question of an original indeterminacy, the presence of which would have disturbed, in his opinion, precisely the assumption of such an order. This position, which went under the title of 'comparative freedom', was the common one at the time.

This debate was nothing new. It had a long metaphysical pedigree. What made it strangely anachronistic is that, whether one took Reinhold's position or Schmid's, it still raised the issue of human freedom in physical terms, as if the human will were one more cause among many others, and its effects part and parcel of the general order of the cosmos. It still entangled human freedom with the causality of nature, in other words – this at a time when Goethe and Jacobi had instead transposed the whole issue of freedom to an altogether different order of reflection by raising it in existential terms.[29] That is to say, they had raised it as an issue concerning the attitude that the human individual should personally assume before nature – whatever the material constitution of the latter – precisely in order to assert his transcendence before it. This was a new tone that was being injected into philosophical debate (but one, it must be added, that had abundant precedents in the religious culture of which Jacobi himself was a product). Reinhold and Schmid might have been forgiven for missing it in the 1785 controversy. Mendelssohn himself had missed it. But they had no excuse for not having noticed how Kant himself, of whom they both professed to be disciples, had also recently redefined the issue of freedom in ways which, albeit in more scholastic modes of expression, made the human individual's stance towards nature the centrepiece of moral doctrine.

We can forget Schmid. He is only a marginal figure. We can also leave Reinhold

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[29]The term might sound anachronistic when used in connection with the 18th century. But Jacobi had explicitly raised the issue in terms of what comes first – requirements of existence or requirements of explanation. Cf. *Letters to Herr Moses Mendelssohn*; *Main Philosophical Writings*, pp. 194-195, and the editor's note 38.

aside, even though his philosophical influence was to be immense. The fact is that from beginning to end – from his early days in Vienna, where he led the double life of cleric and member of the *Illuminati*, to his activities in Kiel where his professorial career was to extend well into the nineteenth century – Reinhold remained committed to the rational programme of the *Aufklärung*. He eventually repudiated Idealism, joining a group that gravitated around the now aging Jacobi and included such figures as J. F. Fries and F. Schleiermacher – about which more at the end. As for Goethe, he would make an improbable figure in any philosophical debate, however much Jacobi had tried to drag him into one. The point of interest is the intricate conceptual connection that bound Spinoza, Jacobi, and Kant. Jacobi is again the one to give us the clue to where the point of connection lay – even though, as we shall see, he was soon to become aware of the threat that this connection posed to his own personalism.

In 1787, in an autobiographical digression,[30] Jacobi recounted how excited he had been by two early essays of Kant. We now call such essays 'pre-critical'. In both, the point that Kant made, to quote his words *verbatim* as Jacobi also did, is that 'existence is not a predicate or a determination of a thing, but is rather the absolute positing of the thing. [. . .] Inner possibility always presupposes existence. [. . .]If all existence were removed, nothing would be posited absolutely, and nothing would therefore be given either'.[31] Jacobi also reminisced how in two parallel essays published at the same time, and on the same occasion, by Kant and Mendelssohn,[32] the latter had instead privileged

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[30]The digression had a definite polemical intent. It is in *David Hume über den Glauben, oder Idealismus und Realismus. Ein Gespräch* (Breslau, 1787). English tr., *David Hume on Faith or Idealism and Realism.. A Dialogue*, in *The Main Philosophical Writings*, pp. 278 ff.

[31]*The Main Philosophical Writings*, pp. 284-285. Kant's essay is *The Only Possible Ground of Proof for a Demonstration of God's Existence* (1763). The quote is in Jacobi's footnote on p. 284. The footnote was omitted in the 1815 edition of the Dialogue.

[32]*Ibid*. p.281. Jacobi does not explicitly name either Kant or Mendelssohn. The occasion was the Berlin Academy essay prize competition on the theme 'Evidence in the Metaphysical Science'. Kant's contribution, which came second, was *Untersuchungen über die Deutlichkeit der Grundsätze der natürlichen Theologie und Moral* (*Enquiries Concerning the Principles of Natural Theology and Morality*, 1764). Mendelssohn's winning essay was *Üeber die Evidenz in metaphysischen Wissenschaften* (*Concerning*

'possibility' over 'existence', thus following Leibniz in taking the concept of a perfect possibility as the starting point of his proof for the existence of God. Kant had reversed that order, taking the thought of an absolute existence as his starting point. But that is exactly what Spinoza, to whom Jacobi also referred in the same context, had done in his *Cartesian Meditations*. From the beginning Jacobi admired and respected Spinoza for that. Even at the time of his controversy with Mendelssohn, he had praised Spinoza, no less than he had criticized him,[33] precisely because from Spinoza he had learned that truth is ultimately to be grasped, not through any ratiocinative process, but intuitively. The conceptual reflection of reason is secondary to, and dependent upon, the immediate apprehension of existence in intuition. Spinoza's mistake was to express the content of that intuition in the medium of the concept of 'substance', which was in fact the product of an abstraction of reason. The consequent fall into what Jacobi believed to be the 'nihilism' of classical metaphysics was therefore inevitable. The critical Kant, whom Jacobi was openly criticizing in 1787, denied that *we*, human beings, are capable of intellectual intuition. Yet he had this much in common with Spinoza, that the possibility of such an intuition, as available to a being other than the human, had to be conceded at least in principle. It *had* to be conceded precisely as the conceptual counter piece of his professed critical ignorance that made the claim to this ignorance meaningful. But whether it was conceded *realiter* or hypothetically, the possibility of an intuition that transcends the limits of the discursive determinations of reason had the same effect of reducing the latter to a secondary and even relative order of cognition – for Spinoza, to attributes or modes of substance that have validity only from a finite point of view; in Kant's critical system, to merely subjective intentions. But *that*, according to Jacobi, was all that philosophical reflection had *in fact* ever been able to achieve. In other words, despite the different interests and the differing speculative commitments that divided

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Evidence in Metaphysical Sciences, 1764).

[33] To the point that Mendelssohn thought at first (not improbably) that his opponent was in fact a Spinozist. This is at least the impression that Mendelssohn conveys in his memoranda to Jacobi of August 1, 1784. Cf. especially, *Letters to Herr Moses Mendelssohn* (1789), *Main Philosophical Writings*, p. 351 ('Your view is that. . .'), p.354 ('In my opinion the source of these illusory concepts. . . '). For Jacobi's admiration for Spinoza, see *ibid.* (1785), p. 193.

them, the link connecting the three – Spinoza, Jacobi, and Kant – was the very belief on which Jacobi had made his stand in philosophy, namely that existence precedes essence, and that, consequently, any conceptual determination of reality has to have only relative status.

Therein lay the threat for Jacobi. For one cannot consistently privilege existence over essence without also privileging efficient over final causality. But, as the pre-critical Kant had already pointed out, 'surely, without knowledge and purpose [God] would be only a blind necessary ground of other things and even of other minds, distinguished not at all from the eternal fate of some of the ancients'.[34] In 1789, citing this same passage, Jacobi was to gloss: 'I deny that there can be an in-between system (such as conceived by us men) between the system of final causes and the system of purely efficient ones. If intellect and will are not the first and highest powers, [. . .]they are not original springs of movement but a clockwork'.[35] Under threat was the possibility of the same freedom and personalism for which Jacobi had made himself the champion when confronting Lessing's alleged Spinozism. The critical Kant was to try to preserve some room for it transcendentally – with, however, more than a measure of dissemblance. He openly admitted in the *Critique of Judgement*[36] that, if one could just see things as they are in themselves, the modal categories would lose all meaning, since all *that is* would simply *be there*. But it is the modal categories, notably the distinction between the possible and the *de facto* actual, which are at the basis of the moral *ought*. In other words, Kant was indirectly admitting that, if we could see things as they really are (but fortunately we cannot),[37] we would discover that the whole moral order is in fact, from an absolute

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[34]In *The Only Possible Ground of Proof*, as cited by Jacobi himself in the 1789 edition of *Letters to Herr Moses Mendelssohn, Main Philosophical Writings*, p. 366, note *10.

[35]*Ibid*., p. 366.

[36]§ 76, especially p. 403 (Academy Edition, Vol. 5).

[37]Kant makes the point somewhat differently but to the same effect. If, *per impossibile* , by virtue of an insight into the nature of things, 'God and eternity in their awful majesty ... would stand unceasingly before our eyes (for that which we can completely prove is as certain as that which we can ascertain by sight)', then 'the moral worth of actions, on which alone the worth of the person and even of the world depends

standpoint, only a subjective phenomenon – exactly what Spinoza would say. One can understand, therefore, Jacobi's incapacity, after his dispute with Mendelssohn and in response to the charges of irrationalism that were being laid against him, to come up with a positive yet conclusive philosophical position of his own. Conceptually, he was conflicted – just as he had been emotionally conflicted in his first encounter with Goethe. He felt intellectual affinity for the existentialism of both Spinoza and Goethe but was conceptually unable to see himself clear of the fatalism which was the direct consequence of it, though he only attributed it to the abstractions of reason. The problem was precisely how to come up with an idea of reason that would resolve his conflict.

By the end of the century, Jacobi was to re-state his position on a new conception of reason altogether – not necessarily for the best, as we shall see. But the fact is that Jacobi had unwittingly defined the problem that was to motivate Fichte's re-doing of Kant's transcendental idealism. Fichte, by far Kant's most perceptive interpreter, was repeatedly and ardently to declare himself a disciple of Jacobi – despite the latter's just as often repeated and ardent rebuff of him. Could one establish precisely what Jacobi had said was impossible, namely an in-between system of final causes and purely efficient ones – in effect, a system that would respect the primacy of existence over essence while at the same time validating the objective status of reason? And could one accomplish this feat while also respecting Jacobi's deeply personalist religious faith? This was still the problem of reconciling Spinoza and Mendelssohn that Reinhold had thought Kant had already resolved. But the issue was whether, and how, faith would come into the picture in the very emergence of reason and rationality, and not, as was the case for Kant, only when human happiness is at issue – an aspect of Kant's critical system, incidentally, that most, including Reinhold, considered at the time to be an undue sop thrown at eudæmonism. Or again, the issue was also how to conceive freedom as an event emerging at the intersection of existence and rational discursiveness, and not – as in the Reinhold/Schmid dispute – as some sort of extra-phenomenal, yet still physical

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in the eyes of supreme wisdom, would not exist at all. The conduct of man, so long as his nature remained as it now is, would be changed into mere mechanism, where, as in puppet show, everything would gesticulate well but no life would be found in the figures'. *Critique of Practical Reason*, tr. Mary J. Gregor, Academy Edition, Vol. 5, p. 147.

cause.

5. One can understand, therefore, the conceptual and historical context within which Fichte and Schelling composed their two works in 1800. To take Fichte's first, it came at a time when Fichte had taken refuge in Berlin after fleeing from Jena, accused of atheism and politically suspected of Jacobism. The title that it bore – *The Vocation of Humankind*, where 'Vocation' (*Bestimmung*) carries in German the meaning of both 'determination' and 'vocation' – was a reprise of the title of the already mentioned Spalding's little book which, over fifty years earlier, had been a statement of *Aufklärung* rational faith.[38] This circumstance was significant, for although Fichte hoped that his spokesman in the book would stand for *Mensch* in general, there was no doubt that the experience that he related was his own in the first place, and for him such an experience had begun as that of an *Aufklärer*. In both books, the protagonist is engaged in a reflection on who he is, and why; in Fichte's, the conclusion at which he arrives at the end of the first part is exactly the same as the protagonist of Spalding's reaches at the end – namely that the universe where he finds himself is an ordered whole, of which every part has its well appointed determination. The special vocation within it that defines his identity is precisely to reflect this order through his conceptual representations. It is by fulfilling this vocation that he can hope to attain the perfection, and the consequent happiness, that gives meaning to his many present travails. This was indeed the belief on which the rational optimism of the *Aufklärung* was based, and it had apparently also been Fichte's original belief. But much had happened since the days of Spalding's original manifesto[39] to disturb this optimism, and this is now also reflected in Fichte's book. First, there was the recognition that Spalding's naturalistic vision of the

[38]J. G. Fichte, *Die Bestimmung des Menschen* (Berlin, Frankfurt und Leipzig, 1800). GA I.6, 123-309. English translation, *The Vocation of Man,* tr. ed. Roderick M. Chisholm (New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1956).

[39]Spalding had gone on republishing his book over and over again, each time modifying it in an attempt to keep up with the latest philosophical developments. It assumed a Kantian tone in the later editions. On Spalding's influence, especially with reference to Mendelssohn's and Kant's anthropology, see Norbert Hinske, 'Moses Mendelssohn und die Kreise seiner Wirksamkeit', in *Wolfenbütteler Studien,* Band 19 (Tübingen: Max Niemayer, 1994).

universe brought with it the fatalism of Spinoza in train. The posthumous intervention of Spinoza had caused this disturbance. Criticism, itself a product of the Enlightenment, intervened second, raising the doubt whether Spalding's vision might not after all be but a subjective projection of reason with no foundation in reality. This doubt could have saved Spalding's *Mensch* from the fatalism of Spinoza, but only at the price of undermining the conceptual framework within which the question itself of a 'who' and a 'why' could be objectively raised – in effect replacing one form of what Jacobi had called *nihilism* with another. In other words, whether at the hand of rational dogma or rational criticism, the *Aufklärung*'s quest for personal identity and meaning was being frustrated.

Therefore we see Fichte's protagonist fall into deep despair, the very antithesis of Enlightenment optimism, twice in the book – at the end of the first part, where he fears that his feeling of being free is only a delusion,[40] and then again at the end of the second part, where his fear is that the very 'I' to whom he attributes that feeling is itself a delusion.[41] But redemption is fortunately at hand. It comes in a hint dropped with the parting words of an ethereal figure who has been in dialogue with him in the second part of the book.[42] This figure, vaguely reminiscent of Descartes' evil spirit, has personified in the book the voice of criticism, and he now reminds Fichte's protagonist that his quest so far was for knowledge, and that what he (the spirit) had simply guided him to where this quest would finally lead him. Indeed, Fichte's protagonist, not unlike the Enlightenment *Mensch* of Spalding, had sought knowledge of reality in an effort to justify the belief, which inescapably accompanied all his actions, that there was a meaningful place within it for both him and his actions. In other words, he had sought *knowledge* in order to validate *belief*, thinking that the former would validate the latter. The suggestion now is that this order is wrong, and that it is the cause of the despair into which Fichte's protagonist has fallen.[43] Existentially, it is *belief* – or the immediate

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[40]English tr., pp.30-34.

[41]*Ibid*. p. 79.

[42]It appears at the very beginning of Book II.

[43]'You wanted to *know*, and you took a wrong road. You looked for knowledge

feeling of being an effective agent – that motivates the quest for *knowledge* and validation in the first instance. The suggestion, in other words, is that, rather than validating belief in 'who' we are, and 'why', in terms of 'what is', we should instead take this belief as the norm of what counts as effectively *being there*. It is not 'what is', but 'what ought to be', which is the measure of reality. Should it happen that 'what is the case' does not measure up to 'what ought to be', it is then incumbent on the one who acts to reshape the former in order make it conform to the latter. The ultimate norm that defines the 'ought' in question is precisely that the purely existential requirement 'that there be action' is both respected and promoted. To create a world where one can be a free agent is indeed the vocation of the human being, the answer to the question of 'who' and 'why' we are.

This is the suggestion that Fichte's protagonist follows in the third part of the book and, behold, all that he thought he possessed in the first and second part, but which had then been lost, the ordered universe of the first and the subjectivity of the second – all this is now given back to him, a hundredfold, as it were, because now invested with a new meaning. It is not just that all things, the putative subject of experience included, turn out to be mere appearances. They *must be interpreted* as mere appearances precisely in order that they can be re-made – intentionally first, and physically eventually – into the manifestation of a transcendent freedom at work in the universe. Or again, it is not that this universe simply happens to be mechanically organized. It must be so organized, because the self-given lawfulness that freedom generates requires that it be so. The third part of the book is thus like a manifesto of *homo faber*, a visionary account of an earth, the product of human work, where there shall be no more diseases, no more putrid swamps, but where 'the wolf also shall dwell with the lamb' (Isaiah, 11:6).[44] Of course

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where no knowledge can reach, and you even persuaded yourself that you had obtained an insight into something which is opposed to the very nature of your insight. I found you in this condition. I wished to free you from your false knowledge; but by no means to bring you the true'. English tr., p.81.

[44]Cf.: 'There is but one world possible – a thoroughly good world. All that happens in this world is subservient to the improvement and culture of man and, by means of this, to the promotion of the purpose of this earthly existence. It is this higher Worldplan which we call Nature when we say: Nature leads men through want to industry; through the evils of general disorder to a just constitution; through the miseries

this is only an ideal which, *ex hypothesi*, will never be realized in real time. For, however expansive and detailed the work achieved at any time, it never exhausts all that 'might be the case': it is, in other words, a *determinate* and, therefore, only *limited* manifestation of freedom, never the thing itself. Nonetheless, a system of ends is thereby introduced within the domain of human actions – one, however, which is not physically pre-appointed but is generated instead by the requirements of action itself. It is the kind of system that Goethe's *Mensch* would have to set up for himself, in defiance of the gods and in full responsibility for his Fate.

There was nothing that Fichte said in popular style in 1800 that he had not already said in more technical language in the various shapes of his *Wissenschaftslehre*, his new Science of Knowledge, that he had presented up to that point and had brought upon h im the suspicion of atheism.[45] Fichte had begun his system by interpreting the otherwise undefined feeling of self-awareness that accompanies all experience and which Kant had straightaway conceptualized as a reflective 'I', as the intimation of an action which is intended as pure act of freedom – a thought thinking itself simply for the sake of thinking itself – but results instead in the thought of something determined, namely on objective 'other'. The presence of the latter in experience is at once an *unintended result* that in fact frustrates the original attempt at infinite freedom, *and a necessary result*. For without the determination that it brings to the intended freedom, neither would the latter acquire a name (that of a subjective 'I') nor would this 'I' be conscious of itself. Accordingly, Fichte proceeds to interpret the whole of experience as an attempt on the part of this 'I' to transform the 'other', which it otherwise *feels* as an obstacle to its intended freedom, into an

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of continual wars to endless peace of earth'. English tr., pp. 142-143.

[45]Fichte gave several versions of this Science, starting from 1794/5, some of them never published in his lifetime. The most accessible texts are two early 'Introductions', the first intended for the general philosophical public, and the second for his critics. *[Erste] Einleitung in der Wissenschaftslehre* (1797). GA I.4.186-208. *Zweite Einleitung in der Wissenschaftslehre* (1797). GA I.4.209-268. English tr., Daniel Breazeale, in *J. G. Fichte, Introduction to the Wissenschaftslehre and Other Writings* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1994), pp. 7-35, pp. 36-105.

objective presence of itself – to manifest 'nature', in other words, as *in fact* a work of freedom. The *Wissenschaftslehre* did this work of transformation intellectually. The 1800 book was to make explicit its pragmatic consequences in the form of a manifesto for moral and social action. Fichte could have believed indeed that he had thereby achieved the 'in-between system' that Jacobi had declared impossible – a system where 'efficacy' stood on the one side in the form of a freedom understood as *causa sui* and 'nature' stood on the other, subjectively invested with determinate purposes, all intended to demonstrate the effectiveness of the other side. And the connection between the two lay precisely in the need on the part of freedom to let itself go – to loose itself into the finitude of nature, so to speak – in order to realize itself *consciously*.

All this was well and good. But there was a problem, and already a sign of it was the fact that Fichte's system ultimately held together on the strength of a metaphor – that of a fall of freedom into the finitude of nature. But there also was Schelling's system of 1800 to make it all the more pressing.

6. It is to Fichte's credit that he both saw and confronted the problem. He openly recognized that it takes an act of faith, indeed a deliberate choice, to place the origin of experience in an act of freedom, and, accordingly, to interpret the whole of experience as a protracted moral commitment.[46] As Fichte openly acknowledged, one may just as well take it as an event of nature. For since that origin is *ex hypothesi* pre-conscious, it is resistant to reflective comprehension and univocal reflective determination. Fichte made the apprehension of this origin the object of an intuition, but, as he also acknowledged, even the fact that we have such an intuition must itself be accepted on faith.[47] For intuition escapes

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[46] *[First] Introduction*, §§ 4-5. English tr., pp. 12-20.

[47] 'We have here presupposed the fact of this intellectual intuition so that we could then proceed to explain its possibility [. . .]. It is, however, an entirely different undertaking to confirm, on the basis of something even higher, the *belief* in the reality of this intellectual intuition'. As Fichte goes on to say, the 'something even higher' is the 'ethical law within us'. Second *Introduction*, § 5; English tr., p. 49. See also earlier in the

conceptualization. It is at best a feeling and, therefore, its dominance at the opening of the *Wissenschaftslehre* injected into the latter a moment of irrationality that could only be contained (though never dissolved) through extra-logical means. It was a matter of temperament – of personal interest in freedom, as Fichte declared[48] – that gave to the system its convincing force. But there were others of different temperament for whom the system's moralism was singularly distasteful. Such, for instance, were the early Romantics, notably Schiller, Hölderlin, Novalis, and the Schlegel brothers – and Schelling was there to meet their special interests.

Despite overlap of language, Schelling's *System of Transcendental Philosophy* of 1800[49] – the other book earlier alluded to – was radically different both in spirit and construction from anything that Fichte had attempted in his Science. The difference was clearly visible at three levels. First, at the very beginning. Schelling assumes an original perfect equipoise of subject and object in the immediate self-awareness that precedes (as he also assumes) reflective consciousness.[50]

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paragraph; English tr. p.47. The intuition must be comprehended in concepts.

[48]*Ibid.*, § 5; English tr. pp. 18-20.

[49]*System des transcendentalen Idealismus*. In *Friedrich Wilhelm Josef Schelling: Werke*, Vol. 9.1, eds. Harald Korten & Paul Ziche (Stuttgart: Fromann-Holzboog, 2005). English tr. Peter Heath, *System of Transcendental Idealism* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1978).

[50]Cf. §§ 2-5; English tr., pp. 49-50.

The net result is that the 'other' which is the object of consciousness is not straightaway construed, as it is in Fichte's *Wissenschaftslehre*, as a fall from an act that would have been, if it had just been possible, an expression of pure subjectivity. The second difference is in the unfolding of the System itself. As the assumed original equipoise is disturbed, two series of ever more complex configurations of existence are made to arise according as the one or the other of its sides predominate: one series is of natural configurations, the other of conscious ones. In Schelling's System these two series are continuous and – even more significant – the series of conscious configurations simply repeats the natural configuration in conscious mode, i.e. ever more reflectively and deliberately (at a higher power, to use Schelling's own language). Natural existence is thus granted an independent status as the pre-history of spiritual existence.[51] This is the third difference. Of course, with the emergence of reflection there occurs a *falling apart* of nature and spirit that gives rise, on the part of spirit, to a sense of loss of innocence and also a longing to recover a once natural past. But this 'falling apart' is not to be interpreted as a fall of nature from spirit or, for that matter, of spirit into nature – as it is for Fichte. To use a later image of Hegel, it is rather an '*upward* fall' of spirit from nature – a 'rise' above the latter that brings unique evils with it and also the need to

[51]The first series had already been developed by Schelling in previous works, notably in *Ideen zu einer Philosophie der Natur* (1797), *Werke*, Vol. 5, ed. Manfred Durner with the assistance of Walter Schieche (Stuttgart: Fromann-Holzboog, 1994). The *System of Transcendental Idealism* documents a second series of configurations that reflectively retrieve and consciously repeat the natural ones – at first as forms of subjective experiences and eventually in the reflectively more complex forms of social existence. The *System* is itself the highest expression of this reflective retrieval of otherwise unconscious configurations – the point at which the emergence of consciousness from its pre-conscious past becomes itself an object of reflective reconstruction. To borrow an expression of Hegel dating from the first years of his stay in Jena, when he still was a Schelling's follower, it is at this point that the 'the absolute substance first gives a sketch of itself in the idea' ('das absolute Wesen in der Idee sein Bild gleichsam entwirft'). Exactly how this is possible, or what it might possibly mean, is of course a problem of all Romantic Idealism of Schelling's type. For Hegel's fragmentary text, see *Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel: Gesammelte Werke*, Vol. 5, *Schriften und Entwürfe (1799-1808)*, eds. T. Ebert, M. Baum, K. R. Meist (Hamburg: Meiner, 1998), pp. 262-268, specifically p. 262, line 7. For an English translation of Schelling's *Ideen*, see *Ideas for a Philosophy of Nature as Introduction to the Study of This Science* (1707, 1803), trs. Errol E. Harris & Peter Heath (Cambridge: University Press, 1988).

recover the original immediate unity with nature. The problem is that immediacy cannot be retrieved reflectively. Here is where Schelling, like Fichte, turns to intellectual intuition. Is there a way of retrieving this union with nature consciously, yet in a medium which is non-reflective – at once expressive (like the concept) yet blindly spontaneous (like nature)? Now there is, according to Schelling, a type of human individual who manages precisely this feat. This is the Genius, the artist whose works are the product at once of blind nature and conscious *Besinnung*. It is in his intuition, and in his artistic witness to it, that the original unity of self and nature is both retrieved and expressed in works of beauty.[52]

Schelling's Genius was clearly a philosophical reprise of the young Goethe's *Mensch* and the Spinozistic inspiration motivating this æsthetic vision of humanity was just as obvious. One need only replace Schelling's two series of constructs with Spinoza's *res cogitans* and *res extensa* to see the Spinozistic template that Schelling was retracing in his System. The difference is that Schelling was post-Kantian, and that he therefore took his starting point, not dogmatically from the concept of substance, but from the problem of a finite mind aware of, yet incapable of expressing, the unity underlying all experiences. Of course, this type of *ascensus intellectus ad Deum* that the System provided could itself be taken as a form of Spinozistic mental discipline, a kind of *medicina mentis*. But this is all the more reason to believe that Schelling's Romanticism was indeed a kind of Spinozism – an aesthetic version of Spinoza's monism that better accorded with the temperament of the time. But was Fichte's any different? Of course, Fichte could not accept Schelling's System because he rightly thought that it was a kind of naturalism. Indeed, he had made the choice of rejecting this possible interpretation of the presence of the 'other' in experience the condition for entering into his own Science. But the fact is that the choice *had* to be made because he, just like Schelling, had made the validity of his Science – which like Schelling's was the product of reflective reason – dependent on

[52]Cf. *System of Transcendental Idealism*, especially pp. 312-316, especially p. 316; English tr. p. 222; but the whole Part Six, §§ 1-2 is relevant.

an intuition that escaped logical means of comprehension; because, like Schelling, he had made essential determination secondary to existence; like him, therefore, he found himself caught up in that indeterminate zone between Spinoza's *causa sui* and the presence of infinitely finite modes that could only be traversed through extra-logical commitments. His commitment happened to be different from Schelling's; his way of providing a face for the *causa sui* accordingly different. But none of this detracted from the fact that, whether Fichte wanted it or not, his *Wissenschaftslehre* was itself the attempt of a mind, itself a finite mode, to find its way back to the source of its existence.

Jacobi saw the Spinozism of both Fichte and Schelling and had occasion stridently to condemn both.[53] What he apparently did not see was the embarrassing position in which he had landed himself. He had been the one who had insisted on the primacy of existence over essence, of intuition over conceptual determination. The problem was that, to the extent that one granted that primacy, one also forced conceptualization into the very formalism that he had decried in classical metaphysics. One forced it to an endless play of thought determinations which could only intend, but never achieve, the individuality of experience of which Jacobi had declared himself to be the champion. Of course, when Jacobi spoke of existence, he had primarily in mind the religious experience of a subject who stands alone before his God, an 'exception' before God that transcends any universal order of being. Philosophical reflection matters little, if at all, to this experience. But Jacobi had raised the issue of existence philosophically, and he could not now blame those such as Fichte, or the early Romantics, for having wanted to also resolve it conceptually. In the process, they had demonstrated that an element of irrationality, and the need to contain it through extra-logical means, necessarily arises within experience precisely in the effort at constituting an 'I' reflectively out of what would otherwise simply be blind efficacy. They had also given an object lesson that it is possible to contain that irrationality by means that were other

[53]He had attacked Fichte in his open letter to him of 1799 (see Note 27 above) and had occasion to attack Schelling a decade later, when both were members of the Royal Academy in Munich. This was the third of the three public disputes in which Jacobi was involved in his lifetime. His position was stridently declared in *Von den Göttlichen Dingen und ihrer Offenbarung* (Leipzig, 1811), (*Of Divine Things and Their Revelation*), a work that also contained a criticism of Kant. It is at this time, in the outcry that ensues, that Goethe definitely broke up with Jacobi.

than Jacobi's religiosity. As of 1799, in his reaction to Fichte and to the charges of atheism that were being brought against him, Jacobi chose to fall back upon religious rhetoric, limiting himself simply to attacking the play of empty conceptual determinations that he now declared all science – but Fichte's in particular – to be. He was soon to have occasion to level the same charge against Schelling. But, I repeat, Jacobi had originally raised the issue of existence philosophically, expecting philosophers to deal with it to his satisfaction. As of 1800, the issue still remained unsolved.

7. Much was to happen after this date. Jacobi re-stated his position regarding reason. He now opposed to it another faculty which he called (following Kant) the 'understanding', and reserved for the latter the work of comprehending reality which is typical of the sciences of nature. As for reason itself, he now identified it with a type of 'feeling' which, he now claimed, provides immediate access to such eternal moral/religious values as motivate specifically human action.[54] Together with the already mentioned J. F. Fries and F. Schleiermacher, he was thus to initiate the tradition of moral/religious positivism, the counterpart of the scientific positivism based on the understanding, that had its history in the new century. But the earlier Jacobi, the champion of the 'exception', still had his influence. He was to find an artistically much more articulate and powerful voice in that of Kierkegaard. As for Fichte, in Berlin he presented new versions of the *Wissenschaftslehre* in a more religious mode, but only orally. We know that the young Schopenhauer attended his lectures. One can easily recognize, in his *World as Will and Representation*, the same interplay of transcendent freedom and mechanistic manifestation of it in particularized experience that we find in the *Wissenschaftslehre*.[55] The essential difference is that Fichte's dissembling religious

[54]This development was documented in the Preface to the 1815 second edition of the dialogue *David Hume* which was to serve also as Preface to the author's *Collected Works. Main Philosophical Writings*, pp. 536ff. See especially pp. 539-545, and also the use of the term 'feeling' in pp. 556ff.

[55]For the Fichte /Schopenhauer connection, see Günther Zöller, 'Kichtenhauer. Der Ursprung von Schopenhauers Welt als Wille und Vorstellung in Fichtes *Wissenschaftslehre* 1812 und *System der Sittenlehre*', in *Die Ethik Arthur Schopenhauers im Ausgang vom Deutschen Idealismus (Fichte/Schelling)*, eds. Lore Hühn & Philipp Schwab (Würzburg: Ergon, 2006), 365-386; revised English translation

language now gives place, at it should, to open myth-making. And in the wake of Schopenhauer, there was to be Nietzsche. Schelling, for his part, continued to pursue his Romantic agenda but, like Fichte, in a different and more religious mode. In late life he switched from the earlier reflective reconstructions of experience to a more positive examination of it, delving into the history of myths in order to find evidence there of the presence of the Absolute.

Hegel, the other great figure within the Idealistic movement, was the one who clearly recognized the problems that positing the primacy of intuition over conceptualization posed for any theory of experience. He deliberately broke with both Fichte and Schelling on this score. For one thing, he did away with the infinite and atemporal distance that in both Fichte's and Schelling's Systems *ex hypothesi* separates the assumed original act of sheer efficiency and the presumed first conscious representation of it. He replaced it with a historical process through which reason gradually emerges out of an only inchoately intelligent natural existence in order to take explicit possession of itself. This process does not culminate in any immediate intuition of the Absolute – be this intuition either moral or æsthetic – but, on the contrary, in a totally discursive Idea which is absolute only in the sense that through it reason fully comprehends, though reflectively and therefore necessarily abstractly, the structure of the universe of meaning which it has itself generated and which constitutes the matrix of all experience. Hegel also re-stated the problem of individuality in social terms, as the problem of creating the kind of society that allows an individual truly to come into his own precisely as an irreducible individual. On both counts, his was an interesting conceptual project. But Hegel died young, and the force of his legacy was quickly dispersed into the various attempts at pressing this project either in the service of naturalism in the shape of anthropology or in the service of orthodox Protestant theology. How much of a direct influence Hegel actually had on the nineteenth century is open to question. But it is significant to note that the very old Jacobi, despite his earlier contempt for Hegel, eventually had occasion to express appreciation, even sympathy, for his

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in 'Schopenhauer's Fairy Tale About Fichte. The Origin of *The World As Will and Representation* in German Idealist Thought', forthcoming in the Blackwell Companion to Schopenhauer, ed. Bart Vandenabeele (Oxford: Blackwell).

project.[56]

Many, in other words, were the ways in which the intellectual situation in Germany as of 1800, as reflected by Fichte and Schelling, was to work itself out in the century to come. But presiding over all of them, though perhaps unbeknown to most, there still stood the figure of Spinoza, the father of the Radical Enlightenment.

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Montreal, 19 October 2008

[56]Cf. Letter to Johann Neeb, 30 May 1817, # 360, in *Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi's auserlesener Briefwechsel*, ed. Friedrich Roth, Vol. 2 (Leipzig, 1825-27), p. 467-468, especially p. 468.