

15 Jacobi as Literary Author

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Jacobi is best known for his 1785 controversy with Moses Mendelssohn, which brought Spinoza to the centre of philosophical debate in the waning years of the German High Enlightenment.¹ This means he is best known as a philosopher – or at least as a philosophical polemicist, since his views on the philosophy and the philosophers of the day were mostly negative.² Although this picture of Jacobi is fair enough, the emphasis on his philosophical side tends to overshadow his literary side, which, I believe, is just as conceptually important as the overtly philosophical side. This is not only because in his two novels, *Allwill* and *Woldemar*, Jacobi put on the lips of his fictional characters some of the most explicit statements regarding his philosophical position.³ More to the point is that rationalism – of which Spinoza's monism was, according to Jacobi, the most consequential expression – was not the only component of the late Enlightenment intellectual landscape. There also was the culture of the *Herzensmensch*, the sentimental hero who dared stand in moral matters on the authority of a feeling for the good, the beautiful, and the pleasurable, which was innate to him, making his witness to

¹ For Jacobi's account of the event, see *Concerning the Doctrine of Spinoza in Letters to Herr Moses Mendelssohn* (1783), MPW 185–98. For the historical and conceptual context, see George di Giovanni, "I. An Essay in Analysis", in *The Unfinished Philosophy of Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi*, MPW 67–90.

² I have documented Jacobi's pervasive influence on the German late Enlightenment and early Romanticism in two works: *Freedom and Religion in Kant and His Immediate Successors: The Vocation of Humankind, 1774–1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), and its recent sequel, *Hegel and the Challenge of Spinoza: A Study in German Idealism, 1801–1831* (Cambridge: University Press, 2021).

³ *Edward Allwill's Collection of Letters* (1792), in MPW 379–496; *Woldemar* (1796), in JWA 7.1. Both novels were published in earlier and, in some cases, fragmentary editions.

that feeling irreducibly singular. The young Goethe had occasion to mock the sentimentalism of this culture because of the shallowness of its exponents (notably Wieland, but also Georg and Fritz, the two Jacobi brothers), yet the *Sturm und Drang* movement that Goethe pioneered also made its stand in moral matters on the same highly individualistic and personal grounds.⁴

There was a culture of anti-rationalism just as strong and pervasive as rationalism in the late Enlightenment. In fact, the two stood in symbiotic relation, as Jacobi demonstrated in his own person, caught as he was between the two. On the one hand, he had nothing but praise for Spinoza⁵ – to such an extent, indeed, that Lessing at first impression, and Mendelssohn to the end, could believe that he was himself a Spinozist.⁶ In Jacobi's eyes, Spinoza had the courage of taking rationalism to its speculative conclusion; he had also conceived a universe in which the presence of God would overflow everywhere. All this resonated in Jacobi's heart. On the other hand, Jacobi equally recoiled, *in fugam vacui*,⁷ from the monism that this universe implied because it undermined human agency.⁸ On this score, he took refuge in the individualism of the *Herzensmensch*. Yet he then recoiled from it as well because of its implicit moral irrationalism. What Jacobi lacked – and was actively seeking – was a concept of reason that would mediate the singularity of existence with the transcendence of truth. And since Jacobi had no such concept at hand, he could only intimate it indirectly: in the philosophical works, by exposing the nihilism that he believed to be the essence of Spinozism;⁹ in the literary, by exposing the ultimately destructive vacuity of the pure *Herzensmensch*. He played the requirements of philosophical discourse and those of historical existence against each other in order to make a point for

⁴ Goethe's *Das Unglück der Jacobis* (The Jacobis' Misfortune, 1773), and *Götter, Jelden, und Wieland* (Gods, Heroes, and Wieland, 1772).

⁵ Jacobi, *Spinoza-Letters*, MPW 193.

⁶ See MPW 193, 203.

⁷ MPW 236. As he also said to Fichte; see *Jacobi to Fichte* (1799), in MPW 519.

⁸ MPW 193–4, 210–12.

⁹ MPW 519.

which the right language eluded him. In doing this he ran the double danger of making his philosophizing sound like a historical narrative, and his storytelling sound like a set of philosophical discourses. In the end, he was accused of both. Hegel also, incidentally, ran that risk in the *Phenomenology*, but finessed it with much greater philosophical acumen and artistic craft, I believe.

But to return to the point, ignoring Jacobi's literary output only impoverishes understanding of his philosophical work. Besides abstracting it from the rich cultural context within which it was conceived, it abstracts from it the moral worries that motivated it. For Jacobi one's philosophy truly was the reflection of one's humanity. And it was his conviction – one that only comes through if one considers the literary and philosophical outputs together – that the *Herzensmensch* was the existential counterpart of the intellectual Spinozist. The two, *Herzensmensch* and Spinozist philosopher, failed in the same respect. Albeit in different venues, they both plied the same craft of seduction.¹⁰

JACOBI THE PHILOSOPHICAL POLEMICIST

But first, exactly what was Jacobi's relation to Spinoza? Unlike his scholastic contemporaries (including Mendelssohn), Jacobi knew and understood Spinoza. He had first-hand acquaintance with his texts. He never criticized him on the basis of Wolff's metaphysics. Nor did he ever try to save him by reframing his monism on more accepted metaphysical terms.¹¹ He knew that on Spinoza's definition of substance there is no room for a creation *ex nihilo*, nor indeed even for the coming-to-be of anything new, however limited in scope this *new* would be.¹² Creation, and becoming in general, require prior nothingness, and this

¹⁰ The subject was very much an object of discussion at the time. See, for instance, Pierre Choderlos de Laclos, *Les Liaisons Dangereuses* (Paris: Durand Neveu, 1782), an epistolary novel in four volumes.

¹¹ As Mendelssohn did. Cf. "Here again is a place where the philosopher of the schools meets with the Spinozist [as Mendelssohn believed Jacobi to be], and the two clasp one another in brotherly embrace." *Spinoza-Letters*, 354.

¹² For Jacobi's understanding of Spinoza, see his conversation with Lessing as reported in the *Spinoza-Letters*, and also his point-form exposition of Spinoza's metaphysics in a letter to Mendelssohn, also included in the *Spinoza-Letters*, MPW 187–97, 217–29.

is a circumstance that Being excludes. Whether one calls it God or, as Spinoza did, substance, Being is per se already all there. One can still distinguish it from the finite things we experience in spacetime. But in order for such things to stand on their own, for them to *exist*, requires that they *not be* something else (*omni determinatio negatio*). It follows that what they presumably are in themselves is definable only with reference to precisely this *something else*, that is, on the basis of external factors: in effect, as *not* anything in themselves. This is a contradiction. When it comes to defining things *in themselves*, one must fall back upon Being per se. Being is already wholly present in each of them, just as Kant posits of space with respect to spatial things.¹³ In effect, any presumed difference between things, or between them and Being per se, is thus rendered moot. In essence, things are only the illusionary modes of one substance existing per se and *a se*. They are semblances of Being rather than Being.

This, in brief, is how Jacobi expounded Spinoza's position in conversation with Lessing in 1780 and eventually in his correspondence with Mendelssohn. Hypothetically he accepted it because, on the ideal of explanation that motivated the metaphysics of the day, it was in his estimate the only rigorously consequential conclusion. The ideal was to reduce all things to higher principles that presumably would ground them. The price one paid for it, however, was to demote the things thus explained to mere semblances; and this was a price that Jacobi was not ready to pay, despite his at times emotionally effusive admiration of Spinoza. Not explanation, but its consequences at the personal level of existence – what it would be like for one to live in a universe if it truly were as Spinoza described it – was the concern that motivated him. The consequences were clear. It meant that despite one's undeniable feeling of being an agent among other agents, relating to them precisely as agents, one is only an observer – not only of the other presumed agents, but also of oneself no less. The keyword here is “observer”. It meant standing at

¹³ The reference to Kant is in Jacobi, *Spinoza-Letters*, MPW 218 (Jacobi's note 30).

a distance from all things, including oneself, but without a determinate *point d'appui* from which to observe, only registering lines of events that anonymously move forwards, with each event driven from behind by the previous. In Spinoza's universe, if one were to attach a determinate name to any of these events, the connection would be only external, with no internal justification on the part of the event itself. As Jacobi depicted this consequence for Lessing:

The inventor of the clock did not ultimately invent it; he only witnessed its coming to be out of blind self-developing forces. So too Raphael, when he sketched the School of Athens, and Lessing, when he composed his *Nathan*. The same goes for all philosophizing, arts, forms of governance, sea and land wars – in brief, for everything possible. [...] We only *believe* that we have acted out of anger, love, magnanimity, or out of rational decisions. Mere illusions!¹⁴

For Jacobi the intellectual attitude of the Spinozist was that of a seducer. To seduce is to behave towards an other, on the face of it on the other's own terms, but in fact for the sake of satisfying intentions that are one's own, in effect voiding the other's actions of the efficacy the other believes they have. Perfection in this consists in having the other spontaneously but unknowingly collude in this process, thus orchestrating a situation in which the seducer also distances himself or herself from the motivating intentions, with the result that there is action, but no responsibility to pin on anyone in particular. Such was, according to Jacobi, the defining situation in a Spinoza-conceived universe. Jacobi called it fatalism.¹⁵ To actually *live* it meant to make oneself not just a seducer with respect to others, but a self-seducing seducer. For this reason, Jacobi found Goethe's *Prometheus* particularly scandalous. This was the poem he had received from Goethe himself and, in 1780, he used to entice

¹⁴ MPW 189; see also 210–13.

¹⁵ MPW 234.

Lessing into a discussion on Spinoza and pantheism in general. The *Menschen* whom Goethe exalted in that poem knew themselves to be the playthings of the gods, yet heroically accepted the situation, acting out the gods' play as if it were their own, even enjoying the illusion. Their lot was "To suffer and weep, / To relish and delight in things", paying no regard to the gods.¹⁶ They colluded with them.

But that was not for Jacobi, whose pietistic leanings demanded that a person-to-person relation with God be possible. He knew that there was no point in arguing against the philosophers; on their ideal of explanation, Spinozism was conceptually unimpeachable. Jacobi was also convinced that the ideal was in fact parasitic on a deeper source of truth that is innate in us. Hence, although there was no point in arguing against the philosophers, one could nonetheless exhort them to alter their attitude regarding truth. Rebuffed by Lessing, Jacobi simply invited him to place himself on that "elastic spot" (presumably his inner self) whence he could perform the jump (a somersault, in effect) that would right his position and have him walk on his feet – whereas before, like all philosophers, he walked on his head.¹⁷ Significant is that, in performing the jump and landing on his feet, Lessing would in fact be walking alongside the *Herzensmensch*.

Lessing could not be blamed for wondering whether he was in the presence of one of the many so-called *Schwärmer* (religious enthusiasts) of the day. Jacobi was indeed drawing from the other side of his personality, the one that resonated with the culture of the *Herzensmensch*. Ever the philosopher in dispute with Mendelssohn, even *malgré soi*, he summed up this side in a pithy formula. "Wie der Sinn, so der Trieb; wie der Trieb, so der Sinn."¹⁸ Very loosely translated, but still true to the meaning: "As the mind, so the heart; as the heart, so the mind." As Jacobi explained, we would not seek truth unless we were already motivated by it; unless, in other words, it were already with us, unconsciously at origin, organically given to us even

¹⁶ MPW 185–6. For the full poem, see the English rendition by Jeremy Walker.

¹⁷ MPW 189.

¹⁸ MPW 237.

at the primary level of bodily instinct as *Trieb* (drive). Seeking truth thus consists in the active retrieval of precisely this truth in us, of which we are unaware, by consciously making it our own, thereby giving rise to *Sinn* (sense). On the one hand, this *Sinn* cannot outrun the experientially given, the original disposition or *Trieb*; on the other, since *Sinn* is nonetheless an achievement, an active fruition of the original *Trieb*, it just as much qualifies the latter *de novo*. It follows, as Jacobi spelled out for Mendelssohn, that philosophy can only be descriptive, the felt story of how one comes to the convictions that shape one's identity; it has to be historical, in other words, and has to have social relevance, because – as Jacobi said in the *Spinoza-Letters* and never tired of repeating – *there is no I without a Thou*.¹⁹ Or again, as Jacobi also said, a living philosophy can only grow out of the life of a people.²⁰ It is not philosophy that determines the institutions of a people but the people's mode of living that rather determines its philosophy.

The “Wie der Sinn, so der Trieb” formula was Jacobi's way of mediating the singularity of existence with the transcendence of truth – but its flaw was apparent. It begged the question of how truth can be *felt* as *Trieb* yet at the same time transcend the latter sufficiently to make it more than just a product of nature or an accidental vicissitude of history, qualifying it anew. In his exchange with Mendelssohn, Jacobi himself unwittingly gave witness to the flaw when he called *Glaube* the historical, quasi-instinctual disposition to accept a truth before the philosophers give voice to it reflectively, thus disconnecting it from its vital source. He also called *Offenbarung* the truth's capacity to command assent by its very presence, thus making the certainty of *Glaube* unassailable. In principle, there was no problem with these terms, considering that in German *Glaube* carries both the meaning of “belief” (not necessarily in a religious sense), and the meaning of religious “faith”.

¹⁹ MPW 231.

²⁰ MPW 244.

As for *Offenbarung*, or “revelation”, truth – any truth – is inherently self-revelatory (ἀλήθεια, *aletheia*). But in this context Jacobi was indeed using the terms with unmistakably religious connotations. The concluding part of the *Spinoza-Letters* reads like a prolix exercise in pietist effusion. In writing to Mendelssohn, “Dear Mendelssohn, we are all born in the faith, and we must remain in the faith, just as we are all born in society, and must remain in society,”²¹ Jacobi was not just making a possibly legitimate conceptual point; he was intimating that the reason Mendelssohn could not understand him was because Mendelssohn was a Jew. He had missed the historical moment of Christ’s revelation. And how was one to rebut Jacobi here? One can indeed sympathize with Mendelssohn in thinking that Jacobi was another Lavater trying to convert him to Christianity.²²

The flaw in Jacobi’s formula, which was also the flaw of the *Herzensmensch* culture – and of Jacobi’s persona no less – was that it had no self-limiting principle, no basis for internal criticism, which is exactly the weakness that Jacobi attributed to the philosopher’s obsession with explanations that led them to their existentially absurd conclusions.²³ And at the existential level of experience, where it counted most, nowhere was this better illustrated than in Jacobi’s two novels.

JACOBI THE LITERARY PHILOSOPHER

Both novels are the portrayals of a closely knit community that is infiltrated, so to speak, by a stranger: by Edward Allwill in the first, by Woldemar in the second – the two novels’ eponymous characters. The provenance of both protagonists is shrouded in uncertainty, and in the case of Allwill, his age as well. This is an important

²¹ MPW 230.

²² J. C. Lavater (1741–1801), Swiss pastor who tried to convert Mendelssohn; for details, consult Alexander Altmann, *Moses Mendelssohn: A Biographical Study* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1973), chap. 3.

²³ For “obsession with explanation”, see MPW 194.

circumstance, for the two are the existential counterparts of philosophers. Just as these float in thought over things in general without relating to any in particular, these characters float as individuals in the presence of others without effectively connecting with them or offering any definite point d'appui for them to connect with.

To dwell first on *Allwill*, the day-to-day life of the community is displayed in letters exchanged by its members.²⁴ These dramatis personae indirectly comment on each other and indirectly also reveal how they each personally fit within the community. Their shared belief is that anyone's world begins with the recognition of someone else for whose sake one would voluntarily relinquish one's life. This recognition is consummated in love, the capacity for which is rooted in nature, in a feeling that is eminently singular and therefore manifested in action in a variety of ways. Ideally, these ways harmonize in a shared, richly textured existence to which – like left and right hand – they contribute from different directions. Faith is another word for this feeling: a trust in life also described as “sympathy for actuality”.²⁵ Two characters live this faith at its rawest but also most comprehensive level. Both are women, Amalia and Sylli. That they would be women should be expected since, in Jacobi's thought, woman presides over the creation of life; in this, her feelings are the closest to nature, the matrix of existence. Amalia is the picture of contentment, the mother on whom all rely for stability and emotional comfort. Sylli, by contrast, is one who was at one time both wife and mother, but both roles were withheld from her by dire circumstances; she is now left on her own, drawing her strength, as she says and the others agree, *from her own centre*.²⁶ The profundity of the faith that animates them, their “sympathy for the actual”, is just as much manifested in fruition as in failure. Like bliss and despair,

²⁴ For bibliographic details of the two novels, see footnote 2. For a more detailed treatment of both *Allwill* and *Woldemar* in English, see George di Giovanni, “III. An Essay in Interpretation”, in *The Unfinished Philosophy of Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi*, MPW 117–51.

²⁵ In an Addition to *Allwill*, see “To Erhard O***”, in MPW 493.

²⁶ MPW 452.

which constitute the antiphony of love, the two women stand in the epistolary's tableau as an antiphony of faith.

Neither woman indulges in philosophical argumentation. The men do, as does one inexperienced young woman, Clärchen. But there is a disconnect throughout between philosophical language and actual conduct. For instance, Clerdon, Amalia's husband, the typical picture of a morally sound pater familias and man of affairs, defends in discussion an idealism that he in fact believes in his day-to-day activities, only to drop discussion the moment social duties call, as if it really did not matter. The great talker and the sophisticated philosopher is Allwill. In discussion he knows how to counter Clerdon's idealism with unimpeachable arguments. Yet he also confides to Clärchen, while flirting with her, that there is indeed a legitimate basis for idealism. One wonders how seriously he takes his arguments, and for that matter how truly felt are his beautiful, even lyrical, yet accurate descriptions of Amalia as woman and mother.

This disconnect between language and conduct reflects the primacy of nature over reflection, which is the overall premise of the narrative. The portrayed community is indeed prototypically *Herzensmensch*-like. But it has special significance in Allwill's case. We first learn of this character indirectly, from what others say about him. As a child he was so stubborn as to routinely undergo the harshest punishments rather than change his ways, even when these were obviously unrealistic. It is not that he was not rich in talents or charm. The problem was that he could only act on the spur of the moment with no particular justification other than the feeling of the moment. This kind of erratic behaviour continues in his later years. In this respect, he was indeed a man of nature. We also learn that he has a shady past with women. There are hints of an affair with a certain Nanny about which he is on the defensive, and there is the more recent affair with Lucy, an acquaintance of Allwill's present company, from which he is trying to disentangle himself. This Lucy speaks in her voice only in the concluding letter, where she

confronts Allwill with the moral authority of a Donna Elvira confronting Johann, the seducer in Kierkegaard's famous *Diary*.²⁷

Clerdon knows of Allwill's faults but reacts to him with sympathy, paternally, ready to condone them because of his talents and because he puts trust in his nature. Clärchen, for her part, is fascinated by him, even in love with him. She sees the evil in him, but she also trusts in his nature. As she says, "There is too much of what is good and beautiful in him, for him not to become master of the evil."²⁸ Perhaps. But this is not how Amalia and Sylli see him. They attack him mercilessly at precisely the source of the evil: they charge that Allwill poetizes "his" women, reducing them to images of his fancy.²⁹ To this extent, he obliterates the real Lucy, seduces her. The remarkable thing is that Allwill agrees; for, as he admits, he has trouble with women because he turns them into idols in his imagination, as he would like them to be – and of course on that premise he cannot deal with them, therefore he prefers to approach them only *en passant*.³⁰ And to those in the epistolary who urge him to consider his moral responsibility, the obligations to those whose lives he touches, his reaction is strident, bordering on rage. He will have nothing of morality's constraints, for these are universal in application and thus inevitably miss the circumstances that make any situation unique. When one comes to decisive judgement, it is the feeling of the moment that counts; therefore Allwill invokes the privilege of the individual, proclaiming himself in moral matters the hero of the exception. Remarkably, these are all words that Jacobi will repeat almost verbatim when confronting Fichte only a few years after the publication of *Allwill*, but this time on his own behalf, inveighing against the empty universality of moral commands.³¹

²⁷ Søren Kierkegaard, "The Seducer's Diary", in *Either/Or: Part I*, ed. and trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1988).

²⁸ MPW 446.

²⁹ "On his moral side, the entire man has become *poesy*" (MPW 463).

³⁰ "I could never attach myself to a young woman without striving as hard as I could to reshape her according to a certain model that was in my mind"; MPW 402. See also MPW 465: "I have turned you [Lucy] into the image of a pagan god."

³¹ See *Allwill*, MPW 470, and *Jacobi to Fichte*, MPW 516.

In effect, this was Jacobi's message in the novel: Feeling can be just as abstractive as thought, but with consequences that make a difference at the level of actual existence. Allwill creates for himself – and for those who come in contact with him – the kind of world that the philosophers only excogitate for the sake of explanation. It is not just his speculative gaze that is seductive, as is the case with the philosophers, but so is his whole engagement with others. If Lucy were not to stand up to him, her pathos would be that of one struck by Fate. This is what it is like to exist in a Spinozistic universe – as a character such as Allwill makes real.

In Jacobi's mind, the figure of Allwill obviously stood as an object lesson for what follows when *Trieb* and *Sinn*, heart and mind, are disconnected. But in the context it once more manifested the flaw that affected Jacobi's formula – a flaw that, as noted earlier, was also of the *Herzensmensch* culture, and of Jacobi's persona no less. There was no self-limiting principle, no basis for internal criticism. In his dialogue with Lessing, Jacobi could well afford to leave unsaid *where* Lessing would find the "elastic spot" from which to perform the jump he requested of him. So far as Jacobi was concerned, finding that spot was only a matter of rediscovering one's feeling, in effect, rejoining the *Herzensmenschen*. In the *Allwill*, however, we are observing this *Mensch* in its wellsprings. The framework of the action is the *heart*. Yet just where is this "spot" to be found, and how, standing on it, might one withstand the aberrations of an Allwill, or the despair that threatens Sylli under pressure of circumstances? Certainly not by way of the good feelings and the moral soundness of the Clerdon's family. Papa Clerdon and sister Clärchen are surprisingly vulnerable to Allwill's charms. Amalia's motherly instincts are a better possibility for withstanding his character. But then the strength that those instincts afforded her were also once Sylli's, before historical vicissitudes stripped her of it. She is now forced to find her strength at a "centre" within herself.³² Where is this centre? And why is it that, looking

³² MPW 452.

for it, Sylli appears to retreat into a private world of her own, certainly at the opposite extreme of Allwill's, yet just as disconnected from the instinctual virtues that bind the Clerdon's family? Above all – now speaking of Jacobi himself – how could he represent Allwill as placing himself beyond the pale of virtue by declaring himself the hero of the exception while, in asserting the same of himself against Fichte, he was in fact vaunting his moral superiority? Where does morality lie?

These questions, albeit uninvited, crowd Jacobi's narrative yet find no resolution in *Allwill*. The story is as conceptually as emotionally inconclusive. Questions of this type do, however, bother Woldemar, the eponymous character of the other novel. The social context of the narrative is much more complicated, even convoluted, in comparison with *Allwill*, but we need not bother with it except for two episodes. Woldemar is a Werther who has recognized the need of social bonds in order to realize his individuality.³³ For this reason, he has infiltrated himself into a social milieu. As he manoeuvres within it, he finds himself, one day, reflecting on how virtue is possible. How does it motivate actions that are universal in character and thus form the basis for true society? After much agonizing, the answer comes to him in an éclat of insight. It is because of the feeling of a greater presence in him (presumably God); this presence raises him above the selfishness of the body's desires, which are the real threat to social existence. In this spirit, Woldemar has arranged his relationship to Henrietta so that there be absolutely no sexual component in it, and the two be bound by a friendship that makes them twin-souls spiritually. Because of a bizarre turn of events, however, Henrietta finds herself having to keep a secret from Woldemar, a circumstance that disturbs their soul-mating and causes suspicions to germinate in Woldemar, which he in turn keeps secret. All this makes for unhappy situations until, with another bizarre turn of events, the secrets are revealed and, after emotionally charged confessions of guilt and

³³ Werther is the eponymous character of Goethe's novel *Die Leiden des jungen Werthers* (1774). Werther commits suicide after completely disconnecting himself from the surrounding reality.

declarations of forgiveness, the two are reconciled. Here the narrative ends. How the two go on living happily ever after harbouring no secrets between them is not revealed.

None of this makes for stimulating literature. Goethe famously crucified *Woldemar* on a tree while picnicking with friends.³⁴ Nonetheless, my original point – that to abstract from Jacobi’s literary side deprives his intellectual perambulations of their historical context and flattens their philosophical import – still stands. The motivating force behind the perambulations was, first and foremost, Jacobi’s belief that we can “only experience from experience”;³⁵ that thought, therefore, is nothing unless rooted in history and social existence. That was not an inconsequential insight; nor, for that matter, was his attempt to embody it in a phenomenology of human relations. But, as I have tried to illustrate, phenomenologically as reflectively, Jacobi did not manage to discipline the intimate connection of heart and mind with limits that would make it conceptually and especially ethically viable. He lacked, as I suggested at the beginning, an adequate idea of reason and rationality.

That was the situation in 1800. But the names of Hegel and Kierkegaard were strategically dropped along the way, for they are the ones who succeeded where Jacobi failed. They had the right idea of reason and rationality, and one must not underestimate Jacobi’s legacy as their forerunner.³⁶ Kierkegaard knew that to be a secret before the other is the *sine qua non* condition for retaining self-identity while giving oneself over to the other in a communication between equals. The secret must not be absorbed into the other, creating a loss of self-identity. For this reason, there is great consolation in knowing that before God, and by extension before any other, one is always in the wrong. To be such is essential to the human situation, and to shirk

³⁴ See Jacobi’s letter to H. C. Boie upon hearing of the incident, August or September 1779, letter 517, JBW 1.2:104–5.

³⁵ MPW 237.

³⁶ Late in life, Jacobi recognized his affinity with Hegel; see his Letter to Johann Neeb, 30 May 1817, in *Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi’s Auserlesener Briefwechsel*, ed. Friedrich Roth (Leipzig: Fleischer, 1825–1827), part 2, letter 360, 467–68.

before this requirement is to take refuge in the make-believe existence of a seducer. Kierkegaard's Johannes is no doubt a much more sophisticated character than Jacobi's Allwill; nonetheless, what Judge William says to Johannes, "what you want is to be – fate", applies to Allwill just as well.³⁷ Before Kierkegaard, Hegel had already made the same point with the battle for prestige that inaugurates human existence as such. He made it again in the concluding part of section six of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, where this original battle morphs into a battle between beautiful souls, *Herzensmenschen* who uphold the privilege of singularity, the right of the exception, yet claim for it universal value and therefore run into conflict with each other. It is significant that this section of the *Phenomenology* concludes with words that almost verbatim reproduce the concluding confession/forgiveness scene of *Woldemar*. In Hegel, however, the act of confessing and forgiving does not redress an accidental disturbance between twin souls, but establishes a community in which to be in the wrong is an existential necessity, making confession and forgiveness, therefore, just as necessary an institutional foundation. The ultimate failure does not lie in being in the wrong, but in failing to recognize it.

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³⁷ Søren Kierkegaard, *Either/Or: Part II*, ed. and trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988), 15.

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