

The Pantheism Controversy in the 1780s

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C10P1 The ‘Pantheism Controversy’ broke out with the publication of a volume of *Letters on the Doctrine of Spinoza* (1st ed., 1785; 2nd ed., 1789) in which Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi (1743–1819), the editor and author of some of the letters, famously claimed that Gotthold Ephraim Lessing (1729–1781), the figurehead of the German *Enlightenment*, had confessed to him, shortly before he died, that he had been a ‘Spinozist’¹: Lessing would have identified God with the Spinozan ‘substance’, thereby rejecting the very idea of a personal God and adopting the notion of *hen kai pan*, ‘One and All’, in other terms a form of ‘pantheism’, as a watchword.² The thesis would be confirmed by Lessing’s last works, more particularly *The Education of Mankind* (1780), whose §73 offers a ‘speculative’ deduction of the Trinity dogma which could be read as an affirmation of God’s immanence to the world, of the Infinite to the finite.³

C10P2 Jacobi had argued that ‘Spinozism’ and, with it, any consistent philosophy inevitably lead to determinism and even to ‘fatalism’. Since morality and religion depend upon human freedom, Spinozism cannot serve as their foundation: one must choose between philosophy and religion, reason and faith—be ready, in other terms, to perform a *salto mortale*: a jump into non-philosophy, i.e., faith. He had put himself under the authority of famous authors amongst his contemporaries: the two Weimar classics Johann Gottfried Herder (1744–1803) and Johann Wolfgang Goethe (1749–1832) in the first place, also the Zwinglian theologian Johann Kaspar Lavater (1741–1801), and the so-called ‘Magus of the North’ Johann Georg Hamann (1730–1788), but it was one of the mainstays of the Berlin *Aufklärung*, the Jewish philosopher Moses Mendelssohn (1729–1786), whom he targeted. His provocative claims left none of his contemporary philosophers and theologians indifferent. Kant himself was dragged into the dispute, as is shown by

¹ F. H. Jacobi, *Werke*, ed. K. Hammacher und I.-M. Piske (Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt: Frommann-Holzboog, 1998), 1.1, 8; Jacobi, *The Main Philosophical Writings and the Novel Allwill*, ed. and trans. G. di Giovanni (Montréal & Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2009), 181.

² Jacobi, *Werke* 1.1, 6; Jacobi, *Writings*, 187.

³ Jacobi, *Werke* 8, 489–510, pp. 505f.; G. E. Lessing, *Philosophical and Theological Writings*, trans. and ed. H. B. Nisbet (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 217–40, pp. 234f.

his 1786 essay entitled ‘What does it mean to orient oneself in thinking?’⁴ However, one of the most remarkable yet unexpected effects of Jacobi’s publication was to ignite in Germany a boundless enthusiasm for Spinoza and his system of philosophy.

C9S1

1. Birth of a New Cult

C10P3 The reaction to the publication of the *Theological-Political Treatise* in 1670 had been nearly unanimous in its virulent hostility, and yet a strong undercurrent of interest had continued to develop for Spinoza’s writings.⁵ They remained relatively difficult to access, particularly in German, at the turn of the eighteenth century: the *Theological-Political Treatise*, which had appeared in several editions, first in Latin and then in French, often without indication of the author, and in German with a fictional title in 1787, was readily available and better known than the *Ethics*, which could be found in Latin in the original edition of the *Opera posthuma*. The *TTP* also existed in German, but the translation (compiled by Johann Lorenz Schmidt and published in 1744) had been disguised in the form of a refutation of the text by Christian Wolff. This is a telling example of the paradox which characterizes the Spinoza reception at that time. Spinoza’s works have first been known through the criticisms levelled against them, the most famous ones being those conveyed by Bayle’s article in his *Dictionnaire historique et critique* (1697); and, on the philosophical plane, by Leibniz and Wolff.

C10P4 The negative image of Spinoza and Spinozism had begun to change already before Jacobi decided to publish the *Letters*: Spinoza slowly became an author to read and to be taken seriously, if only in order to put him to a test. The change is attested by Mendelssohn’s ‘Philosophical Dialogues’ (1755), a work which results from many discussions Mendelssohn had with Lessing on Spinoza,⁶ and by texts composed by Lessing himself in 1763, among them ‘On the reality of things outside God’, and ‘Spinoza only put Leibniz on the track of [his theory of] pre-established harmony.’⁷ Since these texts had been left unpublished, Lessing’s affinities for Spinoza remained unknown to the wider public until Jacobi disclosed them in 1785, right at the outset of his *Letters on the Doctrine of Spinoza*.

⁴ Immanuel Kant, *Gesammelte Schriften* (hereafter AA), ed. Königl. Preuss. Akad. der Wissenschaften zu Berlin (1902ff), 8, 133–47; Kant, *Religion and Rational Theology*, ed. and trans. Allen W. Wood and George di Giovanni (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 1–18.

⁵ On the developments described in the following lines see David Bell, *Spinoza in Germany from 1670 to the Age of Goethe* (London: Institute of Germanic Studies, 1984); also Jonathan Israel, *Radical Enlightenment: Philosophy and the Making of Modernity 1650–1750* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 628–63.

⁶ Cf. Alexander Altmann, *Moses Mendelssohn: A Biographical Study* (Philadelphia: University of Alabama Press, 1973), 37.

⁷ Lessing, *Werke* 8, 515–18; Lessing, *Philosophical and Theological Writings*, 30–4.

Together with his account of Lessing's Spinozism, Jacobi also published many letters and documents he had been exchanging privately over a number of years with famous authors of the time and in the first place with Moses Mendelssohn. He had not asked for the consent of any of them before publishing that material, and his publication had the effect of a bomb: Goethe, whose as yet unpublished poem 'Prometheus' had also been included in the volume without his authorization, said later on that the publication of his poem 'served as the tinder for an explosion.'⁸

C10P5 One of the reasons Jacobi rushed his publication into print may have been that he himself had become afraid of being accused of Spinozism, and by none other than Moses Mendelssohn.⁹ Having heard that Mendelssohn was about to publish his long-awaited vindication of Lessing's character and writings, he said that he

C10P6 could not leave it up to him [Mendelssohn] alone, quite one-sidedly, to 'inaugurate the controversy'...and to permit the definition of a *status controversiae* in which the role of *advocatum diaboli* somehow fell to me [i.e., Jacobi], if the full occasion of the controversy that was to be inaugurated was not being made known at the same time. It was of the highest importance to me [Jacobi] that the spirit in which I had taken up the cause of Spinoza should be accurately perceived.¹⁰

C10P7 It cannot be said that he succeeded in fulfilling that task: his eloquence on Spinoza was so great that many puzzled even more over his own stance on Spinoza: did he want to actually condemn him, or to exalt him, in his life as well as his philosophy? It was, to be sure, in Lessing's mouth that he had put the famous thesis according to which 'There is no other philosophy than the philosophy of Spinoza.'¹¹ But he declared himself in full agreement with it. Furthermore, a significant part of his publication consists in a detailed presentation, with long textual quotations, of the main principles of Spinozism.¹² He then insisted that Leibniz himself had not been able to convince him of other ideas than those of Spinoza: 'Fundamentally they have the same teaching on freedom too, and it's only an illusion that distinguishes their theories.'¹³ Instead of upgrading Spinoza to the level of Leibniz—in other terms, 'purifying' Spinozism in order to show that it could easily be associated with religion and ethics, as was done by Mendelssohn in his *Morning Hours* (1785), published just one month after his

⁸ Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Werke*. Hamburger Ausgabe, 14 vols (München: Beck, 1996), 10, 49.

⁹ For a helpful reconstitution of the following developments, see F. C. Beiser, *The Fate of Reason: German Philosophy from Kant to Fichte* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1987).

¹⁰ Jacobi, *Werke* 1.1, 128; Jacobi, *Writings*, 235f.

¹¹ Jacobi, *Werke* 1.1, 18; Jacobi, *Writings*, 187.

¹² Jacobi, *Werke* 1.1, 55–85, 93–112; Jacobi, *Writings*, 204–15, 217–28.

¹³ Jacobi, *Werke* 1.1, 25; Jacobi, *Writings*, 191.

own volume¹⁴—he brought Leibniz back to Spinoza. He lavished compliment after compliment upon that ‘great man, [that] clear and pure mind’¹⁵ who may sometimes have erred, but ‘possessed a most correct sense, a most exquisite judgment, and an accuracy, a strength, and a depth of understanding that are not easy to surpass.’¹⁶ It is little wonder that many of his readers mistook him as adopting Spinozism, rather than noting his recommended leap beyond philosophy into religious faith. Mendelssohn, to whom Jacobi had sent his text as early as November 4, 1783, two years before publishing it, even asked for his permission to avail himself of his ‘lively exposition, and have him speak for Spinoza.’¹⁷ And Herder, to whom Jacobi had also sent a copy of his explosive missive, leisurely answered, almost three months after he had received it—on February 6, 1784—that he had been happy to discover in Lessing a comrade-in-faith. He explained to Jacobi in a rather patronizing tone that he already knew Spinoza’s ideas and that he had his own publication projects related to that author. He also encouraged Jacobi to publish Lessing’s theses *as they were*, without any criticism and counter-arguments.¹⁸

C10P8 Herder’s interest in Spinoza predated Jacobi’s. He had already begun during the years 1771–1776 to study Spinoza’s *Ethics*, Parts II and IV, but it was only in those years that he seems to have immersed himself in the study of Spinoza’s metaphysics in Part One¹⁹; and then he also induced Goethe to follow a similar path.²⁰ Herder and Jacobi, both of whom had been under Hamann’s tutelage many years prior, continued a heated discussion of Spinoza. Jacobi even came to Weimar in September 1784, where Goethe attentively followed their discussion. Herder wanted Jacobi to clarify his relationship to Spinozism. Even after that so-called ‘Weimarer Spinoza-Konferenz’,²¹ Herder accused Jacobi of failing to make clear to what extent, if at all, he subscribed to it. His letter to Jacobi asked bluntly which side he was fighting for.²² Goethe shared Herder’s complaints. He observed that ‘The good Fritz [i.e., Jacobi] is more successful in illustrating other people’s

¹⁴ Moses Mendelssohn, *Last Works*, trans. Bruce Rosenstock (Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2012), III, 2.

¹⁵ Jacobi, *Werke* 1.1, 27; Jacobi, *Writings*, 193.

¹⁶ Jacobi, *Werke* 1.1, 56f.; Jacobi, *Writings*, 204.

¹⁷ Jacobi, *Werke* 1.1, 90; Jacobi, *Writings*, 216.

¹⁸ J. G. Herder, *Briefe. Gesamtausgabe*, 12 vols, ed. W. Dobbek and G. Arnold. Nat. Forschungs- und Gedenkstätten der klassischen deutschen Literatur (Weimar: Böhlau, 1977), vol. 5, 27–9.

¹⁹ Herder at that time seems also to have studied with much attention the *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*. Cf. Herder, *Sämmtliche Werke*, vol. 14, ed. B. Suphan (Berlin: Weidmann, 1877–1913), 669, note 3; and Bell, *Spinoza in Germany*, 147–70.

²⁰ On Goethe and Spinoza, cf. Suphan, *Goethe und Spinoza*; Martin Bollacher, *Der junge Goethe und Spinoza. Studie zur Geschichte des Spinozismus in der Epoche von Sturm und Drang* (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1969); and Bell, *Spinoza in Germany*, 147–70.

²¹ A reconstruction of that ‘conference’ is offered by Hermann Timm, *Gott und die Freiheit. Studien zur Religionsphilosophie der Goethezeit*, vol. 1: *Die Spinozarennaissance* (Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 1974), 307–20.

²² Herder, *Briefe* 5, letter dated 6 June 1785, 125–9.

opinions rather than his own²³: those ‘other people’s opinions’ had been Spinoza’s ideas in the first place, of course, but also Herder’s—and naturally his own. He did a great deal to eventually influence Jacobi’s account of Spinoza, which Jacobi readily acknowledged.²⁴ It must have been Goethe who fulfilled the crucial role in transforming Spinoza, the ‘Jew excluded from the Synagogue’ (*Judaeus aposynagogos*) of earlier Christian philosophers and theologians, into the ‘godliest, yes most Christian philosopher’ (*theissimus et christianissimus*).²⁵

C10P9 Goethe’s stunning praise was echoed by many of the German Romantics, amongst them Friedrich Schlegel, who wrote in his *Athenaeum*: ‘It’s only prejudice and presumption that maintains there is only a single mediator between God and man. For the perfect Christian—who in this respect Spinoza probably resembles most—everything would really have to be a mediator.’²⁶ In his *Speeches on Religion* (1799), Friedrich Schleiermacher proclaimed: ‘Offer with me reverently a tribute to the manes of the holy, rejected Spinoza. The high World-Spirit pervaded him; the Infinite was his beginning and his end... He was full of religion, full of the Holy Spirit...’²⁷ And almost half a century after the first publication of the *Letters on the Doctrine of Spinoza* the old Schelling, who had lauded Spinoza from the start, praised Jacobi for having been ‘the involuntary prophet of a better era, involuntary because this time which in his opinion could never come was one which he did not wish to prophesy, but as a prophet because he prophesied it against his will, like the second Adam, who came to curse Israel and had to bless it.’²⁸

C10P10 Anti-Jewish prejudices certainly played a role in that amazing metamorphosis of Spinoza into a Christian saint. However, it would be inaccurate to consider them as one of the main triggers of the controversy. In his 1785 publication Jacobi

²³ Goethe to Herder, letter probably written in mid-December 1783; cf. Suphan, *Goethe und Spinoza*, 166f., n. 18.

²⁴ Reacting to Mendelssohn’s judgement, according to which his work would consist in ‘an unusual mixture, an almost monstrous birth, with the head of Goethe, the body of Spinoza and the feet of Lavater’ (cf. Mendelssohn’s letter to Kant dated 16 October 1785 in Kant, AA 10, 414; Kant, *The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Immanuel Kant* (hereafter CEW), ed. Paul Guyer, and Allen W. Wood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 231), Jacobi wrote to Hamann that he considered that as ‘the highest praise.’ For what more flattering thing could be said of an author than that he thinks with a head like Spinoza’s, breathes as if from Herder’s chest, and moves as if with Goethe’s feet?’ (Jacobi, *Aus F. H. Jacobi’s Nachlaß: Ungedruckte Briefe von und an Jacobi und Andere. Nebst ungedruckten Gedichten von Göthe & Lenz*, vol. 1, ed. Rudolf Zöppritz, (Leipzig: Engelmann, 1869), 71.

²⁵ Cf. Goethe’s letter to Jacobi dated 9 June 1785 in *Briefe. Hamburger Ausgabe* (Hamburg: Wegner, 1968), I, 475 and 748f.

²⁶ A. W. and K. W. F. Schlegel, *Athenaeum. Eine Zeitschrift* (1798–1800; Nachdruck Darmstadt: WBG, 1992), I, 239; Friedrich Schlegel, *Philosophical Fragments*, trans. P. Firchow (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), 50.

²⁷ F. D. E. Schleiermacher, *Über die Religion. Reden an die Gebildeten unter ihren Verächtern* (1799) (Hamburg: Meiner, 1958), 54f.; ET: Schleiermacher, *On Religion: Speeches to Its Cultured Despisers*, trans. and ed. Richard Crouter (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 40.

²⁸ F. W. J. Schelling, *Ausgewählte Schriften*, vol. 4, ed. M. Frank (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1985), 598; Schelling, *On the History of Modern Philosophy*, trans. Andrew Bowie (Cambridge, University Press, 1994), 177.

had not just evoked the Pietist theologian Charles Bonnet in support of his theses,²⁹ he had also concluded his text with strong words from the ‘pious and angelically pure lips’ of ‘the honest Lavater’.³⁰ Consequently, Moses Mendelssohn suspected him, understandably enough, of wanting to reinstate the nefarious efforts of the Zwinglian theologian who had infamously challenged him, some 15 years earlier on (in 1769), to refute the arguments of the Pietist theologian, Charles Bonnet, or convert to Christianity.³¹ It must also be kept in mind that ever since the beginning of the 1780s Mendelssohn had been devoting most of his energy to the practical, political question of how to promote the civil rights of Jews in Prussia and elsewhere. His masterpiece *Jerusalem*, which is a plea for ensuring a ‘true tolerance’, one which would make it possible for Jews to remain Jews because it would not aim at a ‘union of faiths’ but only ‘pay heed to the [right] conduct of men’,³² had come out in 1783, not long before Jacobi’s publication, and it had not been received favourably. There were a few notable exceptions, amongst them Kant’s,³³ but Jacobi himself had reacted negatively, just like Hamann, Goethe and even Herder.³⁴

C10P11 In the controversy one should not underestimate the personal. Mendelssohn’s career had been boosted by Lessing, whose work he published. Mendelssohn even served as the model for ‘Nathan’ in *Nathan der Weise*, Lessing’s piece on behalf of religious tolerance. Like his teacher, Hamann, Jacobi harboured serious doubts about a happy marriage between biblical religion, of the Jewish or Christian variety, and the Enlightenment. If making this argument meant casting Lessing as a Spinozist and tarnishing Mendelssohn’s reputation, Jacobi saw it as a minor cost. He had sought not to attack the Enlightenment as such, nor even Spinoza himself, with his publication. There is no reason not to believe his latter, 1815 assertion that he had not been waging war on Spinoza himself, but rather against the ‘utterly inconsistent fatalism’ of those who ‘mix up necessity and freedom, providence and fatum, together into one thing’.³⁵ Jacobi did not target Spinoza, who was long dead, but living adversaries, amongst them Moses Mendelssohn and members of the Berlin *Aufklärung*, a trend which had developed during and after the reign of Frederick II and which counted among its members many enlightened Protestant theologians who were searching for a compromise between

²⁹ Jacobi, *Werke* 1.1, 35; Jacobi, *Writings*, 197.

³⁰ Jacobi, *Werke* 1.1, 145f.; Jacobi, *Writings*, 250; see already 1.1, 125; Jacobi, *Writings*, 234.

³¹ Altmann, *Moses Mendelssohn*, ch. 3.

³² Mendelssohn, *Jubiläumsausgabe* 8, 202–4; Mendelssohn, *Jerusalem, or On Religious Power and Judaism*, trans. Allan Arkush (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1983), 138f.

³³ See Kant’s letter to Mendelssohn dated 16 August 1783 (AA 10, 344–7; CEW 1999b, 201–4).

³⁴ For Goethe’s reaction to the *Morgenstunden*, see his letter to Jacobi dated 17 December 1785; for Herder’s reaction see his letter to Hamann dated 2 January 1786. Both are quoted by Altmann in *Moses Mendelssohn: A Biographical Study*, 701f. See also 742f. on Goethe’s reaction to the news of Mendelssohn’s death.

³⁵ Jacobi, *Werke* 2.1, 429; Jacobi, *Writings*, 586f.

reason and revelation. He targeted civil servants and lawyers, amongst them those who had drafted the *Allgemeines Landrecht* promulgated in 1794. Last but not least, he waged war on many influential personalities in the press: Friedrich Nicolai, the editor of the *Allgemeine Deutsche Bibliothek*; also Johann Erich Biester, an editor of the *Berlinische Monatsschrift* in which Kant as well as Mendelssohn often published.³⁶ But the success of Jacobi's publication was so great that it practically obliterated the trend towards Enlightenment. Many judged, already at the time, that Jacobi had 'killed' Mendelssohn, if not personally and literally, in any case figuratively: his publication would mark the twilight, perhaps even the end, of the Enlightenment as such: the claim has survived to the present day.³⁷ This undoubtedly goes too far, if only because one may rightly contest that the philosophy of the Enlightenment is not alive any more, since Jacobi's publication. However, it cannot be doubted that after that publication Mendelssohn, who prior to 1785 had been considered as one of the greatest living German philosophers, began to be perceived mainly as a Jew, who had understood neither Spinoza nor his friend Lessing.³⁸ Furthermore, what seems to have been wholly forgotten is that it was Mendelssohn who had served as a living model for 'Nathan' in Lessing's piece on behalf of religious tolerance, *Nathan der Weise*: it was nothing less than the fight for religious tolerance, that essential impulse of the Enlightenment, in Germany and also in other countries, which thereby collapsed.

C10P12 Since Mendelssohn remained up to the end of his life an adept of the Leibniz-Wolff school philosophy, his star as a philosopher was overshadowed by Kant, in the first place—but also secondly, after 1785, by the Spinoza revival, which developed soon after his death into a real cult, under the motto of 'pantheism'.

C9S2

2. Three Routes of Spinoza's Influence

C10P13 At the time of the publication of the *Letters on the Doctrine of Spinoza*, the notion of 'pantheism' was broadly used as a synonym to 'Spinozism' and derogatorily assimilated to that of 'atheism'; this explains why Jacobi resorted to it in order to

³⁶ That current of thought seems to have been regularly associated to Jews, because of the central role some of them did play in it. U. Goldenbaum quotes eloquent letters which confirm that point. See Goldenbaum, 'The Pantheismusstreit—Milestone or Stumbling Block in the German Reception of Spinoza?', in *Spinoza's Ethics. A Collective Commentary*, Studies in Intellectual History 196, ed. Michael Hampe, Ursula Renz, and Robert Schnepf (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 335f.

³⁷ On Mendelssohn's death and Jacobi's role in generating the events which led to it, see Altmann *Moses Mendelssohn: A Biographical Study*, 744f. Beiser (*Fate of Reason*, 74f.) strongly emphasizes Jacobi's responsibility in the death of Mendelssohn—and of the Enlightenment.

³⁸ See on this Goldenbaum, 'The Pantheismusstreit'. Hegel's evolution is typical on that matter; see M. Bienenstock, 'Hegel über das jüdische Volk: "eine bewunderungswürdige Festigkeit...ein Fanatismus der Hartnäckigkeit"', in *Der Begriff des Judentums in der klassischen deutschen Philosophie*, ed. Jörg Noller and Amit Kravitz (Münster, Mohr Siebeck, 2018), 117–34.

throw the blame upon some of his most famous contemporaries. However, instead of giving it up, many endorsed it, quite often enthusiastically. Although (a) Kant objected, (b) Fichte and his Early Romantic followers developed an iteration of pantheism, disparagingly called by Herder ‘transcendental Spinozism.’³⁹ The ‘aesthetical pantheism’ Herder himself elaborated (c) enjoyed even more success but was severely criticized, in the first place by Kant.

C9S3

2.1 Kant vs. Mendelssohn

C10P14 Mendelssohn undoubtedly believed that the ‘refined’ (*geläuterte*) version of pantheism, which he presented in the *Morning Hours* (1785) as one ‘compatible with religion and ethics,’⁴⁰ was in line with the basic values of the German Enlightenment.⁴¹ Kant disagreed: Mendelssohn’s work seems to have represented for him the ‘final legacy of a dogmatizing metaphysics’ and indeed ‘a masterpiece of the self-deception of our reason.’⁴² However, he only wrote this privately, while delaying a public disavowal of Mendelssohn. One reason for this is that he did not want to distance himself from the camp of the *Aufklärung*, to which he unequivocally belonged. Jacobi tried his best to enrol him on his side of the controversy. He argued that in the final instance they shared the same views: for them, explanation would only be ‘a means... never a final goal,’⁴³ and one could not demonstrate the existence of God. Jacobi’s conclusion was that if he himself was labelled a ‘fanatic’ (*Schwärmer*) intending to promote blind faith just because he had affirmed that one can only *believe* in God, then Kant was also one, because he had been teaching the same thing for years.⁴⁴ Jacobi then quoted passages of the second edition of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, in which Kant had indeed written that the ‘belief’ (*Glauben*) in God and in another world is a ‘rational belief’

³⁹ Cf. the Preface to the 2nd ed. of Herder’s *God: Some Conversations*, ed. Frederick H. Burkhardt (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1962), 69: ‘Some turned things upside down and made bold to spin out the contents of the entire universe from a confined and imaginary ego. This senseless dream was called Transcendental Spinozism and the old Spinoza was derided because he had not gone so far’; also, Herder, *Werke* 4, 679–794 and 1345–407, here 1367. Herder may also have targeted the young Schelling’s essay ‘Of the I as the Principle of Philosophy or on the Unconditional in Human Knowledge’; see Schelling, *Ausgewählte Schriften*, vol. 1, ed. M. Frank (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1985); and Schelling, *The Unconditional in Human Knowledge: Four Early Essays 1794–96*, trans. F. Marti (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 1980), 63–129.

⁴⁰ Mendelssohn, *Jubiläumsausgabe* 3.2, 114–37; Mendelssohn, *Last Works*, trans. Bruce Rosenstock (Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2012), 101–19.

⁴¹ His version of the *Aufklärung* has been aptly dubbed ‘consolatory’ (*trostvoll*). On this expression and its link to Mendelssohn’s ‘purified pantheism’, see Alexander Altmann, *Die trostvolle Aufklärung. Studien zur Metaphysik und politischen Theorie Moses Mendelssohns* (Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt: Frommann-Holzboog, 1982).

⁴² Kant, AA 10, 428f.; Kant, CEW 1999b, 237f.

⁴³ Jacobi, *Werke* 1.1, 29; *Writings*, 194.

⁴⁴ Jacobi, *Werke* 1.1, 320; Jacobi, *The Spinoza Conversations between Lessing and Jacobi: Text with Excerpts from the Ensuing Controversy*, trans. C.G. Chapple (Lanham, NY: University Press of America, 1988), 158.

(*Vernunftglauben*), that is, not a knowledge, but a ‘conviction’ (*Überzeugung*) which depends on subjective grounds and presupposes a moral disposition.⁴⁵

C10P15

Kant’s disconcerting oxymoron ‘rational belief’ can certainly not warrant any assimilation with Jacobi’s changing uses of the German *Glauben*, a term which primarily denotes ‘faith’ in a religious sense, but to which Jacobi also recurred in order to refer to Hume’s ‘belief’.⁴⁶ However, Kant only resolved quite late to speak up, probably when he discovered himself labelled by Jacobi and other eminent protagonists, among them Thomas Wizenmann,⁴⁷ as a *Schwärmer* (‘enthusiast’). That term was used at the time by proponents of the *Aufklärung* as a libel, synonymous with ‘fanatic’, in order to fight all those positions which did not seem to them compatible with their own convictions.⁴⁸ In his ‘What does it mean to orient oneself in thinking?’, published in October 1786 in the *Berlinische Monatsschrift*, Kant publicly distanced himself from the famous thesis put forward by Mendelssohn in his *Morgenstunden*, according to which it is sometimes necessary to orient oneself by means of *bon sens*, particularly when the results obtained by speculation contradict moral conscience.⁴⁹ For Kant, such an appeal to ‘common sense’ or to a ‘healthy reason’ relies upon a maxim far too ambiguous to avoid ‘the danger of serving as a principle of enthusiasm (*Schwärmerei*) in the dethroning of reason’⁵⁰ and could thereby severely endanger the freedom to think. In his *Critique of the Power of Judgment* (1790), Kant also distances himself from the then fashionable exaltation of the ‘genius’ and its so-called ‘freedom’.⁵¹ And in his *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason* (1st ed. 1793; 2nd ed. 1794), he distinguishes between ‘religious superstition’, as ‘the delusion that through religious acts of cult we can achieve anything in the way of justification before God’, and the ‘religious enthusiasm’ (*der schwärmerische Religionswahn*) which would consist in the ‘delusion of wanting to bring this about by striving for a supposed contact with God’. He argues that the latter is much worse, because it is ‘the moral death of the reason without which there can be no religion, because, like all morality in general, religion must be founded on principles’.⁵² The ‘enthusiasm’ (*Schwärmerei*) of the ‘genius’, with his ‘declared lawlessness in thinking’,

⁴⁵ Cf. Kant AA 3, 536–8 (A 828/B856f.); Kant, CEW 1998, 689; and cp. with Jacobi, *Werke* 1.1, 319–22.

⁴⁶ Cf. his ‘David Hume on Faith, or Idealism and Realism’ (1787: 2.1, 29ff.; *Writings*, 271f.). On Jacobi’s conception of ‘faith’, cf. Hermann Timm, *Gott und die Freiheit. Studien zur Religionsphilosophie der Goethezeit*, vol. 1: *Die Spinozarennaissance* (Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 1974), 211–23 and Di Giovanni in Jacobi, *Writings*, 80f.

⁴⁷ On the role of that author and the development of the controversy, cf. Timm, *Gott und die Freiheit*, 242–75.

⁴⁸ Cf. Norbert Hinske, ‘Die Aufklärung und die Schwärmer. Sinn und Funktion einer Kampfdiee’, in *Aufklärung*, Jahrgang 3, Heft 1 (Hamburg: Meiner, 1988).

⁴⁹ Cf. Mendelssohn, *Jubiläumsausgabe*, 3.2, 202f.; 2012–162; also Jacobi, *Werke* 1.1, 175; *Writings*, 352f.

⁵⁰ Kant, AA 8, 134f.; Kant, CEW 1996, 7f.

⁵¹ Kant, AA 5, §50: 318f.; Kant, CEW 2000, 196f.

⁵² Kant, AA 6, 174f.; Kant, CEW 1996, 193f.

turns out to be more dangerous according to Kant than philosophical dogmatism, and even more dangerous than ‘religious superstition’.

C9S4

2.2 Fichte’s ‘Transcendental Spinozism’

C10P16 The figure of the ‘genius’ stigmatized by Kant in his October 1786 article and other texts is, at bottom, none other than that of the artist depicted in the poem of Goethe made public and interpreted by Jacobi in 1785.⁵³ ‘Prometheus’, asserting his independence from God, would go as far as wondering whether he is himself the supreme Being—and when Lessing once sat at table near Jacobi and it suddenly began to shower, whether it was him, Lessing, or somebody else, who did that.⁵⁴ The figure of Prometheus had become the incarnation of a new form of ‘pantheism’, which can easily be related to the kind of ‘enthusiasm’ (*Schwärmerei*) put forward in the years of the *Sturm und Drang* literary movement, the very years during which the young Goethe had composed his poem.

C10P17 The ‘genius’ also is the figure Jacobi ascribes to Fichte a few years later, in his 1799 ‘Letter to Fichte’.⁵⁵ In his *Foundations of the Entire Science of Knowledge* of 1794–1795, Fichte had himself written that the ‘theoretical portion’ of his *Science of Knowledge* was in fact ‘Spinozism made systematic; save only that any given self is itself the one ultimate substance’,⁵⁶ so that Jacobi considered himself fully justified to ascribe to him that kind of Promethean Spinozism.⁵⁷ Jacobi had also noticed that Fichte was endeavouring to ‘transfigure’ Spinozism into an idealism, and that he gave to the Spinozan substance the structure of a self, an Ego (*Ich*) in order to achieve such an end. Right at the beginning of his Letter to Fichte, Jacobi writes that there only are ‘two main avenues’:

C10P18 materialism and idealism, or the attempt to explain everything from a self-determining matter alone or from a self-determining intelligence, [and they] have the same aim. Their opposing courses do not take them apart at all, but rather bring them gradually nearer to each other until they finally touch. Speculative materialism, or the materialism that develops a metaphysics, must ultimately transfigure itself into idealism of its own accord; since apart from dualism there is only egoism, as beginning or end, for a *power of thought* that *will think to the end*.⁵⁸

⁵³ Jacobi, *Werke* 1.1, 45–7; Jacobi, *Writings*, 185.

⁵⁴ Jacobi, *Werke* 1.1, 34; Jacobi, *Writings*, 195f.

⁵⁵ Jacobi, *Werke* 2.1, 187–225; Jacobi, *Writings*, 497–527.

⁵⁶ Fichte, *Fichtes Werke* I, 122; Fichte, *Foundations of the Entire Science of Knowledge*, trans. Peter Heath, in Fichte, *Science of Knowledge (Wissenschaftslehre)*, 2nd ed., ed. Peter Heath and John Lachs (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 100–01, 119f.

⁵⁷ On Jacobi’s knowledge of Fichte’s works at that time, cf. Günter Zöller, ‘Fichte als Spinoza, Spinoza als Fichte. Jacobi über den Spinozismus der Wissenschaftslehre’, in Jaeschke/Sandkaulen 2004, 37–52.

⁵⁸ Jacobi, *Werke* 2.1, 194f.; Jacobi, *Writings*, 502.



- C10P19 Spinoza himself would not have been far from transfiguring his ‘materialism’ of the substance into an idealism, but it would be Fichte who accomplished that step. Fichte’s *Doctrine of Science* would be nothing else in the final instance than the representation of an ‘inverted Spinozism,’⁵⁹ one according to which
- C10P20 we comprehend a thing only in so far as we can construct it, i.e. let it arise before us in thoughts, let it *become*. And in so far as we cannot construct it, or produce it ourselves in thoughts, we do not comprehend it. . . . Thus the human spirit, since its philosophical understanding will simply not reach beyond its own production, must, in order to penetrate into the realm of beings and conquer it with its thought, become world *creator*, indeed, its own creator.⁶⁰
- C10P21 Although Jacobi eloquently describes Fichte’s activity as a philosopher, one needs only evoke his mischievous comparison of Fichte’s idealism to a knitted stocking, one which could be adorned with all possible empirical figures like borders, flowers, moon, and stars, but also followed up to the infinite—and then is undone as easily as it is done, by the back-and-forth movement of only one thread—to gather that his admiration is feigned. He is as far from endorsing Fichte’s ‘logical enthusiasm’⁶¹ as he had been far from endorsing Spinozism in his *Letters on the Doctrine of Spinoza*. It is true that he does not go as far as explicitly accusing Fichte of ‘atheism’. He rather contends that the Fichtean position leads, just like the Kantian one and Spinozism itself, to *nihilism*, a concept he moulded durably, which had a great future.⁶² Still, labelling Fichte as a ‘Spinozist’ was more than enough to fuel the ‘Atheism dispute’ (*Atheismusstreit*) which had already begun earlier on, and which eventually led Fichte to resign from his post in Jena.⁶³ Jacobi had been the ‘involuntary prophet’ of Spinozism, and Fichte became—as involuntarily as Jacobi—one of the heralds of another ‘age’: the age of Early Romanticism, celebrated in literature—by Friedrich Schlegel in the first place⁶⁴—but also in philosophy, even up to our days through some hermeneutical interpreters of Early Romanticism.⁶⁵

⁵⁹ Jacobi, *Werke*, 2.1, 194f.; Jacobi, *Writings*, 502.

⁶⁰ Jacobi, *Werke* 2.1, 201f.; Jacobi, *Writings*, 508.

⁶¹ Jacobi, *Werke* 2.1, 196f.; Jacobi, *Writings*, 503f.

⁶² The term *Nihilismus* is explicitly used in the Letter to Fichte (Jacobi, *Werke* 2.1, 215; Jacobi, *Writings*, 519), in which Jacobi explains his accusation at length (*Werke* 2.1, 203f.; *Writings*, 509sq.), also directing it against Kant’s theoretical philosophy (cf., for example, *Werke* 2.1, 382; *Writings*, 544) and others (*Werke* 2.1, 425; *Writings*, 583).

⁶³ On Fichte and his time, cf. Xavier Léon Léon, *Fichte et son temps*, vol. 1 (Paris: Armand Colin, 1922–27), 445–57.

⁶⁴ Cf. Schlegel’s aphorism, in the *Athenaeum*: ‘The French Revolution, Fichte’s philosophy, and Goethe’s Meister are the greatest tendencies of the age’ (1798–1800), in *Athenaeum. Eine Zeitschrift* (Darmstadt: WBG, 1992) I, 46.

⁶⁵ H.-G. Gadamer endorses Jacobi’s reading when he writes in his *Truth and Method*, that ‘Fichte had elevated genius and what genius created to a universal transcendental position’. See *Gesammelte Werke*, vol. 1 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1986), 65; and *Truth and Method*, trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall (2nd ed., London: Continuum, 1989), 52.

C10P22 Fichte's 'transcendental Spinozism' was also criticized from the start, by Jacobi and also by many theologians for embodying a kind of *hybris*, an '*eritis sicut deus*' ('You will be as God') which would unavoidably lead to nihilism.⁶⁶ It is highly significant that the religiously oriented dialogical thinking which was elaborated in the twentieth century—for example, by Franz Rosenzweig—had already been anticipated by Jacobi's own early assertion: 'without the Thou, the I is impossible.'⁶⁷

C9S5 2.3 'Aesthetical Pantheism': Herder and Goethe

C10P23 Herder, who himself elaborated in those years a dialogical thinking which was to become very influential later on,⁶⁸ argued that the nihilism condemned by Jacobi consisted in an essentially *reactive* reading of Spinoza: the *negation* of Spinoza's most basic *affirmation* of God's Being. He had already pointed that out to Jacobi in 1784, in words which precluded any ambiguity:

C10P24 The *proton pseudos* ('error in premise') in your system and that of all the Antispinozists, dear Jacobi, is that God, as the great *ens entium*, who is in all phenomena the eternally acting cause of its Being, would be a 0, an abstract concept like the one we formulate for us. But this is not what it is according to Spinoza, it [God] rather is the most real, most active One, the only one saying to itself: 'I am that I am, and shall be... that I shall be.' It is not from the negation of the proposition *Ex nihilo nihil fit*, but from the eternal proposition *Quidquid est, illud est* ('whatever is, it is') that the philosophy of the true Entity begins. It is precisely that concept of Being which Spinoza developed in such a fertile way, and it is rightfully, in my opinion, that he put it above all the modes of representation and thinking of singular phenomena, as well as above limited modes of existence in space.⁶⁹

C10P25 Herder thereafter put forward in his *God: Some Conversations* (1st ed. 1787, 2nd ed. 1800)—a work which may rightly count as the first book-length, explicitly positive vindication of Spinoza in German—a reading that adopts as point of departure 'Being': *Sein*, also *Dasein*⁷⁰ rather than the 'I', or 'consciousness'.

⁶⁶ Cf. here Timm, 'Die Bedeutung der Spinozabriefe Jacobi's', 36.

⁶⁷ Cp. Jacobi (*Werke* 1.1, 116; *Writings*, 231) with Rosenzweig, *Ich entsteht im Du: Ausgewählte Texte zu Sprache, Dialog und Übersetzung*, ed. Steiner, Grätz, eiburg/München: Alber, 2013): 'Mein Ich entsteht im Du.'

⁶⁸ On Herder's influential essay 'Love and Selfhood' ('Liebe und Selbstheit. Ein Nachtrag zum Briefe des Herrn Hemsterhuis': 1781, in Herder, *Werke* 4, 405–24), see Dieter Henrich, 'Hegel und Hölderlin', in *Hegel im Kontext* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1971), 9–40.

⁶⁹ Herder, *Briefe* 5, 28f.

⁷⁰ Herder, 1984–87, II, 796.

C10P26 He had already performed that significant philosophical turn much earlier on, as is shown by the ‘Essay on Being’ he drafted in 1863–1864,⁷¹ while listening to lectures Kant gave in Königsberg during these years. In those years Kant did not yet reject the endeavour to rationally demonstrate the existence of God, as is already indicated by the title of the work he prepared: *The Only Possible Argument in Support of a Demonstration of the Existence of God* (1762–63).⁷² In his lectures, he regularly followed the manuals of A. G. Baumgarten (1714–1762), an Enlightenment philosopher of the Wolffian school whom Herder also learnt to appreciate, just like Kant. Herder particularly valued the role Baumgarten had played in turning aesthetics into a proper science: the science of ‘sensitive knowledge’, a knowledge which would be neither mathematical nor metaphysical: it would dwell at the level of the sensible, that is, of that which was reputed to be ‘confused’, and ‘dark’. As Ernst Cassirer pertinently points out in his important work on the *Philosophy of the Enlightenment*, Baumgarten had ‘no intention of maintaining the logical contradiction of confused and dark knowledge’; he was rather seeking

C10P27 a knowledge of the ‘dark’ and the ‘indistinct’. The predicate indicates the theme and the objective field, not the kind of insight and the mode of treatment. Science is not to be dragged down to the region of sensibility, but the sensible is to be lifted to the dignity of knowledge and impregnated with a special form of knowledge, and in this way subjected to rational treatment. [...Baumgarten] erects a new standard of sensibility whose function is not to destroy but to preserve the value of this mode of experience. He attributes new perfection to sensibility; but this perfection bears with it the condition that it be understood as an immanent advantage, as a ‘phenomenal perfection’ (*perfectio phaenomenon*).⁷³

C10P28 Herder had well understood that point.⁷⁴ When he wrote in his Essay on Being that the ‘first sensory concept’, the concept of Being, is ‘unanalyzable’ and ‘undemonstrable’ and yet the ‘center of all certainty... for the highest degree of proof, the proposition *quidquid est, illud est*, stands next to it’⁷⁵, his intention had

⁷¹ Cf. Herder 1984–1987-I, 573–87. Kant’s AA 28 already contains one version of the *Versuch über das Sein* (951–61), together with many notes taken by Herder during Kant’s lectures. Cf. on these notes, Hans Dietrich Irmscher, ed., ‘Immanuel Kant. Aus den Vorlesungen der Jahre 1762 bis 1764. Auf Grund der Nachschriften Johann Gottfried Herders’, in *Kantstudien. Ergänzungsheft* 88 (1964), and on Herder’s essay, see M. Bienenstock, ‘La filosofia di Herder: una “modificazione minore” della riflessione praticata da Jacobi?’, in *Fede e Sapere. La genesi del pensiero del giovane Hegel*, ed. Rossella Bonito Oliva and Giuseppe Cantillo (Milano: Guerini e associati, 1998), 127–40.

⁷² Kant, AA 2, 65–163; Kant, CEW 1992, 107–286.

⁷³ Ernst Cassirer, *The Philosophy of the Enlightenment*, trans. Fritz C. A. Koelln and James P. Pettigrove (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1951), 340.

⁷⁴ Cf. Herder, *Werke* II, 14–31, 78. ⁷⁵ Herder, *Werke* II, 586.

not been to bring out the insurmountable limits of our knowing capacities.⁷⁶ He wanted to set up another form of knowledge: an aesthetical rather than idealistic one.

C10P29 He already criticized ‘idealism’ for being an ‘egoism.’⁷⁷ But did not yet refer his aesthetics to Spinoza. It is only later on, and progressively, that he began to exalt him. The third version of his essay ‘On the Cognition and Sensation of the Human Soul’, published anonymously in 1778 (1st version 1774, 2nd version 1775), culminates in an explicit glorification of Spinoza, whom he deems ‘even more divine’ than Saint John for having understood not just that the forces of the soul—cognition, sensation, volition—are one, but also that love is ‘the highest reason.’⁷⁸ These declarations stem from years during which Herder had been quite close, just like the young Goethe, to the *Sturm und Drang* movement.⁷⁹ Jacobi had himself been attracted to some values of that movement, and Herder’s enthusiastic tone enables one to better understand the reasons for which he could have hoped to enlist him, as well as Goethe, on his side, in the controversy over pantheism.

C10P30 He did not succeed. Herder went on claiming, just like Goethe, that Spinoza had not been an atheist. It was his idea of God which had been totally different from that of Jacobi’s: ‘You want God in human shape, as a friend who thinks of you,’ he wrote to Jacobi already in 1784:

C10P31 Remember that He must then think in a human, i.e., limited way of you, and if he is biased towards you He will be so against others. Tell me then: why do you need Him in human form?⁸⁰

C10P32 The declaration is startling, the more so because it comes from the mouth of a Protestant clergyman. Unsurprisingly, the following debate focused in a large measure upon the question of the ‘personality’ of God. Herder criticized Jacobi’s ‘extramundane God *comme il faut*’ (in a letter dated 16 September 1785⁸¹). He also rejected, together with the anthropomorphic notion of a personal God, any and all imagery whatsoever, including that of a ‘World Soul’ that he had once taken over from Shaftesbury,⁸² as well as the imagery one could find in some Cabbalistic texts known at the time. Jacobi had related Spinozism to the ‘philosophy of the cabbala,’⁸³ but Herder disagreed, also strengthening his

⁷⁶ As has sometimes been pointed out later on. Cf. Wilhelm Dilthey, *Weltanschauung und Analyse des Menschen seit Renaissance und Reformation* (Stuttgart: Teubner, 1957), 391–415, p. 409f.

⁷⁷ Herder, *Werke* I, 576. Kant, interestingly enough, himself already noted that ‘dogmatic egoism is a hidden Spinozism’; AA 17, 297.

⁷⁸ Cf. Herder, *Werke* II, 696; Herder, *Philosophical Writings*, ed. M. N. Forster (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 216.

⁷⁹ On these years Herder spent in Bückeburg (from 1771 to 1776) and the new form of religiosity he developed there; cf. for ex. Bell, *Spinoza in Germany*, 50–64.

⁸⁰ Herder, *Briefe* 5, 90.

⁸¹ Herder, *Briefe* 5, 137.

⁸² On Herder’s early enthusiasm and his later change of mind, cf. Bell, *Spinoza in Germany*, 49f.

⁸³ Jacobi, *Werke* I.1, 121f.; Jacobi, *Writings*, 233.

opposition over the years. His *God: Some Conversations*, whose fourth part contains his criticism of Jacobi, is even sharper in the second edition than in the first in its criticism of the Hebraic Cabbalists, who ‘heaped so many images on God’: they were ‘as poor philosophers as they were poor disciples of Moses’ because they had not understood that Spinoza had actually followed the first commandment of Moses. His conception had been distinctly Jewish precisely because of the rejection of any imagery: ‘when we speak of God, let us rather use no images!’⁸⁴

C10P33 In that work, Herder takes over his earlier, 1764 vindication of the concept of Being. He now explicitly relates it not only to Moses’ ‘Jehovah, that is, I am that I am, and I shall be that I shall be’, but also to Spinoza, who would have remained faithful to that lofty, unique concept of the most perfect, self-existing and eternal ‘existence’ (*Dasein*), through which everything is given.⁸⁵ Herder ascribes to Spinoza a philosophy of religion which rests upon the affirmation of God’s immanence in the world. However, he refuses to reduce ‘nature’, in Spinoza’s *deus sive natura*, to a mere extension or to matter. He endeavours to comprehend nature dynamically, on the basis of inner substantial and spiritual ‘forces’.⁸⁶ Spinoza, according to Herder, had been no materialist. The key concept of ‘force’ (*Kraft*), to which he recurs, in his philosophy of nature and in his work on the philosophy of history, was often criticized, first by Kant⁸⁷ and then by many others, including Hegel.⁸⁸ This did not hamper the progress of both disciplines, on which Herder left an indelible yet frequently distorted mark.⁸⁹

C10P34 It may well have been by reading Spinoza—and by conversing with Herder—that Goethe, too, rejected any anthropomorphism in the conception of the divine. This position is consistently expressed in his writings, also in his poetry, as is shown by the beginning of his poem ‘Proemium’:

C10P35 What sort of God would it be who merely gave the universe a push from outside and rotated it with his finger! It befits Him to move the world from within, to

⁸⁴ Herder, *Werke* II, 792–815, p. 809–11; and 1086f.; for the 2nd ed., Herder, *God: Some Conversations*, 155f.

⁸⁵ Herder, *Werke* II, 792–815, p. 809–11; and 1086f.; Herder, *God: Some Conversations*, 155f.

⁸⁶ Cf. Herder, *Werke* II, 2nd Conversation, 763ff.; Herder, *God: Some Conversations*, 95–114.

⁸⁷ ‘[W]hat is one to think in general about the hypothesis of invisible forces, effecting organization, hence about the endeavor to want to explain what one does not comprehend from what one comprehends even less?’, Kant asked already in 1785: cf. AA VIII, 53f.

⁸⁸ Cf. Hegel’s article ‘Faith and Knowledge’ in *Gesammelte Werke* 4, 315–414; M. Bienenstock, *Politique du jeune Hegel* (Paris: PUF, 1992), 139ff.; and Bienenstock, ‘La filosofia di Herder: una “modificazione minore” della riflessione praticata da Jacobi?’, in *Fede e Sapere. La genesi del pensiero del giovane Hegel*, ed. Rossella Bonito Oliva e Giuseppe Cantillo (Milan: Guerini e associati, 1998), 127–40.

⁸⁹ The distortion is particularly noticeable in the anachronistic understanding, during WW2 and afterwards, of Herder’s ‘sense of history’ (*historischer Sinn*) as a ‘sense for force’ (*Sinn für Kraft*); cf. Herder, *Auch eine Philosophie der Geschichte zur Bildung der Menschheit* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1967), 157, 163, 176f.

cherish Nature in Himself and Himself in Nature, so that all that lives and moves and has its being in Him, is never without His power and His spirit.⁹⁰

C10P36 The reference is to St Paul (Acts 17:28), which is a Christian source. It also is the source Spinoza himself had quoted⁹¹—and it may well have been Spinoza who had ultimately inspired Goethe. ‘The great heathen... the name given to Goethe in Germany’,⁹² who had himself admitted quite early on, in a letter to Lavater dated 29 July 1782, that he was ‘albeit no anti-Christian, not un-Christian, but decidedly a non-Christian’,⁹³ began a ‘study based on Spinoza’ (*Studie nach Spinoza*) written in the winter of 1784–85 by asserting that ‘the concept of being and of perfection is one and the same’ (*Der Begriff vom Dasein und der Vollkommenheit ist ein und ebenderselbe*),⁹⁴ thereby expressing a this-worldly vindication of Being, or existence (*Dasein*), quite akin to Herder’s. Goethe also explicitly associated Spinoza with the principles he adopted in his scientific research: he thereby referred not just to the adoption of Spinoza’s monistic concept of nature, but also to an emphasis upon empirical observation he would have shared with the philosopher. ‘When you say we can only *believe* in God, then I tell you, I see great store by *seeing*’, he eloquently wrote to Jacobi in a letter dated 5 May 1786.⁹⁵ He also famously insisted in the very same letter of 9 June 1785 in which he had praised Spinoza for being ‘the most godly, indeed the most Christian’ (*theissimum ia christianissimum*) of all, and also for insisting that we must try and perceive God ‘in individual things’ (*in rebus singularibus*) ‘in plants and stones’ (*in herbis et lapidibus*).⁹⁶ It was to Spinoza’s *Ethics*, Part V, Proposition 24, that he was thereby alluding: ‘the more we understand individual objects, the more we understand God.’ The pantheism which underlies this conception marked his time.⁹⁷ It also marked many later literary, philosophical, and religious circles in nineteenth-century Germany. But it was defined and interpreted according to very different lines, which imperatively need to be specified. One of them is that of Heinrich Heine (1797–1856). In an essay first published in France in 1834 *On the History of Religion and Philosophy in Germany*, Heine asserted that pantheism, which posits God as identical with the world, is ‘the open secret... the clandestine religion of Germany’. He added that such a religion, which supports ‘the wellbeing of matter’, is very close to Saint-Simonism, because it leads people to fight for the ‘divine rights of the human’ rather than simply for

⁹⁰ Cf. Goethe, *Werke*, 1, 357. Bell offers a translation of these lines and a cogent commentary in *Spinoza in Germany*, 169, n. 17.

⁹¹ Cf. Bell, *Spinoza in Germany*, 169.

⁹² Heinrich Heine, *Historisch-kritische Gesamtausgabe der Werke*, Düsseldorf Ausgabe (hereafter DHA), ed. M. Windfuhr (Hamburg: Hoffmann und Campe, 1979), 100; Heine, *On the History of Religion and Philosophy in Germany*, ed. Terry Pinkard, trans. Howard Pollack-Milgate (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 98.

⁹³ Goethe, *Briefe* I, 402.

⁹⁴ Goethe, *Werke* 13, 7.

⁹⁵ Goethe, *Briefe* I, 508.

⁹⁶ Goethe, *Briefe* I, 476.

⁹⁷ Cf. here Timm, *Gott und die Freiheit*.

the ‘human rights of the people.’⁹⁸ Goethe, whom Heine had dubbed the ‘Spinoza of poetry,’⁹⁹ would not have been in full agreement with that conception of ‘the great Heathen No. 2,’ as Heine occasionally named himself.¹⁰⁰

C9S6

3. Concluding Remarks

C10P37 Ever since the word ‘pantheist’ first appeared in modern times it was used polemically, in controversies whose object significantly changed over the years,¹⁰¹ so that the notion itself gained very different meanings that ought to be clearly distinguished from one another. The formula *hen kai pan* which Jacobi had famously ascribed to Lessing¹⁰² remains up to this day obscure, in its source and in its meaning. Jacobi had first read into it an atheism, and a rationalistic monism he had ascribed to Spinoza, but some years later he himself evoked other authors, amongst them the Renaissance heretic Giordano Bruno (1548–1600), in whose *Cause, Principle and Unity* (1584) he saw one of the purest outlines of pantheism, taken ‘in the broadest possible sense’ of the word. The long excerpts of Bruno’s work that he published in the second edition of his *Letters* (1789: Supplement I¹⁰³) became an important source of inspiration for many Romantic authors who saw in it a divinization of nature, and also for later philosophers, amongst them the young Schleiermacher and the young Schelling, who went as far as giving to one of his early dialogues the eloquent title of *Bruno or On the Divine and Natural Principle of Things* (1802). That line of inspiration gained much importance later on in the nineteenth century, with some influential interpreters even going as far as to argue that the role fulfilled by the Renaissance heretic in the edification of an aesthetic form of pantheism had been much greater than that of Spinoza. Shaftesbury (1671–1713) and especially Herder would also have had a share in the elaboration of an idealistic form of pantheism, which according to them would have been distinctly German.¹⁰⁴ They thereby followed lines drawn by an irrationalistic ‘philosophy of life’ which only became predominant at the end of the nineteenth century¹⁰⁵ and is blatantly anachronistic for understanding the beginning of the century. The turn towards aesthetics is undeniable, but what such a turn means, and exact way in which Shaftesbury was used, need to be specified.

⁹⁸ Heine, DHA 8/I, 60–2; Heine, *On the History of Religion and Philosophy in Germany*, 58f.

⁹⁹ Heine, *On the History of Religion and Philosophy in Germany*, 99.

¹⁰⁰ Heine, DHA XV, 112.

¹⁰¹ Cf. Winfried Schröder, ‘Pantheismus,’ in *Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie*, vol. 7, ed. J. Ritter and K. Gründer (1989), 59–63.

¹⁰² Jacobi, *Werke* 1.1, 40f.; Jacobi, *Writings*, 187.

¹⁰³ Jacobi, *Werke* 1.1, 185–205.

¹⁰⁴ Cf. again Dilthey, *Weltanschauung und Analyse des Menschen seit Renaissance und Reformation*, 391–415.

¹⁰⁵ Cf. on this Cassirer, *The Philosophy of the Enlightenment*, 312–19.

C10P38 Spinoza's role would also need to be reappraised. Jacobi reports that when Mendelssohn had heard for the first time that Lessing held Spinoza's system to be true, he had asked which system of Spinoza it was, which was meant: the one expounded in the TTP, that of the *Principia Philosophiae Cartesiana*, or that presented posthumously in the *Ethics*.¹⁰⁶ This is the only passage in Jacobi's whole publication with an explicit mention of the TTP, and it was long read by many interpreters as a testimony to the fact that Mendelssohn had only had a faulty knowledge of Spinoza. One telling example of this concerns the young Hegel. He had first carefully read Mendelssohn's *Jerusalem*, but then he discovered the TTP, which made such a strong impression on him that it overshadowed the lesson of tolerance given by Mendelssohn in that text.¹⁰⁷ More recent scholarship has shown that even if it is true that Mendelssohn nowhere explicitly refers to Spinoza and the TTP in his *Jerusalem*, he was strongly inspired by it when framing the basic theses and structure of that work.¹⁰⁸ The subterranean influence of the TTP, that controversial book, can be presupposed between or behind the lines, from the start and up to our days—so much so that the so-called 'pantheism controversy' would more adequately be called a controversy over Spinoza.

Suggested Reading

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¹⁰⁶ Jacobi, *Werke* 1.1, 10; Jacobi, *Writings*, 182.

¹⁰⁷ Cf. G. W. F. Hegel, *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, vol. 3, ed. R.F. Brown (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1990), 240.

¹⁰⁸ On this point, see Julius Guttman, *Bericht der Hochschule für die Wissenschaft des Judentums*, Mendelssohns Jerusalem und Spinozas Theologisch-Politischer Traktat 48 (Berlin, 1931), 31–67; Altmann, *Moses Mendelssohn: A Biographical Study*, 520, 536ff.; see also Altmann's Introduction to Mendelssohn's *Jerusalem*, 22–5.