· *Chapter 2* ·

Jacobi and the Pantheism Controversy

2.1. The Historical Significance of the Pantheism Controversy

Along with the publication of the *Kritik der reinen Vernunft* in May 1781, the most significant intellectual event in late eighteenth-century Germany was the so-called pantheism controversy between F. H. Jacobi and Moses Mendelssohn.[1] The controversy began in the summer of 1783,[2] initially as a private quarrel between Jacobi and Mendelssohn. But, two years later, the dispute became public and engaged almost all the best minds of late eighteenth-century Germany. Among the celebrities who took part in it were Kant, Herder, Goethe, and Hamann. Furthermore, each party to the dispute had a large supporting cast, including such later stars as Thomas Wizenmann, who defended Jacobi, and Karl Leonhard Reinhold, who popularized Kant.

It is difficult to imagine a controversy whose cause was so incidental—Jacobi's disclosure of Lessing's Spinozism—and whose effects were so great. The pantheism controversy completely changed the intellectual map of eighteenth-century Germany; and it continued to preoccupy thinkers well into the nineteenth century. The main problem raised by the controversy—the dilemma of a rational nihilism or an irrational fideism—became a central issue for Fichte, Schelling, Hegel, Kierkegaard, and Nietzsche. It is indeed no exaggeration to say that the pantheism controversy had as great an impact upon nineteenth-century philosophy as Kant's first *Kritik*.[3]

The first and most visible effect of the controversy was the remarkable rise in the fortunes of Spinozism in Germany. Nearly all the major figures of the classical *Goethezeit*—Goethe, Novalis, Hölderlin, Herder, F. Schlegel, Hegel, Schleiermacher, and Schelling—became Spinoza enthusiasts in the wake of the controversy. Apparently overnight, Spinoza's reputation changed from a devil into a saint. The scapegoat of the intellectual establishment in the first three quarters of the eighteenth century became its hero in the last

quarter. Thanks to the controversy, pantheism became, as Heine later put it, "the unofficial religion of Germany."[4]

A second striking effect of the controversy was the breakthrough of Kantianism, its final triumphal entry onto the public stage in Germany. Before the controversy reached its height in the winter of 1786, Kant had already made some progress in gaining a reputation. He had a few worthy disciples in various universities, for example, F. G. Born in Leipzig, L. H. Jakob in Halle, and C. G. Schütz in Jena; and the *Jenaische Allgemeine Literaturzeitung* had begun to champion his cause. But the critical philosophy was still far from dominating the philosophical scene and still far from the center of the public eye. Its influence was confined to a few universities, and indeed only a few select circles within them. The pantheism controversy soon changed all this, however. The decisive breakthrough came sometime in the autumn of 1786 with Reinhold's *Briefe über die kantische Philosophie.* In an elegant, popular, and lively style Reinhold had succeeded in making Kant's philosophy intelligible to a wider public. The *Briefe* had created—to quote a friend of Kant's—"a sensation."[5] But it is important to note the secret behind Reinhold's success. He established the relevance of the critical philosophy to that dispute foremost in the public eye: the pantheism controversy.

A third effect of the controversy was that it created a crisis in the *Aufklärung,* one so severe that it accelerated its eventual downfall. The revolt against the *Aufklärung* had already begun in the 1770s with the *Sturm und Drang.* The novels and plays of Goethe, Lenz, and Klinger; the philosophical tracts of Hamann, Herder, and Jacobi; and the religious writings of Lavater, Jung-Stilling, and Claudius had all established a new literary trend and spirit in Germany. The rights of feeling were proclaimed against the cold rules of reason; and the rights of self-expression were asserted against the repressive norms of society. The dawn of Romanticism was already visible as the twilight of the *Aufklärung* grew near. But, in the meantime, the *Aufklärung* still lived on, indeed as the predominant intellectual force. During the 1770s, the natural sciences made further progress; the philological and historical criticism of the Bible gained momentum; and Wolffianism entrenched itself in most of the universities of Protestant Germany. Around the same time, Lessing, Mendelssohn, and Nicolai were still active; the *Popularphilosophie* movement became even more popular; and societies like the *Freimauerer* and *Illuminati* grew in power and numbers. All in all, then, the *Aufklärung* continued to represent the literary and philosophical status quo in the 1770s, even if it was not the latest fashion.

The pantheism controversy threw the *Aufklärung* back on the defensive, forcing it to struggle for its very life. Seventeen eighty-five, the year that Jacobi published his *Briefe über die Lehre von Spinoza,* marks the end of

its hegemony. Jacobi had succeeded in casting doubt upon the central dogma of the *Aufklärung:* its faith in reason. The dramatic manner in which he attacked this dogma inflicted nothing short of trauma on the contemporary intellectual scene. Referring to the effect of the *Briefe* on the public, Goethe spoke of "an explosion,"[6] and Hegel wrote of "a thunderbolt out of the blue."[7]

The *Aufklärung's* faith in reason was based on the belief that reason could justify all the essential truths of common sense, morality, and religion. The authority of reason replaced the authority of tradition and revelation because it was a more effective sanction for all moral, religious, and commonsense beliefs. This all-important but vulnerable premise was the main target of Jacobi's attack. Reason, he argued, was not supporting but undermining all the essential truths of morality, religion, and common sense. If we were consistent and pushed our reason to its limits, then we would have to embrace atheism, fatalism, and solipsism. We would have to deny the existence of God, freedom, other minds, the external world, and even the permanent existence of our own selves. In short, we would have to deny the existence of everything, and we would have to become, to use Jacobi's dramatic language, 'nihilists'. There was then only one way to save ourselves from nihilism: 'a leap of faith', a *salto mortale.*

It is important to see that it was Jacobi, and not Kant, who shook the *Aufklärung* to its very foundations. Kant was a typical *Aufklärer* insofar as he never doubted the *Aufklärung*'s fundamental postulate of the harmony between reason and faith. Rather than questioning this belief, Kant attempted to give it a new foundation with his doctrine of rational faith. Indeed, the very reason for the success of Kant's philosophy during the pantheism controversy is that Kant seemed to rescue this all-important belief of the *Aufklärung* in the face of Jacobi's provocative criticism. His doctrine of rational faith, already worked out in the "Kanon" of the first edition of the *Kritik,* appeared to silence all of Jacobi's unsettling doubts. Significantly, Reinhold's *Briefe* saw this doctrine as the selling point of Kant's philosophy and stressed that it alone held the solution to the controversy between Jacobi and Mendelssohn.

But Kant's practical faith was at best an ad hoc solution, a finger in the dike of a swelling irrationalism. No sooner did Kant's doctrine become the center of attention than Jacobi and his allies brought it under heavy fire. The ultimate effect of these counterattacks was deeply disturbing: the truce between reason and faith seemed more fragile than ever. While Jacobi and friends picked holes in the wobbly edifice of Kant's practical faith, they also welcomed Kant's destruction of metaphysics, as more fuel to their irrationalist flames. To the German mind at the end of the eighteenth century,

reason seemed to be heading toward the abyss, and no one could see any means of stopping it.

Jacobi's attack on the *Aufklärung* in Germany is not accidentally reminiscent of Pascal's and Rousseau's earlier critiques of the *Illumination* in France. The young Jacobi was a student of Pascal and Rousseau, and he deliberately imported their ideas into Germany.[8] He merely repeated Pascal's provocative argument that reason, unaided by revelation, leads to skepticism; and he simply rehearsed, albeit in epistemological guise, Rousseau's radical thesis that the arts and sciences had done more to corrupt than improve morals. Jacobi knew that these arguments had disturbed the philosophes;[9] and he was determined that they would now upset the *Aufklärer* too.

Jacobi's criticism of reason also appears to follow along the lines of another more indigenous precedent: Hamann's *Sokratische Denkwürdigkeiten*. Jacobi was indeed an admirer of Hamann, and, just before the controversy, he entered into a correspondence with him, hoping to gain his support for the forthcoming battle against the *Aufklärung*.[10] Hamann responded warmly to Jacobi's overtures, providing him with all the advice, information, and encouragement that he needed. Despite their alliance, there was still a very important difference between Hamann's and Jacobi's positions. It was Jacobi, and not Hamann, who was the genuine irrationalist. Whereas Hamann held that faith and reason are independent of each other, so that reason neither demonstrates nor refutes faith, Jacobi argued that reason and faith are in conflict, so that reason refutes faith. Thus he said that reason, if consistent, leads to atheism. By contrast, Hamann maintained that reason transcends its limits if it attempts to disprove the existence of God. This difference did not escape Hamann, who confessed to Herder that he never could accept Jacobi's *Pia desiderata*.[11]

Even a single one of the above consequences should be sufficient to establish the historical and philosophical significance of the pantheism controversy. But, surprisingly, for an intellectual event of its magnitude, the controversy has been largely ignored.[12] The reason for this neglect primarily lies with the controversy itself, in that its deceptive appearance masks its underlying significance. It has an outer shell—the biographical issue of Lessing's Spinozism; an inner layer—the exegetical question of the proper interpretation of Spinoza; and a hidden inner core—the problem of the authority of reason. The main difficulty in understanding the controversy is seeing how these outer layers reflect the inner core, how the biographical and exegetical issues reflect and arise from the philosophical problem. It has often been assumed

that the main problem was only whether Lessing was a Spinozist,[13] or how we should interpret Spinoza's pantheism.[14] To understand the deeper significance of the pantheism controversy—and indeed the significance that it had for the participants themselves—we must recognize its underlying philosophical dimension. We have to see that Lessing and Spinoza were only symbols, which had a much wider cultural and philosophical meaning.

We have, however, paid a heavy price for our ignorance of the pantheism controversy. We have lost our philosophical orientation in dealing with the speculative systems of post-Kantian philosophy. In no small measure these systems grew up as a response to the fundamental problem raised by the pantheism controversy. What Fichte, Schelling, and Hegel were trying to do was to preserve the authority of reason in the face of Jacobi's provocative criticisms.

Before I proceed to an examination of the pantheism controversy proper, it is important to have some idea of the history of Spinozism in Germany. This history forms part of the essential background to the controversy; and the rise of Spinozism in the late eighteenth century is a phenomenon of no less significance than the emergence of Kantianism itself. By the beginning of the nineteenth century, Spinoza's philosophy had become the main competitor to Kant's, and only Spinoza had as many admirers or adherents as Kant.

2.2. The Rise of Spinozism in Germany, 1680–1786

Until the publication of Jacobi's *Briefe über die Lehre von Spinoza* in 1785, Spinoza was a notorious figure in Germany. For more than a century the academic and ecclesiastical establishment had treated him "like a dead dog," as Lessing later put it. The *Ethica* was published in Germany in 1677, and the *Tractatus theologicus-politicus* in 1670 (though it appeared anonymously, Spinoza was known to be the author). Until the middle of the eighteenth century it was de rigueur for every professor and cleric to prove his orthodoxy before taking office; and proving one's orthodoxy often demanded denouncing Spinoza as a heretic. Since attacks on Spinoza became a virtual ritual, there was an abundance of defamatory and polemical tracts against him. Indeed, by 1710 so many professors and clerics had attacked Spinoza that there was a *Catalogus scriptorum Anti-Spinozanorum* in Leipzig. And in 1759 Trinius counted, probably too modestly, 129 enemies of Spinoza in his *Freydenkerlexicon*. Such was Spinoza's reputation that he was often identified with Satan himself. Spinozism was seen as not only one form of atheism, but as the worst form. Thus Spinoza was dubbed the 'Euclides atheisticus', the 'princips atheorum'.[15]

The reception of Spinoza by the great luminaries of the early *Aufklä-*

rung—Leibniz, Wolff, and Thomasius—was scarcely more favorable. They pretended to write impartial criticisms of his philosophy; but it is plain that Spinoza's unorthodoxy heavily weighed the scales against him. There were the same dire warnings about Spinoza's heretical beliefs, and the same tendentious polemics that we find in the worst *Schmähschriften*. All of them felt obliged to denounce Spinoza and to write lengthy refutations of him. Thus, in 1688 Thomasius went to the trouble of writing an elaborate and involved critique of Spinoza in his *Monatsgespräche*. Deeming the *Ethica* to be a dangerous book, Thomasius warned his students that, of all sects, the Spinozists were the most difficult to combat. For his part, Wolff boasted that his philosophy was a bulwark against Spinozism. In his *Theologica naturalis* (1737) he gave a full-scale refutation of Spinoza, which became the standard line of the Wolffians for generations.[16] Leibniz too warned of the evils of Spinozism, which he condemned as heresy. He considered the *Ethica* "a dangerous book for those who took the pains to master it" and wrote a critical commentary on it.[17] All these thinkers, in true orthodox fashion, saw Spinozism as atheism and fatalism. For more religious than philosophical reasons, they could not accept Spinoza's denial of providence, revelation, freedom of will, and a supernatural and personal God.

Leibniz and Wolff had a special reason to distance themselves from Spinoza, however. 'Spinozism' became a favorite objection of the pietists against the Leibnizian-Wolffian school. It was felt by them that Leibniz's and Wolff's philosophy, with its insistence on strict demonstrative method, was little more than a halfway house on the fatal road to Spinozism. Some of the disciples of Thomasius, notably Joachim Lange and Johann Franz Budde, argued that Wolff's rationalism, if consistent, led straight to the atheism and fatalism of Spinoza.[18] The only way to escape such consequences, they argued, was to recognize the sovereignty of faith over reason, or revelation over demonstration. This line of argument foreshadows the later controversy between Jacobi and Mendelssohn, which in many ways merely continued the debate between the pietists and Wolffians. Jacobi's debate with Mendelssohn was only a more sophisticated version of Budde's and Lange's critique of Wolff.

But why was there such a vehement reaction against Spinoza? The fact that Spinoza was seen as the very incarnation of evil by the academic and ecclesiastical establishment forces us to raise this question. For why single out Spinoza for such abuse, especially when there were other heretics whose doctrines were no less heterodox than Spinoza's, for example, Hobbes or Bruno? Of course, part of the answer lies in Spinoza's Jewish ancestry; it was no accident that Spinoza was called "the accursed Jew of Amsterdam." But there was still another—and more important and interesting—reason why Spinoza was regarded as such a horrible heretic. Namely, Spinoza

represented the extreme left wing in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century religious and political conviction. Spinoza's political views were an indictment of the whole academic and ecclesiastical establishment in Germany, and this threat was clearly felt.[19] In his *Tractatus theologicus-politicus* Spinoza not only laid down the basis for the philological and historical criticism of the Bible—the sacred cow of the Lutheran establishment—but he also defended such progressive causes as tolerance, freedom of speech and conscience, democracy, a universal religion, and the separation of church and state. Consider the effect that such a book would have upon the powers that be of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Germany. Since the "Augsburger Religions-friede" (1555), the princes in Germany had the right to determine the religion of their principality, so that the church became part of the general legal system. Observation of the official religion became a sheer legal necessity. Hence there was no such thing as tolerance, freedom of conscience, and ecclesiastical independence in the principalities—all the causes championed by Spinoza. The professors and clergy, who were little more than glorified civil servants, had to exorcise Spinoza, who had criticized their dubious dependence on the state. Spinoza was biting the hand that was feeding him, and gratitude demanded heaping not a little obloquy upon his cursed head.

Fortunately, the history of Spinoza's reception in Germany is not only a tale of infamy and woe. If Spinoza was passionately denounced by the establishment, he was equally passionately embraced by its opponents. It is an old myth that Spinoza was treated "like a dead dog" long before the end of the eighteenth century. The truth of the matter is that he was in the very vanguard of the *Aufklärung* in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries in Germany, and that he was indeed the patron saint of its extreme left wing. Almost all the radical freethinkers of that time—Gottfried Arnold, Johann Christian Edelmann, Friedrich Wilhelm Stosch, Theodor Ludwig Lau, Johann Lorenz Schmidt—were also covert or overt Spinozists. Those who did not ally themselves with Spinoza—Konrad Dippel and Angelus Silesius—still had metaphysical and political views that were similar to his.[20] These thinkers stood—and suffered—for all the radical ideals of Spinoza's *Tractatus:* tolerance, a universal religion, freedom of conscience, the separation of church and state, and the historical and philological criticism of the Bible. Thus the establishment's harsh condemnation of Spinoza was also a symbolic denunciation of its left-wing opposition.

Almost all the early Spinozists in Germany were the unhappy children of the Protestant Counter-Reformation.[21] Most of them had been, or still were, pietists, and all of them had become bitterly disillusioned with the

course of the Reformation. They were fiercely loyal to its original ideals: the universal priesthood of believers, freedom of conscience, the necessity for an immediate relationship to God. But in their eyes the Reformation had gone astray and betrayed its own principles. Since the Lutheran Church had become part of the state, it had developed an authoritarian structure of its own, and had thus become a form of dogmatism and elitism no better than the Roman Catholic Church. What, then, had become of Luther's ideals?

To these discontented radicals and reformers, Spinoza represented the very spirit of rebellion. His criticism of the Bible, his support for democracy, his ideal of a universal religion, and his call for a separation of church and state were just the weapons that they needed to fight the political and ecclesiastical establishment. The *Tractatus theologicus-politicus* thus became the manifesto for all their radical opinions.[22]

If Spinoza's *Tractatus* was important to these early freethinkers and radicals, his *Ethica* was even more so. They eagerly embraced Spinoza's pantheism, which they saw as the foundation for all their radical political convictions. What Heine said of pantheism in the early nineteenth century—that it was the religion of the radicals—was in fact true centuries earlier.[23] During the sixteenth, seventeenth, and early eighteenth centuries, many of the radicals were pantheists.[24]

But whence this connection between pantheism and political radicalism? Why was pantheism so appealing to the early radicals? How did it support their political ideals? This issue is of the utmost importance if we are to understand the rise of Spinozism in the late eighteenth century. For the later enthusiastic acceptance of Spinoza's pantheism was partly conditioned by the increasing strength of liberal political causes. The rise of Spinozism was a reassertion of the political ideals of the Protestant Counter-Reformation.

The answer to the question largely lies in the early radical interpretation of Luther's ideal of an immediate relationship to God. According to Luther's ideal, everyone should have a personal relationship to God where he is directly answerable to God alone and not the church. What made such a relationship possible in orthodox Lutheranism was the Bible, which had been made available to the public through Luther's translation. If one simply read the Bible, which he had rendered into plain German, then one could know God's message by oneself, and it would not be necessary to consult the clergy. Now the early freethinkers eagerly embraced Luther's ideal of an immediate relationship to God, which appealed to their sense of equality and freedom. But, thanks to Spinoza's *Tractatus,* they no longer saw the Bible as an infallible guarantee of that relationship. Spinoza had taught them that the Bible was the product not of divine inspiration, but of history and culture, like any other human document. What, then, could guarantee

an immediate relationship to God if the Bible was not a sure means of access to him? Our own immediate experience, our direct awareness of God within ourselves, the early radicals said. All of us could have such an experience, they believed, if we would only reflect upon ourselves and listen to God within us.

Here lies the attraction of pantheism for the early freethinkers: it ensured the possibility of everyone having such an experience, of everyone having direct access to God. The God of pantheism is within me and everyone else, so that, in order to experience him, it is necessary for me only to reflect upon myself. The God of theism, however, is not nearly so accessible. He is a supernatural being who only occasionally makes himself known in nature through the odd miracle. Hence he is accessible only to an elite few, namely, those who are fortunate enough to witness his miracles.

Hence the appeal of pantheism ultimately lay deep in Lutheranism itself. Someone who insisted upon Luther's ideal of an immediate relationship to God, and who at the same time had his doubts about the authority of the Bible, would find pantheism a very appealing doctrine. It is no accident that most of the later Spinozists had Lutheran backgrounds, that they did not accept the authority of the Bible, and that they insisted on the need for an immediate experience of God. Pantheism was thus the secret credo of the heterodox Lutheran.[25]

The first significant step toward a more public recognition of Spinoza in the eighteenth century was taken by—ironically—Moses Mendelssohn.[26] Mendelssohn is usually portrayed as the bitter opponent of Spinozism, and so he was in his *Morgenstunden* (1785). But, in his first published work, the *Philosophische Gespräche* (1755), Mendelssohn wrote a spirited defense of Spinoza. Although Mendelssohn himself was a disciple of the Leibnizian-Wolffian school, he still pleaded for a more serious and impartial examination of Spinoza. Here indeed lies the historical significance of Mendelssohn's little book. It is the first attempt at an objective philosophical treatment of Spinoza.[27] Neither the defenders nor opponents of Spinoza in the early eighteenth century could make any claim to objectivity because they were either too predisposed or too hostile to his views.

The basis for Mendelssohn's sympathy for Spinoza was undoubtedly his Jewish heritage. Both Mendelssohn and Spinoza were ardent students of Moses Maimonides in their youth, and, accordingly, both affirmed a belief in the reconcilability of philosophy and faith, reason and religion. Although sympathetic to Spinoza, who he deeply admired for his nobility of character amid persecution, Mendelssohn was an orthodox Jew who was disturbed by Spinoza's apostasy. He may have dreamt of becoming "a second Spi-

noza," as Lessing said, [28] but he never wanted to preach a philosophy as controversial as Spinoza's or to break with the religion of his fathers. Mendelssohn's path toward Spinoza was therefore an individual one, and he was never allied with the early Spinozists, who were for the most part nonconformist Christians. As legend has it, Mendelssohn met one of the most notorious of the early Spinozists, Johann Christian Edelmann, whose coarseness sent him hurrying to the door.[29]

The *Philosophische Gespräche* was, true to title, written in dialogue form. The characters in the dialogue, Neophil and Philopon, probably represent Lessing and Mendelssohn; and it is likely that the dialogue reconstructs conversations between Lessing and Mendelssohn during the first year of their friendship.[30] Ironically, there is a complete reversal of the positions later taken by Lessing and Mendelssohn in 1785. In the *Philosophische Gespräche* Lessing is cast in the role of the skeptical anti-Spinozist, and it is Mendelssohn who tries to convince him of the plausibility of Spinoza's philosophy. It was indeed Mendelssohn who first introduced Lessing to Spinoza.

The express aim of the *Gespräche* is to rehabilitate Spinoza. Although Mendelssohn does not intend to convert his readers to Spinozism—that would be going too far even for his more liberal taste—he does want them to consider Spinoza more dispassionately and impartially. In this modest aim Mendelssohn succeeds admirably. There are a number of ways in which he establishes Spinoza's importance and vindicates his reputation. (1) He discredits the popular picture of Spinoza found in Bayle's *Dictionaire historique et critique.* Bayle's criticisms of Spinoza had found wide acceptance in the eighteenth century, although this was based more on Bayle's wit than on his profundity. Mendelssohn has little difficulty in showing that most of Bayle's criticisms rest upon misunderstandings.[31] (2) Mendelssohn reveals that there are many points of similarity between Leibniz and Spinoza, and argues that Leibniz had taken some of his characteristic doctrines from Spinoza. Leibniz's notion of the preestablished harmony, for example, is said to have its source in Spinoza's idea that the mind and body are independent attributes of one and the same substance.[32] (3) Mendelssohn maintains that Leibniz is on weak grounds in some of the respects in which he differs from Spinoza, so that mending Leibniz's system brings him closer to Spinoza. Leibniz's theory that the world arises from God's free will, for instance, suffers from the classic objection that there is no reason why God did not create the world earlier. This difficulty does not arise with Spinoza, Mendelssohn claims, since he admits the infinity of the universe.[33] (4) Last, but most important, Mendelssohn interprets Spinoza's philosophy so that it is consistent with morality and religion. Spinoza's view of the universe becomes perfectly acceptable, Mendelssohn suggests, provided that it applies

to the world as it exists in God's mind prior to becoming real through his decrees.[34] The Leibnizians attribute a twofold existence to the world: the world as it exists prior to its creation as a possibility in the mind of God; and the world as it exists in reality outside God and as a product of his decrees. Spinoza fails to recognize this distinction, however, and that is where he goes astray, according to Mendelssohn. What the Leibnizians assert of the ideal world—that it exists in God and is inseparable from his intellect—is what Spinoza also says of the real world. But, provided that we recognize this distinction, Mendelssohn contends, it is possible to be a qualified Spinozist—a Spinozist in the ideal world and a Leibnizian in the real one. This reinterpretation of Spinoza, stressing the ideal existence of the world in the mind of God, is significant in foreshadowing the 'purified pantheism' that Mendelssohn later attributes to Lessing in *Morgenstunden.*[35]

In general, although he sometimes argues in favor of Spinoza against Leibniz, Mendelssohn tries to resurrect Spinoza by showing that he is a mediating figure, the necessary transitional stage, between Descartes and Leibniz. That is a neat reversal of the old pietist argument that Leibniz is only a halfway house on the fatal road to Spinoza. Later, in his *Morgenstunden,* Mendelssohn defends this interpretation of Spinoza against Jacobi, who reasserts the pietistic argument.

In 1763, only eight years after the publication of Mendelssohn's *Gespräche,* someone else made his personal discovery of Spinoza—a discovery that was to prove fateful for the later reception of Spinoza in Germany. This person was none other than F. H. Jacobi himself. The story of Jacobi's discovery of Spinoza is an exciting one, shedding not a little light on Jacobi's early relationship to Kant and his later controversy with Mendelssohn. But the story has a strange and surprising twist: it was Kant who first convinced Jacobi of the necessity of Spinoza's philosophy.

In the first edition of *David Hume* Jacobi himself tells us how he came to Spinoza. While studying all the old protagonists of the ontological argument in 1763, he says, he came across a striking remark of Leibniz's: "Spinozism is nothing more than exaggerated Cartesianism." It was this remark that sparked his interest in Spinoza.[36] Jacobi turned to the *Ethica,* hoping to find a clearer formulation of Descartes's version of the ontological argument. And he was not disappointed. Spinoza clarified Descartes's proof for him; but, even more important, he also taught him "for what God" the proof was valid. Presumably, this God was no less than the God of Spinoza, the single universal substance of which everything else is only a mode. Unfortunately, Jacobi does not explain precisely how he became convinced of this. One significant point is still clear: as early as 1763 Jacobi already held that reason was heading in the direction of Spinozism.

Jacobi recalls that he became totally convinced of this point upon reading Kant's early work *Der einzig mögliche Beweisgrunde zu einer Demonstration des Daseins Gottes*. This work so excited him, he later confessed, that he had to put it down from time to time to stop his heart from beating so wildly. Jacobi enthusiastically endorsed Kant's new proof of the existence of God; but he accepted it with one significant qualification, one that would have horrified Kant: namely, that it was true only for Spinoza's God. Kant, in Jacobi's view, had unwittingly demonstrated the necessity of pantheism.

How could Jacobi arrive at such a remarkable conclusion? It is not difficult to see his point once we understand the thrust of Kant's new proof for the existence of God. According to Kant's proof, the existence of God is prior to his possibility and that of all other things; in other words, if God did not exist, not only would nothing else exist, but nothing else would be even possible.[37] God's existence is prior to the possibility of all things in the sense that all predication, or any possible attribute that we ascribe to a thing, presupposes some existence which is to be qualified or determined. What is it, though, that exists prior to being qualified or determined? Existence pure and simple is the answer, or what Kant calls 'the absolute positing of a thing'. This absolute existence of all things, what exists prior to their being determined in this or that respect, Kant equates with the existence of God himself.

Now, to Jacobi, Kant's proof was tantamount to a demonstration of the existence of Spinoza's God. For what is Spinoza's God, Jacobi asks, other than the concept of existence itself, that being of which everything else is only a limitation? The same proof would not hold for the God of deism, however, which is not existence per se, but a specific kind of existent, a set of properties (omniscience and omnipotence) from which we can never automatically infer existence itself. Of course, Kant himself would not be so hasty in equating God's existence with his essence. In his view, God's existence preceded *his* possibility as well as that of all other things; God had other properties which made him a specific kind of existent. But Jacobi had no such scruples. His tendentious reading of Kant's work had shown him that the only possible demonstration for the existence of God was a demonstration for the existence of Spinoza's God. So, for better or for worse, it was Kant who originally convinced Jacobi that all speculative philosophy ends in Spinozism. During his reading of Kant's book, Jacobi hit upon the central idea that he would later pit against Mendelssohn.[38]

Of course, the most famous Spinozist of them all was Lessing. Around 1763, the same time as Jacobi was discovering Spinoza, Lessing began his first serious study of the *Ethica* and *Tractatus theologicus-politicus*. Mendelssohn had already introduced Lessing to Spinoza as early as 1754, and an

early fragment dating back to that time, "Die Christenthum der Vernunft," shows that Lessing was moving toward pantheism, if not downright Spinozism.[39] At this early date, though, Lessing does not seem to have studied Spinoza in depth.[40] It was not until 1763 that his studies began in earnest. Two early fragments from that year, "Ueber die Wirklichkeit der Dinge ausser Gott" and "Durch Spinoza ist Leibniz erst auf die Spur der vorherbestimmten Harmonie gekommen," show Lessing's preoccupation with Spinozist themes.[41]

Lessing is part and parcel of the Spinozist tradition in Germany, and, much more than Mendelssohn or Jacobi, he is in the direct line of succession from the early Spinozists. There is a pantheism which goes hand in hand with liberal political views. Lessing, like all the other early Spinozists, believed in the value of biblical criticism, natural religion, tolerance, and equality. He too was deeply indebted to the *Tractatus,* which probably first fired his interest in Spinoza.[42] *Nathan der Weise* is indeed little more than a dramatic presentation of the philosophical doctrines of Spinoza's *Tractatus.* What completes Lessing's ties with the Spinozist tradition is that he considered himself a Lutheran—if only in spirit—because of his firm conviction that every individual had the right to think for himself.[43] In this respect Lessing preserves the legacy of the Protestant Counter-Reformation, the tradition from which all the early Spinozists sprang.

A crucial chapter in the history of Spinozism in Germany began in 1778, with Lessing's bitter dispute with H. M. Goeze, an orthodox Lutheran pastor in Hamburg. Although this dispute ostensibly did not center on, or even include, Spinoza, the issues that it raised are part of the essential background to Jacobi's later controversy with Mendelssohn. This dispute also laid the ground for the Spinoza renaissance some ten years later.

The occasion for Lessing's dispute with Goeze was Lessing's publication from 1774 to 1778 of the *Wolffenbüttler Fragmente,* a work consisting of a commentary upon, and lengthy extracts from, H. S. Reimarus's *Apologie oder Schützschrift für die vernünftige Verehrer Gottes.* This treatise was so heretical that Reimarus did not dare to publish it in his lifetime. After his death, though, Elise Reimarus, his daughter, handed the manuscript over to Lessing. Lessing then published the manuscript without disclosing the author's name and under the pretense of having found it in the library at Wolffenbüttel.

Reimarus's *Apologie* is essentially a critique of positive religion and a defense of natural religion. It was his general thesis that religion had to be based upon reason alone, and that no rational person could possibly accept the historical record contained in the Bible. Reimarus took his criticism to the most heretical extremes, however. He maintained that many of the stories in the Bible were deliberate fabrications; and he insisted on jettisoning most of the dogmas of orthodox Christianity, namely, the resurrection,

original sin, the trinity, and eternal punishment.[44] It should come as no surprise that Reimarus was an avid student of Spinoza's *Tractatus,* and that much in his *Apologie* breathes a Spinozist spirit.[45] In publishing Reimarus's work, Lessing was thus airing Spinoza's views.

Lessing had his own complex philosophical motives for publishing Reimarus's heretical work. He did not agree with everything that Reimarus said, and to make this clear he published his extracts along with a critical commentary. Nonetheless, Reimarus's *Apologie* still provided Lessing with the best opportunity for putting forward his own theological views. It was Lessing's firm belief that the two major theological schools of his day took extreme and implausible views. There were the orthodox, who wanted to base religion upon revelation and the dogmatic truth of the Bible; and there were the neologists, who based religion upon reason and who wanted to demonstrate all the truths contained in the Bible. According to Lessing, the orthodox overextended the sphere of faith in defending beliefs that could not withstand rational criticism, while the neologists overextended the sphere of reason in trying to justify beliefs whose only basis was historical. Now, by publishing Reimarus's *Apologie,* Lessing thought that he could reveal the mistaken beliefs of both the orthodox and the neologists. Reimarus's critique of revelation showed that reason stood in a critical relationship to miracles and prophecy. This would teach the neologists that it is absurd to demonstrate everything contained in revelation; and it would show the orthodox that it is foolish to enjoin a faith that is vulnerable to criticism.

The publication of the *Wolffenbüttler Fragmente* had a sensational effect on the public of the day. Both the neologists and the orthodox theologians were shocked by Reimarus's attack upon positive religion, and they were suspicious of Lessing's motives in publishing such a dangerous book. Such an outspoken attack upon Christianity was to them tantamount to endangering public order. They feared that the book would weaken the faith of the common man, which was the main pillar of civil obedience. As one reviewer complained in the *Allgemeine deutsche Bibliothek:* "What useful purpose can such a book serve in the interests of the Christian public . . . We shall never invent a better religion for men than the religion of Christ, which apart from its inner rationality also has an external positive sanction. Can we want to deprive the people of the latter? Is this not to expose the ship to the open sea without rudder, mast or sail?"[46]

The cause of the orthodox was soon taken up by Pastor Goeze.[47] He felt that Lessing was not only misguided in publishing the work, but also suspiciously lax in criticizing it. Lessing, it seemed, endorsed Reimarus's criticism of the Bible. A pitched battle between Lessing and Goeze then ensued, which produced one of the masterpieces of German polemical literature, Lessing's *Anti-Goeze.*

The main issue between Lessing and Goeze concerned whether or not

the truth of the Bible is necessary for Christianity. Goeze defended the orthodox Lutheran position that the Bible is the basis of the Christian faith, an infallible document written under divine inspiration. Lessing maintained, however, that the truth of the Bible is not necessary for faith, so that criticisms like those of Reimarus do not undermine the essence of Christianity. As Lessing summed up his position: "The letter is not the spirit, and the Bible is not religion, so that objections against the letter, or against the Bible, are not ipso facto objections against religion."[48] Lessing used Leibniz's distinction between truths of fact and truths of reason to prove his point. Even assuming that everything in the Bible is true, he argued, it does not follow that any truth of Christianity is also true. For the Bible purports to contain nothing but truths of fact; and from no contingent truth of fact does a necessary truth of reason follow. It does not follow, for example, from the truth of the proposition 'Jesus rose from the dead' that 'Jesus is the son of God'. There is "a wide ugly ditch" between historical and metaphysical truth, Lessing said, and he confessed that he did not know how to cross it. Lessing concluded from this argument that the basis of religion had to be reason, not revelation.[49]

Jacobi's later controversy with Mendelssohn is essentially a continuation of Goeze's debate with Lessing.[50] Jacobi defended the case for positive religion against Lessing and Mendelssohn. This does not mean, however, that Jacobi was willing to defend the infallibility of the Bible, like Goeze, and still less that he was a political reactionary who saw the publication of the *Wolfenbüttler Fragmente* as a danger to public morality.[51] Nevertheless, Jacobi insisted that the basis of religion must be revelation, not reason. Revelation did not necessarily come from the Bible; it could also come from inner experience. Religion had to be based upon historical fact, whether that was the experience of present events or the testimony of past events contained in the Bible. It is interesting to note that Jacobi never disputed Lessing's distinction between the truths of fact and the truths of reason; he only drew the opposite conclusion from it. Namely, that reason could not demonstrate the existence of anything, and in particular the existence of God; hence all evidence for God's existence had to come from revelation.

Lessing's battle with Goeze not only provided the issues for Jacobi's controversy with Mendelssohn; it also paved the way for the later reception of Spinoza. Lessing's devastating polemics against Goeze did much to weaken the position of the orthodox, who had always persecuted the Spinozists. But, much more significant, Lessing had shown that it is possible to be a Lutheran in spirit without accepting the authority of the Bible. There could have been no better restatement of the spirit of the Protestant Counter-Reformation than Lessing's *Anti-Goeze*. In that work Lessing publicly vindicated the cause of Lutheran nonconformity. All the latent pantheistic

strains in Lutheranism, which emerge as soon as we divest ourselves of the authority of the Bible, were now free to express themselves.

After 1785 public opinion of Spinoza changed from almost universal contempt to almost universal admiration, largely as a result of the publication of Jacobi's *Briefe,* in which he revealed Lessing's Spinozism. Lessing was the most admired figure of the *Aufklärung,* and his credo automatically gave a stamp of legitimacy to every secret Spinozist. One after another the Spinozists could now come out of their closets and form a file behind Lessing. If Lessing was an honorable man and a Spinozist, then they could be too. Ironically, Jacobi's *Briefe* did not destroy Lessing's reputation, as Mendelssohn feared. It did the very opposite, making him a hero in the eyes of the nonconformists. Lessing made it a fashion to be unorthodox; and to be fashionably unorthodox was to be a Spinozist.

Of course, Lessing's credo explains only how Spinozism became respectable. It accounts for why a Spinozist might go public, but not for why he became a Spinozist in the first place. To understand why Spinozism became the credo of so many other thinkers, we have to consider the new situation of the sciences at the close of the eighteenth century.

The rise in the fortunes of Spinozism resulted in part from the consequence of the decline of theism and deism. By the middle of the eighteenth century theism was suffering at the hands of the sciences. Two of the cardinal tenets of theism—the belief in miracles and the authority of the Bible—were looking less and less plausible. Modern physics had become status quo by the middle of the eighteenth century, and its picture of the necessary order of nature cast doubt upon the possibility of miracles. Around the same time the historical and philological criticism of the Bible, at the hands of J. A. Ernesti in Leipzig and J. D. Michaelis in Göttingen, began to undermine its authority.[52] The Bible seemed to be no longer the product of supernatural inspiration, but of man himself writing under specific historical and cultural circumstances. The main principle behind Spinoza's biblical criticism—that the Bible is the product of nature—had been vindicated.

Although deism seemed to be consistent with modern physics and biblical criticism, it too began its decline. If theism was the victim of science, deism was the victim of philosophical criticism. The mainstays of deism were the ontological and cosmological arguments. But these arguments had become discredited by the 1780s. Hume's *Dialogues concerning Natural Religion,* Butler's *Analogy of Religion,* and Diderot's *Lettre sur les aveugles* had severely damaged the cosmological argument, while Kant's *Kritik* appeared to provide a fatal exposé of the ontological argument.

Whereas theism and deism were vulnerable to the advance of the sciences

and philosophical criticism, Spinoza's pantheism seemed to be immune from them both. Indeed, to the eighteenth-century mind, Spinoza was the prophet of modern science. The science of biblical criticism advanced in the *Tractatus* was clearly groundbreaking and far ahead of its time. And the radical naturalism of the *Ethica* seemed to represent the very philosophy of modern science. Spinoza's denial of final causes and providence, his affirmation of determinism and the infinity of the universe, his belief in an impersonal and cosmic God—all these were thought to be the consequences of modern scientific naturalism. Of course, Spinoza's rationalism, and in particular his use of the geometric method in metaphysics, had been largely discredited by the 1780s, and no one was so naive as to believe in its infallibility. But it was more the content of Spinoza's system (its naturalism) than its form (its geometric method) that commanded the respect of the eighteenth century. The belief in Spinoza's cosmic God seemed to be the religion of science itself.

Thus part of the appeal of Spinozism at the end of the eighteenth century was its religious attitude toward the world, an attitude that was still consistent with, if not the result of, modern science. Spinoza's pantheism seemed to be a viable middle path between a discredited theism and deism on the one hand and a ruthless materialism and atheism on the other hand. If the thinkers of the *Goethezeit* were not willing to return to theism or revive deism, neither were they inclined to go as far as Holbach's *System de la nature* and to assert a bald atheism and materialism.

As well as the state of philosophy and science, there were other factors behind the triumph of Spinozism in late eighteenth-century Germany. One of these factors, which cannot be overestimated, is Lutheranism itself, and in particular its ideals of equality and an immediate relationship to God. We have already seen how Luther's ideals lend themselves to pantheism once the authority of the Bible is rejected. For this pantheistic tendency latent within Lutheranism to realize itself, two conditions had to be fulfilled. First, the authority of the Bible had to be discredited; and, second, Luther's ideals had to be maintained. Both of these conditions obtained. The first was satisfied by the growth of biblical criticism and by Lessing's victory over Goeze. The second was fulfilled through the pietistic movement, whose influence was still discernible well into the late eighteenth century. Not a few of the *Goethezeit* pantheists had pietistic backgrounds, which inevitably influenced their thinking.

To understand the rise of Spinozism in late eighteenth-century Germany, it is crucial that we take this Lutheran dimension into account.[53] Luther's ideals were the guiding spirit behind the later Spinozists as well as the early ones. There was indeed a single Spinozist tradition running from the late seventeenth century into the late eighteenth century, one that was constantly

under the inspiration of Luther. One characteristic, and indeed conspicuous, feature of *Goethezeit* pantheism betrays his persistent influence. This is the insistence of almost all the later Spinozists upon the importance of having an experience of God, of standing in communion with nature as a whole. We find this expressed time and again in Goethe, Schelling, Schleiermacher, Novalis, Hölderlin, and Herder. It is this mystical strand of *Goethezeit* pantheism that distinguishes it from the rationalism of orthodox Spinozism. It is as if the intellectual love of God were the beginning, not the end, of Spinoza's system. Yet what is this feature of *Goethezeit* pantheism other than a reassertion of Luther's ideal of an immediate relationship to God? What was true of Spinozism in the late seventeenth century did not cease to be true of it in the late eighteenth: it was Lutheranism without the Bible.

2.3. The Dispute over Lessing's Spinozism

On March 25, 1783 Elise Reimarus, friend of Jacobi, Lessing, and Mendelssohn, and daughter of Herman Samuel Reimarus (author of the *Apologie*), wrote Jacobi about the latest news from Berlin.[54] Only the day before, she had paid a visit to Mendelssohn, who had informed her of his latest literary plans. Mendelssohn assured her that he still intended to finish his long-promised work on Lessing's character, a work he had planned to write ever since Lessing's death in February 1781. This tract was to be a tribute to the character of his closest friend, a man whom he had known for thirty years, and with whom he shared all his most intimate thoughts. Reimarus was delighted to hear of Mendelssohn's fresh resolve, and she promptly relayed the happy news to Jacobi.

After hearing of Mendelssohn's plans Jacobi wrote back to Reimarus on July 21, 1783, asking her if Mendelssohn knew about Lessing's final religious views.[55] He had something important to tell her, something so important he could confide it only "under the rose of friendship." It was indeed a shocking piece of news for the orthodox. But Jacobi felt obliged to tell it all the same: "In his last days, Lessing was a committed Spinozist!" Astounding though it was, Jacobi implied that Lessing had made just such a confession to him. And surely this fact should be communicated to Mendelssohn. Surely it was necessary for Mendelssohn to know about Lessing's Spinozism if he was to write a book on Lessing's character. But, plainly, the whole matter was very delicate. How was it possible to disclose Lessing's unorthodox views to an orthodox public? Such was Spinoza's reputation in eighteenth-century Germany that to be a Spinozist was also to be an atheist. Mendelssohn would have to treat Lessing's ultimate religious views with extreme caution. If he openly betrayed Lessing's Spinozism, then he would be bound to shock the public and defame rather than dignify Lessing's

character. If, however, he completely repressed the facts, then he could not claim to write anything like an honest or definitive biography. Jacobi told Reimarus that he did not know whether Lessing had imparted his views to others, and Mendelssohn in particular. It was possible that Lessing told Mendelssohn; but it was also possible that he did not, since Lessing had not seen Mendelssohn for a long time before his death and did not like writing letters. Jacobi then left it up to Reimarus's discretion whether or not to tell Mendelssohn of Lessing's Spinozism.

Although it appears to be perfectly honest and well-meaning, Jacobi's letter to Reimarus was in fact disingenuous. Jacobi knew very well that Lessing had not confessed his Spinozism to Mendelssohn.[56] He also was not concerned about discretion or the consequences of revealing Lessing's Spinozism to the public, given that he would publish his intimate conversations with Lessing only two years later. And despite the air of indifference in leaving the matter to Reimarus's discretion, Jacobi wanted nothing more than for her to inform Mendelssohn.

So why the subterfuge? What was Jacobi up to? Simply put, he was laying a trap for Mendelssohn. He knew that his information would alarm Mendelssohn; and he calculated that it would compel Mendelssohn to doubt or deny the claim of Lessing's Spinozism, which was tantamount to calling his best friend an atheist. After Mendelssohn voiced his doubts or suspicions, Jacobi could enter the fray and divulge the contents of his personal conversations with Lessing. Such a tactic would prove his closer friendship to Lessing and expose Mendelssohn's ignorance of their old friend's most intimate opinions. So, prima facie, what was at stake was Mendelssohn's claim to be the sole legitimate heir and spokesman for Lessing. Jacobi wanted that title for himself, and he was willing to resort to underhanded means to get it.

Jacobi's eagerness to contest Mendelssohn's claim was already apparent from a small literary skirmish that he had contrived with Mendelssohn only a year earlier, which foreshadows much of the later controversy. In his *Etwas, das Lessing gesagt hat* (1782) Jacobi cited a statement of Lessing to support his attack on all forms of political and religious authority: "What Febronius and his disciples said was nothing but shameless flattery of the princes; for all their arguments against the rights of the popes were either groundless or applied with double and treble force to the princes themselves."[57] It was significant for Jacobi that Lessing had the courage to criticize the Protestant princes as well as the Catholic popes. This meant that Lessing was not one of the Berlin *Aufklärer*, who were always ready to abandon their intellectual ideals in order to compromise with the moral and political status quo. Lessing, unlike the Berliners, had the integrity to take a point to its logical conclusion, despite the moral and political consequences. Thus

Jacobi felt that Lessing was on his side in the struggle against every form of despotism—and, as will become evident, this included the "despotism of the *Aufklärung*" in Berlin.

After Jacobi's book appeared Mendelssohn made some critical comments on it, a few of which questioned Jacobi's understanding of Lessing.[58] These comments were later forwarded to Jacobi, who then took the extraordinary step of fabricating an article against himself, consisting inter alia of Mendelssohn's remarks. He then published the article anonymously in the January 1783 issue of the *Deutsches Museum*. This remarkable ploy finally gave Jacobi what he wanted: the opportunity to have a public debate with Mendelssohn. In his reply to Mendelssohn's criticisms Jacobi quarreled with Mendelssohn's interpretation of Lessing's irony.[59] Mendelssohn claimed that Lessing's statement against the princes was only an example of his love of paradox and therefore it could not be seriously attributed to him. This love of paradox tended to make Lessing oppose any exaggeration, if it was widely believed, with another exaggeration. But Jacobi countered this interpretation by appealing to his special knowledge of Lessing. Lessing told him personally, he said, that he would never indulge in paradox for its own sake, and that he would never attack a true belief unless it were based upon poor arguments. This interpretation of Lessing's irony was also important for the dispute to come. According to Jacobi, it meant that Lessing did not confess his Spinozism to him merely out of love of paradox.

Despite Jacobi's desperate ploy, Mendelssohn was not to be lured into battle. Mendelssohn only courteously conceded Jacobi's point. He saw Jacobi as a mere literatus, who was not worth his time. Needless to say, Jacobi detected this and was insulted and frustrated by it. The next time he would not let Mendelssohn slip away so easily.

Just as Jacobi expected, Elise Reimarus dutifully passed on the secret about Lessing's Spinozism. On August 4, 1783 she wrote Mendelssohn, giving him Jacobi's news and enclosing a copy of Jacobi's July 21 letter.[60] What was Mendelssohn's reaction to such stunning news? To put it mildly, it was one of puzzlement and annoyance. In his August 16 reply to Reimarus, Mendelssohn asked with some consternation, "What does it mean that Lessing was a Spinozist?"[61] Jacobi would have to explain himself. As it stood, his claim was too bald and too vague for him to cast serious judgment on it. "What precisely did Lessing say?" "How, and under what circumstances, did he say it?" "What did Lessing mean by Spinozism?" "And what particular doctrines of Spinoza did he have in mind?" All these questions, and more, had to be answered before Mendelssohn even began to assess Jacobi's claim. Whatever Jacobi might say, Mendelssohn was suspicious. He dismissed the possibility that Lessing was a Spinozist pure and simple. If Lessing ever said that he held Spinozism to be the only possible system,

then he had either lost his senses or was in another of his combative and ironic moods in which he would defend an unpopular view simply for the sake of argument. Assuming, however, that Jacobi were right about Lessing's Spinozism, Mendelssohn said that he saw no reason to suppress this fact. There was no cause for disguise or censorship, as Jacobi imagined. The interests of truth could not be compromised, and they would be served only by frankly revealing Lessing's Spinozism. "Even our best friend's name should not shine in a better light than it deserves," Mendelssohn told Reimarus.

In his readiness to acknowledge and publicize Lessing's Spinozism, provided Jacobi managed to substantiate his allegation, Mendelssohn appeared to have given up his struggle with Jacobi. In fact, he was only playing his cards. Mendelssohn knew that Reimarus would either forward or summarize his letter to Jacobi, so he had to weigh his response carefully. There was an element of disingenuousness in Mendelssohn's reply, just as there was in Jacobi's original letter. What he seemed so willing to acknowledge was precisely what he feared most. If a simple assertion of Lessing's Spinozism were made, it would irreparably damage his friend's reputation. Hence Mendelssohn did not suggest that Jacobi should publish his information, and indeed he was willing to go to great lengths to forestall publication. Why, then, his seeming willingness to acknowledge the bald truth of Jacobi's claim? There were at least two motives for this. First, Mendelssohn sought to remonstrate Jacobi for his suggestion that he might want to suppress the facts and write a less than honest epitaph. That suggestion had put his integrity into question, and he had no choice but to dismiss it. Second, Mendelssohn's apparent willingness was also a sign of his confidence that, if Jacobi should justify his claim, he was in a position to interpret Lessing's Spinozism in an innocuous manner perfectly consistent with the truths of natural religion and morality. In his *An die Freunde Lessings*, written some two years later during the very height of the controversy, Mendelssohn insisted that he had always known of Lessing's sympathy for Spinozism since the earliest days of their friendship. But he associated Lessing's Spinozism with the ideas expounded in the early fragment "Die Christenthum der Vernunft." The strains of Spinozism found in that fragment were, at least in Mendelssohn's eyes, completely compatible with all the essential truths of morality and religion. Thus if Mendelssohn could publish his account of Lessing's Spinozism before Jacobi, that would take the sting out of any bald declaration by Jacobi of Lessing's Spinozism. In that way, Lessing's reputation could easily be saved. All in all, then, Mendelssohn's disingenuousness shows one thing: that he had clearly seen Jacobi's trap—and deftly avoided it.[62]

It was now very clear that a battle between Jacobi and Mendelssohn was imminent. It was only a question of letting events take their natural course. On September 1, 1783 Reimarus duly sent a summary of Mendelssohn's August 16 letter to Jacobi.[63] Upon receiving it, Jacobi felt that he had no choice but to oblige Mendelssohn's request for more information about Lessing's Spinozism.[64] So, only two months later, on November 4, 1783 Jacobi wrote a long letter (of some thirty-six quarto pages), describing his conversations with Lessing, during which Lessing allegedly made his confession of Spinozism. It was this record of his conversations with Lessing that was to have such an enormous impact on the cultural scene of late eighteenth-century Germany.

According to Jacobi, their fateful conversation took place during the summer of 1780, when Jacobi went on his 'great journey' to visit Lessing at Wolffenbüttel. Jacobi first met Lessing on the afternoon of July 5. The next morning, Lessing came into Jacobi's room in preparation for a visit to the famous Wolffenbüttel library. Jacobi was just finishing his correspondence; to entertain Lessing in the meantime, he gave him some things to read, among them the young Goethe's then-unpublished poem *Prometheus*. In commenting on the poem, Lessing made his dramatic confession. As Jacobi recalled, the dialogue went as follows:

> *Lessing:* I find the poem good . . . The point of view in it is also my own. The orthodox concepts of the divinity are no longer for me. "One and All," I know no other. That is the gist of the poem, and I must confess that it pleases me.
>
> *Jacobi:* Then you would be pretty much in agreement with Spinoza.
>
> *Lessing:* If I were to name myself after anyone, then I know no one better.
>
> *Jacobi:* Spinoza is good enough for me; but what a mixed blessing we find in his name!
>
> *Lessing:* Yes, if that's the way you look at it . . . But do you know anyone better?

At this point, the conversation was interrupted by the arrival of the director of the library. But the next morning Lessing came back to see Jacobi, eager to explain to him what he had meant by the expression "One and All," fearing that he had shocked Jacobi.

> *Lessing:* I've come to talk to you about my "One and All." You were shocked yesterday?
>
> *Jacobi:* You did surprise me, and I did feel some embarrassment. But you did not shock me. It surely wasn't my expectation to find you a Spinozist or

pantheist; and still less did I think that you would lay down your cards so quickly, bluntly and plainly. I came for the most part with the intention of getting your help against Spinoza.

Lessing: You know Spinoza then?

Jacobi: I believe that I know him like very few others.

Lessing: Then there is no need to help you. You too will become his friend. There is no philosophy other than Spinoza's.

Jacobi: That might well be. For a determinist, if he is to be consistent, must also become a fatalist. Everything else follows from there.

The dialogue came to a stop as Jacobi explained his interpretation of Spinoza's philosophy. His reading stressed Spinoza's denial of free will, providence, and a personal God. Judging from Jacobi's report, Lessing seemed to endorse the salient points of his interpretation. After Jacobi's brief exposition, the dialogue resumed:

Lessing: So we won't be parting company over your *credo* [Spinoza]?

Jacobi: We don't want that on any account. But my *credo* does not rest with Spinoza. I believe in an intelligent and personal cause of the world.

Lessing: Oh, all the better then! Now I'll get to hear something completely new.

Jacobi: I wouldn't get so excited about it. I get myself out of the business with a *salto mortale*. But usually you do not find any special pleasure in standing on your head?

Lessing: Don't say that, as long as I do not have to imitate it. And you will stand on your feet again, won't you? So if it's no mystery, I'll have to see what there is to it.

The conversation then turned into a debate over the problem of freedom. Jacobi confessed that the most important concept to him was that of final causes. If there are no final causes, he explained, then we must deny freedom and embrace a complete fatalism. But the prospect of fatalism was horrible to Jacobi. If fatalism is true, then our thoughts do not direct our actions, but observe them. We do not do what we think, we only think about what we do. Despite Jacobi's passion and conviction, Lessing remained cool and unimpressed. He bluntly replied that the notion of free will meant nothing to him. In true Spinozist fashion he rejected final causes and free will as anthropomorphic. It is only a product of human pride, he said, that we regard our thoughts as the first principle of things. Lessing then taunted Jacobi by asking him how he conceived the personality of God. He doubted that Jacobi could conceive it along the lines of Leibniz's philosophy since this philosophy, in the end, boils down to Spinoza's.[65] Jacobi admitted that there is indeed a correspondence between the philosophy of Leibniz and Spinoza. Because Leibniz is a determinist, he too must become a fatalist like Spinoza.

Here the dialogue reached a crucial point. Having admitted the identity of Spinoza's and Leibniz's philosophy, and having rejected the fatalism inherent in them, Jacobi seemed to be turning his back on all philosophy, or so Lessing suggested. Jacobi's reply was decisive for the dispute to come.

Lessing: With your philosophy, you will have to turn your back on all philosophy.

Jacobi: Why all philosophy?

Lessing: Because you are a complete skeptic.

Jacobi: On the contrary. I withdraw myself from a philosophy that makes skepticism necessary.

Lessing: And withdraw yourself—where?

Jacobi: To the light, the light Spinoza talks about when he says that it illuminates itself and the darkness. I love Spinoza since, more than any other philosopher, he has convinced me that certain things cannot be explained, and that one must not close one's eyes in front of them but simply accept them as one finds them . . . Even the greatest mind will hit upon absurd things when he tries to explain everything and make sense of it according to clear concepts.

Lessing: And he who does not try to explain things?

Jacobi: Whoever does not want to explain what is inconceivable but only wants to know the borderline where it begins: he will gain the largest space for human truth.

Lessing: Words, dear Jacobi, mere words! The borderline you want to fix cannot be determined. And on the other side of it you give free rein to dreaming, nonsense and blindness.

Jacobi: I believe that the borderline can be determined. I want not to draw it, but only to recognize what is already there. And as far as dreaming, nonsense and blindness are concerned . . .

Lessing: They prevail wherever confused ideas are found.

Jacobi: More where false ones are found. Someone who has fallen in love with certain explanations will blindly accept every consequence.

At this point, Jacobi summarized his philosophy in a few famous lines:

Jacobi: As I see it, the first task of the philosopher is to reveal, to disclose existence (*Daseyn zu enthüllen*). Explanation is only a means, a way to this goal: it is the first task, but it is never the last. The last task is what cannot be explained: the irresolvable, immediate and simple.

Here, Jacobi's report quickly concluded. We are left with Lessing's amusing and ironic remarks about Jacobi's philosophy.

Lessing: Good, very good, I can use all that; but I cannot follow it in the same way. In general, your *salto mortale* does not displease me; and I can see how a man with a head on his shoulders will want to stand on his head to get somewhere. Take me along with you if it works.

Jacobi: If you will only step on the elastic spot from which I leap, everything else will follow from there.

Lessing: Even that would demand a leap which I cannot ask of my old legs and heavy head.

What was Mendelssohn's response to Jacobi's remarkable report? Judging from a letter he wrote to Elise and Johann Reimarus on November 18, 1783, it was one of apparent capitulation.[66] Mendelssohn conceded that Jacobi's report had answered his questions "to his complete satisfaction," although he added the important qualification "for the time being" (*vor der Hand*). He praised Jacobi and even sent him his apologies for his previous brusqueness. At first he thought Jacobi a mere literatus; but now he could see that Jacobi was one of the very few who made thinking his chief business. Mendelssohn then made an important concession: such were Jacobi's merits that he could understand why Lessing wanted to confide in him. This concession was tantamount to his recognizing that he alone did not have privileged access to Lessing's character. Having admitted the strength of his opponent, Mendelssohn decided to withdraw from the fray. As he explained, "The knight he had challenged to combat had removed his visor; and upon seeing his worthy foe, he now picked up his gauntlet."[67]

What is even more striking about Mendelssohn's November 18 letter, however, is his apparent willingness to admit that Lessing had fallen into a crude form of Spinozism which was dangerous to morality and religion. He told the Reimaruses that it was necessary to warn philosophers by means of a striking example—namely, Lessing—of the dangers involved in abandoning oneself to speculation without guidelines. He also agreed with Johann Reimarus's diagnosis of Lessing's Spinozism: Lessing's love of paradox and irony, combined with his inclination to take extreme positions in playing the *advocatus diaboli*, had finally gotten the better of him. In any case, in writing an essay on Lessing's character, it never was his intention to make a saint or prophet out of Lessing. His main obligation was to the truth, the truth pure and simple, and that meant portraying Lessing as he was, including all his follies and weaknesses. Attempting to play down Lessing's confession of Spinozism, Mendelssohn claimed that he never put that much importance upon what any great man said in his last days, especially someone as fond of 'leaps' as Lessing. Mendelssohn seemed to be admitting at least the possibility that Lessing's Spinozism was not the same as the Spinozism of his youth, the Spinozism that Lessing espoused in his "Christenthum der Vernunft."

With Mendelssohn's conciliatory November 18 letter, the whole dispute between Jacobi and Mendelssohn seemed to be defused. After apologizing to Jacobi and withdrawing his challenge, Mendelssohn had apparently aban-

doned the struggle. The general appearance of peace and good will was reinforced by Jacobi's reply to Mendelssohn. On December 24, 1783 Elise Reimarus wrote Mendelssohn to tell him that Jacobi was "completely satisfied" with his letter.[68] Indeed, he had every reason to be satisfied since Mendelssohn had apparently capitulated. Reciprocating the feelings of good will, Jacobi said that Mendelssohn had no need to apologize, and that he found "great joy" in his comment that it was necessary to warn "the devotees of speculation." To Jacobi, this remark was indeed the greatest concession of them all. It was proof of Mendelssohn's readiness to compromise in philosophy, of his willingness to stop short with reason if it threatened morality and religion. Mendelssohn seemed to be admitting that reason, if it were not controlled by moral and religious guidelines, would end in the atheism and fatalism of Spinozism. And that, in essence, was everything that Jacobi ever wanted to say.

The apparent truce between Jacobi and Mendelssohn lasted for the next seven months. But, despite the general tone of capitulation and acquiescence in his November 18 letter, Mendelssohn was only drawing his breath for the struggle to come. His letter was in fact a clever delaying tactic, a way of bargaining for time. Mendelssohn told Elise and Johann Reimarus that he needed more time to consider Jacobi's position. If he appeared to capitulate, that was only because he did not want to challenge Jacobi prematurely and to provoke him into publishing his report. What Mendelssohn wanted more than anything else was the time to prepare his own interpretation of Lessing's Spinozism, an interpretation that would make it consistent with morality and religion. He had to preempt the publication of Jacobi's report with its version of Lessing's Spinozism, which would be sure to damage Lessing's reputation by attributing Spinozism to him.

The die was now cast, and the only question was when Mendelssohn should begin his attack upon Jacobi. The first ominous signs came on July 4, 1785, when Elise Reimarus wrote Jacobi to tell him some exciting news. Referring to Mendelssohn's last letter to her, probably written April 1784,[69] Reimarus said: "He told me that if he has the health and time this summer, he'll set aside the book on Lessing's character in order to risk a contest with the Spinozists."[70]

Without his consent, Elise Reimarus had naively revealed Mendelssohn's battle plans to Jacobi. "A contest against the Spinozists" could mean only one thing: an attack upon Jacobi himself, who claimed that all philosophy ended in Spinozism. A battle was clearly in the offing, then, and Jacobi told Reimarus that he was "delighted" with the news.

A month later the formal declaration of war was finally made. On August

1, 1784 Mendelssohn wrote Jacobi directly for the first time (without the mediation of Reimarus), sending him his objections to the report on Lessing's conversations.[71] Then, in a few dramatic lines, Mendelssohn made his challenge: "You have thrown down the gauntlet in chivalrous fashion; I will pick it up; and now let us fight out our metaphysical tournament in true knightly custom under the eyes of the damsel whom we both esteem."[72]

Jacobi replied directly to Mendelssohn on September 5. He regretted that the delicate state of his health prevented him from making any kind of reply to his objections. But he promised to send him a detailed reply as soon as his health improved. In the meantime he was sending Mendelssohn a copy of his "Lettre a Hemsterhuis," a mock dialogue between Spinoza and himself, setting forth his interpretation of Spinoza. Despite his poor health, Jacobi did manage to make one substantial point: he warned Mendelssohn that his philosophy was *not* that of Spinoza. Rather, it was summed up by the famous lines of Pascal: "La nature confond les Pyrrhoniens, et la raison confond les Dogmatistes."

Jacobi claimed, again disingenuously, that he knew nothing about throwing down the gauntlet. But, if Mendelssohn thought it was thrown, he was not so cowardly as to turn his back. Jacobi accepted the challenge—the challenge he had done so much to provoke—and commended himself to heaven, our lady (Elise Reimarus), and the noble mind of his adversary. With the romantic image of a knightly tournament, the contest began. But it would soon prove to be anything but romantic. It became vicious, and then tragic, for reasons we shall soon see.

The contest was slow in getting started. Little or nothing happened in the autumn and winter of 1784–85. Mendelssohn crept along at a snail's pace with his book. Jacobi's health worsened. And, when it finally improved, he suffered a severe blow: his third son died, and then his wife.[73] All thought of a reply to Mendelssohn's objections was now out of the question.

Only at the end of April 1785, eight months after receiving Mendelssohn's objections, did Jacobi find the strength to write to Mendelssohn. On April 26 he sent Mendelssohn another long manuscript, a summary of his interpretation of Spinoza.[74] But Jacobi did little more than reiterate his position. Rather than making a quid pro quo to Mendelssohn's objections, he told Mendelssohn in no uncertain terms that he had missed the point. This was no basis for a dialogue. Even more ominously, in his covering letter, Jacobi gave a sinister prophecy: "Perhaps we will live to see the day when a dispute will arise over the corpse of Spinoza like that over the corpse of Moses between the archangel and satan."[75] Clearly, the days were over when, as Lessing said, Spinoza was treated like a dead dog.

Jacobi's delay in writing Mendelssohn was as fateful as it was excusable. As Jacobi was summoning his strength to reply to Mendelssohn's objections, Mendelssohn was growing increasingly impatient. Before Jacobi's reply arrived in Berlin, Mendelssohn made a dramatic decision. He wrote Elise Reimarus on April 29, 1785, that he intended to publish the first part of his book without consulting Jacobi or waiting for the reply to his objections.[76] Mendelssohn was tired of waiting for Jacobi's reply, and suspected that it might never come. He also felt that if he stated his views formally and clearly, he could put the whole debate on more substantial footing.

Although this seemed to be a perfectly reasonable decision, it was a questionable move considering Mendelssohn's delicate relationship with Jacobi. It was bound to strain the already weakened trust between them. On the one hand, though Mendelssohn had received permission to cite Jacobi's report, it was still understood that he would not make any use of it before consulting Jacobi. After all, it was Jacobi who was the witness of Lessing's confession, and it was he who provided the information in the first place. But on the other hand, Mendelssohn did think that his decision would not break this tacit agreement. He explained to Elise Reimarus that he would not mention Jacobi's conversations in the first volume of his book. Only the second volume would consider them; but there was still plenty of time for Jacobi to be consulted about that. In this way, Mendelssohn told Reimarus, he could give a formal statement of his position while still keeping his promise to Jacobi.

This is how Mendelssohn put his case to Elise Reimarus. But the truth of the matter was much more complicated. Mendelssohn was in fact acting according to his old strategy.[77] He wanted to beat Jacobi to press, to get his version of events in first. Only in that way could he protect Lessing's reputation against any damaging allegations Jacobi might make about Lessing's Spinozism. Of course, true to his word, Mendelssohn did not mention anything about Jacobi's conversations in the first volume of his book. But he did include a chapter on Lessing's pantheism, where he attributed "a purified pantheism" to Lessing, a pantheism supposedly consistent with the truths of morality and religion. Such a chapter was plainly designed to preempt Jacobi and to deprive him of all the shock value of his revelations about Lessing's Spinozism.

After finally receiving Jacobi's reply to his objections, Mendelssohn only strengthened his resolve to go ahead with the publication of his book. As Mendelssohn explained to Reimarus in a letter written May 24, it was proving impossible to argue with Jacobi.[78] Jacobi dismissed all his objections as misunderstandings; and the more he explained things the more obscure they became. Since they were speaking different philosophical languages, there were no common terms for debate. So it seemed all the more sensible

to publish his book without consulting Jacobi. For what difference would it make if Jacobi saw the manuscript? All his criticisms would be unintelligible anyway.

On July 21, 1785, Mendelssohn finally overcame his reluctance and wrote a long overdue letter to Jacobi.[79] It was a delicate business, but he had to go through with it: he had to inform Jacobi of his decision to publish his book, whose title was now firm in his mind, *Morgenstunden*. Despite his wariness, Mendelssohn botched everything. He honestly and bluntly told Jacobi that he found everything he wrote incomprehensible. He then stated that by publishing his book he would be able to establish the *statum controversiae*. This Latin phrase was ambiguous and ill-chosen. Mendelssohn did not explain how he wanted to determine the state of the controversy, leaving Jacobi to guess whether he would refer to his conversations with Lessing. He did not mention his intention of referring to them only in the planned second volume because he reckoned—rightly—that Elise Reimarus had already informed Jacobi of his detailed plans. But she had done so months ago. By leaving his plans so vague, Mendelssohn gave plenty of fuel to Jacobi's febrile and suspicious imagination.

It is not difficult to imagine Jacobi's reaction to Mendelssohn's letter. Jacobi was, to put it mildly, indignant. It seemed as if Mendelssohn had flagrantly violated his trust by publishing his information without consulting him. For all he knew, Mendelssohn would portray him as the *advocatus diaboli*, that is, as a simple Spinozist who knew nothing about the standpoint of faith that transcended all philosophy.[80] In short, Jacobi could see that Mendelssohn was trying to preempt him, and he was furious. What could he do? Jacobi felt that he had no alternative but to publish, and publish soon. He could not sit idly by while Mendelssohn whitewashed all the issues surrounding Lessing's Spinozism. So, in a frantic haste, Jacobi patched together his own book, an odd pastiche containing his letters to Elise Reimarus and Mendelssohn, Mendelssohn's letters to him and Reimarus, and the report of his conversations with Lessing, all embellished with quotations from Hamann, Herder, Lavater, and the Bible. Jacobi threw the book together in a single month, naming it *Ueber die Lehre von Spinoza in Briefen an Herrn Moses Mendelssohn*. Since Jacobi did not want Mendelssohn to get wind of his plans, he did not ask him for permission to publish his correspondence. He knew that this was unethical; but he felt that it was fair, tit for tat, given that Mendelssohn had made unauthorized use of his conversations with Lessing. Although it was a desperate gamble rushing into print, Jacobi's strategy paid off. His *Briefe* appeared as early as the beginning of September, while Mendelssohn's *Morgenstunden*, due to publishing delays, did not come out until the beginning of October. By a narrow margin, Jacobi had won the publishing race.

If Mendelssohn's book angered Jacobi, Jacobi's book so shocked Mendelssohn that he refused to believe in its existence. Mendelssohn had plenty of reasons to be upset. To begin with, Jacobi had beaten him at his own game by rushing into press before him. This had a serious consequence: it meant that he could no longer be sure that *Morgenstunden* would protect Lessing's reputation; for *Morgenstunden,* unlike Jacobi's *Briefe,* did not openly discuss Lessing's confession of Spinozism. Mendelssohn was also indignant that Jacobi had published his private correspondence without his consent.[81] What hurt Mendelssohn most of all, though, was Jacobi's insinuation that there had been no philosophical rapport between him and Lessing. Slyly, Jacobi drove home this point in the cruelest fashion. In the beginning of his *Briefe* he said that he once asked Lessing whether he ever divulged his true philosophical convictions (his Spinozism) to Mendelssohn. "Never" was Lessing's answer, Jacobi claimed.[82] Such a revelation was bound to hurt Mendelssohn by questioning the degree of trust in his thirty-year friendship with Lessing. But Jacobi could not resist. This was his coup de grace to Mendelssohn, his final trump card in his claim to be the legitimate heir and spokesman for Lessing.

The dispute reached a bitter climax—and a tragic close. Eager to wipe out the blemish on Lessing's name created by Jacobi's accusation of Spinozism, and determined to defend the integrity of his friendship with Lessing, Mendelssohn decided to write a riposte to Jacobi's *Briefe.* So, during October and November 1785, in a grim and restless mood, Mendelssohn wrote his final statement on the controversy, his *An die Freunde Lessings.* This brief tract was intended as an appendix to *Morgenstunden* and a replacement for the second volume that Mendelssohn had been planning.

The heart of Mendelssohn's tract is his analysis of Jacobi's intentions in publishing his conversations with Lessing. According to Mendelssohn, Jacobi's aim was to warn people of the dangers involved in all rational speculation—the atheism and fatalism of Spinozism—and to lead them back to "the path of faith." Jacobi held up Lessing as an example to show how reason leads us astray and into the abyss of atheism. The reason Jacobi initiated the conversations with Lessing in the first place, Mendelssohn hypothesized, was that he wanted to convert him to his orthodox and mystical version of Christianity. He wanted to lead Lessing into "the thorny thicket of Spinozism" so that he would recognize the error of his ways, renounce his reason, and make a leap of faith. Lessing, Mendelssohn was convinced, saw through Jacobi's proselytizing zeal but was roguish and waggish enough to play along. Lessing always had more pleasure in seeing a false belief defended competently than a true belief defended incompetently. Since Jacobi was proving to be such a dazzling defender of Spinoza, Lessing simply nodded his consent now and then to spur him on and watch

the pyrotechnics. Lessing was therefore not confiding any deep secret to Jacobi in telling him of his Spinozism, but only encouraging him to continue with his dialectical show. The upshot of this interpretation was plain: Jacobi had been taken in by Lessing's love of irony and paradox. By suggesting that Jacobi had been duped, Mendelssohn not only questioned the depth of Jacobi's friendship with Lessing, but he also hoped to establish his superior understanding of Lessing. At the same time Mendelssohn thought that he had cleared Lessing's name. Although Lessing was perhaps guilty of playing with dialectical fire, he was at least not making a serious personal confession when he told Jacobi about his Spinozism. All in all, *An die Freunde Lessings* was a skillful exposé of Jacobi's intentions. But Mendelssohn's defense of Lessing, though well meaning, was very weak. It presupposed precisely that view of Lessing's irony that Jacobi had discredited before the controversy began.

Mendelssohn completed his *An die Freunde Lessings* at the end of December 1785. As far as he was concerned, it was his final word on the matter, and he wanted nothing more to do with "Herr Jacobi."[83] Mendelssohn was so eager to be done with the whole matter that he decided to deliver the manuscript as soon as it was completed. So on December 31, 1785, a bitterly cold day in Berlin, Mendelssohn left his house to hand over the manuscript to his publisher, Voss and Sohn. He was in such a hurry that he even forgot his overcoat, as it turned out, a literally fatal mistake. Upon his return, he fell ill. His condition rapidly declined; and on the morning of January 4, 1786 he died.

News of Mendelssohn's death spread throughout Germany and was met with almost universal regret and dismay. But after tragedy there came farce. Mendelssohn's death became the subject of a huge scandal, which is one reason why the pantheism controversy attracted so much public interest. The scandal arose when some of Mendelssohn's friends suggested,[84] while others baldly asserted,[85] that Jacobi was directly responsible for Mendelssohn's death. According to reliable reports, Mendelssohn was so upset by Jacobi's *Briefe* that his health began to deteriorate. He had suffered from a nervous debility ever since his traumatic dispute with Lavater two decades earlier; but he became much worse after Jacobi's book appeared. So fragile was his health that only the slightest setback, the smallest imbalance, would mean death. It was for this reason that Mendelssohn's chill proved fatal. Even if Jacobi were not the incidental cause of Mendelssohn's death, he certainly had created its essential preconditions. As one report put it, perhaps too dramatically, "He became a victim of his friendship with Lessing and died as a martyr defending the suppressed prerogatives of reason against fanaticism and superstition. Lavater's importunity dealt his life its first blow; Jacobi completed the work."[86] A heated controversy then broke out, de-

bating whether, and to what extent, Jacobi was responsible for Mendelssohn's death.[87]

Whatever the truth in all these stories about Jacobi's heavy hand in Mendelssohn's death, they are at least good myths. If Jacobi did not literally kill Mendelssohn, he did so figuratively. He delivered the coup de grace to Mendelssohn's tottering philosophy, which Kant had already shaken in the *Kritik*. It was indeed not only Mendelssohn, but the *Aufklärung* itself that died. Mendelssohn was the leading representative of the classical phase of the *Aufklärung*, and when his philosophy collapsed that period too came to an end. Thus Jacobi's 'murder' of Mendelssohn is a fitting metaphor for his destruction of the *Aufklärung* itself.

2.4. The Philosophical Significance of the Controversy

Such was, if only in outline, Jacobi's and Mendelssohn's debate over Lessing's Spinozism. But what is the philosophical significance of it all? What philosophical problem does it raise? Prima facie the dispute only revolves around the question of Lessing's Spinozism. Yet it would be rash to conclude that only this biographical issue was at stake. Such a conclusion would not explain why Lessing's Spinozism was given such enormous philosophical significance by the disputants themselves. If we are to appreciate the philosophical significance of the controversy—and indeed the significance that it had for the participants—then we first have to investigate its underlying symbolism. We have to consider what the parties to the dispute symbolized for one another.

Lessing was a deeply symbolic figure for Jacobi, and indeed a symbol he could use to score important philosophical points. Lessing was essentially a vehicle for Jacobi's criticisms of the Berlin *Aufklärer*, and in particular Mendelssohn, whom he rightly regarded as their leader. Since his early days, Jacobi had been disdainful of the Berlin *Aufklärer*,[88] the circle consisting of Engel, Nicolai, Eberhard, Spalding, Zöllner, and Biester. In his eyes this group represented a form of intellectual tyranny and dogmatism no better than the Catholic Church. It was nothing more than a disguised 'Jesuitism and philosophical papism'. The *morgue berlinoise* set itself up as the highest standard of truth, the final court of intellectual appeal.[89] All views that differed from its own were contemptuously dismissed as falling short of the standards of universal reason. The result was a betrayal of those very values the *Aufklärer* pledged themselves to defend: tolerance and freedom of thought.

Another mortal sin of the Berliners, in Jacobi's view, was their hypocrisy. They were willing to forfeit their intellectual ideals for the sake of compliance with the moral, religious, and political status quo.[90] Although they professed the ideals of radical criticism and free inquiry, they abandoned them as

soon as they seemed to lead to unorthodox or dangerous consequences. They stopped short whenever their criticism and inquiry seemed to threaten the foundation of morality, religion, and the state.

Jacobi had an interesting diagnosis of this hypocrisy. The Berliners could not take inquiry and criticism to its limits, he charged, because they were 'utilitarians'.[91] They valued philosophy not for its own sake, but only as a means to an end. This end was nothing more nor less than *Aufklärung:* the education of the public, the promotion of the general welfare, and the achievement of a general culture.[92] Almost all of the Berliners were *Popularphilosophen,* and it was their express aim to make philosophy practical, to bring it into public life, so that it would be not the esoteric possession of an elite, but the common good of the public at large. Such was their devotion to the program of the *Aufklärung,* however, that the Berliners were ready to sacrifice their ideals of free inquiry and criticism for it.

But can philosophy serve two masters? Reason and the public? Can it be both critical and practical, both rational and responsible, both honest and useful? What, indeed, is the purpose of philosophy? Truth or the general happiness? Inquiry for its own sake or the enlightenment of the public? That was Jacobi's question, just as it was Plato's in the *Apology.* And, like Socrates, Jacobi was convinced that this question contained all the material for a tragic conflict. Philosophy, in his view, was intrinsically irresponsible, the pastime for a public nuisance like a Socrates or a Hamann. It is an illusion to think that philosophy supports morality, religion, and the state. Rather, it does the very opposite: it undermines them. If we pursue free inquiry to its limits without imposing any guidelines, then we end up, of necessity, in skepticism. But skepticism erodes the very foundation of morality, religion, and the state. It presents us with a dreadful specter: atheism, fatalism, anarchism.

Thus, as Jacobi saw it, the Berliners were caught in a dilemma. If they remained true to their ideals of free inquiry and criticism, they would have to abandon their program of *Aufklärung;* but if they stuck to their program of *Aufklärung,* they would have to limit free inquiry and criticism. Philosophy could not serve both truth and the public. It was the tragedy of Socrates that he had tried to make it do both. The Berliners were going to have to learn his lesson all over again, Jacobi felt, and he was preparing for them the eighteenth-century equivalent of hemlock: namely, the bitter pill of Lessing's Spinozism.

Lessing became a deeply symbolic figure for Jacobi because he represented the very antithesis of the *Berliner Geist.* Jacobi considered Lessing the only courageous and honest thinker of the *Aufklärung.* He alone had the courage to pursue inquiry for its own sake, despite the consequences; and he alone had the honesty to take criticism to its tragic conclusion without moral or

religious scruples. Contrary to popular opinion, it was Lessing, and not Mendelssohn, who was the true Socrates of his time.

Jacobi felt that he had good reason for seeing Lessing in such a light. Was it not Lessing who insisted upon distinguishing between the spheres of truth and utility?[93] Was it not Lessing who despised the shallow attempts to mediate philosophy and religion, and who dismissed rationalist theology as sloppy philosophy and soulless religion?[94] Was it not Lessing who dared to publish the *Wolffenbüttler Fragmente,* even though it threatened the moral and religious status quo?[95] And was it not Lessing who valued the simple faith of the heart over the cold and dead knowledge of reason? It was for all these reasons that Jacobi could so readily identify with Lessing, even though he represented the very epitome of the *Aufklärung,* an ideology that he despised. In using the figure of Lessing to criticize the Berlin establishment, Jacobi had hit on a very potent weapon indeed. For of all the figures admired by the Berliners, Lessing stands out supreme. If Lessing, the most revered thinker of the *Aufklärung,* turned out to be at odds with the moral and religious status quo, then that would make the Berliners think twice about where their reason was taking them.

But, to Jacobi, the most significant fact about Lessing was his Spinozism. Lessing was the most radical and honest thinker of the *Aufklärung* but was also a Spinozist. This connection was certainly not accidental for Jacobi. It meant that Lessing was the only man with the honesty to admit the consequences of all inquiry and criticism: atheism and fatalism. According to Jacobi, all rational speculation, if only consistent and honest, as in the case of Lessing, had to end in Spinozism; but Spinozism amounted to nothing more than atheism and fatalism.[96] Hence Lessing's Spinozism was a symbol—a warning sign—for the dangerous consequences of all rational inquiry and criticism.

Now it was this attack upon the claims of reason, and not merely the biographical sensation of Lessing's Spinozism, that really shocked Mendelssohn and the whole Berlin establishment. This charge was tantamount to the accusation that the rationalist metaphysics, to which Mendelssohn had devoted his entire life, was ultimately Spinozistic and therefore dangerous to morality and religion. It was not only Mendelssohn's knowledge of Lessing that was at stake, then, but more important, his lifelong devotion to metaphysics. The inspiring hope behind that metaphysics—the assumption that we could rationally demonstrate beliefs in God, immortality, and providence—was now thrown into question.

From the very beginning, Mendelssohn knew all too well that his philosophy, not only his knowledge of Lessing, was at stake. Even before his

decision to write *Morgenstunden,* Mendelssohn saw his conflict with Jacobi in philosophical terms. He suspected that another contest was brewing between the *Aufklärung* and *Sturm und Drang,* the "flag of reason" and "the party of faith." After reading Jacobi's report of his conversations with Lessing, Mendelssohn wrote to Elise and Johann Reimarus on November 18, 1783: "I still firmly believe that it is necessary and useful to warn the devotees of speculation, and to show them by means of a striking example what dangers they expose themselves to when they engage in speculation without guidelines . . . We certainly do not want to form a party ourselves; we would become traitors to the flag to which we have sworn ourselves as soon as form a party and try to recruit."[97] Here Mendelssohn is insinuating that Jacobi is guilty of proselytizing, of trying to convert Lessing and to win him over to the party of faith; and he is at the same time contrasting Jacobi's proselytizing with his own more liberal and tolerant philosophy. The point that Mendelssohn is making here anticipates his later analysis of Jacobi's intentions in *An die Freunde Lessings.*[98] In this later work Mendelssohn claims that Jacobi's intention in publishing his conversations with Lessing is to convince him (Mendelssohn) of the dangerous consequences of all philosophy and to convert him to the party of faith (Christianity). Jacobi, Mendelssohn suggests, was using the figure of Lessing as a warning against the atheism and fatalism inherent in all rational inquiry. In other words, Mendelssohn had accurately read the writing on the wall and had rightly gauged the symbolic significance of Lessing's Spinozism.

The very decision to write *Morgenstunden* was indeed a victory of the philosophical over the biographical. Although at least one chapter of the book is devoted to the question of Lessing's Spinozism, its primary aim is certainly philosophical. This is evident from Reimarus's letter to Jacobi of July 4, 1785, which explains Mendelssohn's decision to write the book. Referring to Mendelssohn's last letter to her, which was written in April 1784, Reimarus told Jacobi that Mendelssohn was postponing the book on Lessing's character in favor of a battle with the Spinozists.[99] Although Mendelssohn was obviously giving priority to the philosophical issue, it is important to note that it did not entail only the truth or falsity of Spinozism, as the letter itself at first suggests. Rather, what was at stake for Mendelssohn was the very possibility and limits of metaphysics itself, and indeed whether or not reason could offer any justification for essential moral and religious beliefs. Mendelssohn's decision "to risk a contest with the Spinozists" meant he intended to dispute Jacobi's controversial claim that all speculative philosophy ends in Spinozism. Such a claim represented a serious challenge to his allegiance to the Wolffian-Leibnizian philosophy.

If Mendelssohn represented all the vices of the *Aufklärung* to Jacobi, Jacobi symbolized all the dangers of the *Sturm und Drang* to Mendelssohn. From the start, Mendelssohn was convinced that Jacobi was just another

Schwärmer, another pietistic mystic who wanted to debunk reason and to convert him to an irrational form of Christianity, which based religion upon revelation and the Bible alone. Mendelssohn could not help seeing Jacobi in the context of another traumatic affair in his life which occurred some fifteen years earlier. In 1769 Mendelssohn had become involved in a bitter dispute with the Swiss pastor J. C. Lavater, the most notorious *Schwärmer* of them all. Lavater demanded that Mendelssohn refute the defense of Christianity in Bonnet's *La Palingenesie philosophique* or publicly convert.[100] The controversy with Lavater was the most dramatic and trying event in Mendelssohn's life, for it put his deep personal allegiance to Judaism at stake. Mendelssohn could never forget the Lavater affair; and in his weary and suspicious eyes, Jacobi was a front man for Lavater. He was convinced that the forthcoming battle with Jacobi would be a bitter repeat of the Lavater affair.

It is important to see, though, that Jacobi's missionary zeal posed Mendelssohn with not only a personal, but also a philosophical, challenge. Whether or not he should be loyal to Judaism was, as far as he was concerned, the same question as whether or not he should be true to reason itself. For Mendelssohn saw his faith in Judaism as part and parcel of his faith in reason. Like Jacobi, Mendelssohn regarded Christianity as an essentially supernatural religion whose only basis was revelation and the Bible. But Judaism was, in his view, an intrinsically rational religion, which did not contain mere articles of faith, and which insisted on a rational justification of all belief. As Mendelssohn explained to Jacobi in his "Erinnerung," "My religion recognizes no obligation to resolve doubt other than through rational means; and it commands no mere faith in eternal truths."[101] Hence Jacobi's demand that Mendelssohn convert to Christianity was tantamount to the demand that he abandon his reason and take a leap of faith. But that was a step that Mendelssohn was simply not willing to take. He argued that Jacobi's *salto mortale* was conceptually, as well as personally, a meaningless act. Thus he told Jacobi in no uncertain terms: "To doubt if there is something that not only transcends, but also lies completely outside the sphere of our concepts is what I call a leap beyond myself. My *credo* is: doubt about what I cannot conceive does not disturb me. A question that I cannot answer is to me as good as no question at all."[102] Rarely had the rationalist's credo been expressed in such frank and explicit terms. It was now incumbent upon Mendelssohn to defend that credo, a task to which he turned with zeal in his *Morgenstunden.*

It should now be clear why the main issue between Jacobi and Mendelssohn was not simply biographical. The strictly factual question of whether or not Lessing had confessed his Spinozism to Jacobi was seldom at issue.[103] That

Lessing had made such a confession was accepted as a fait accompli by everyone; even Mendelssohn did not question Jacobi's honesty. It was of course more of a problem to determine in what sense Lessing was a Spinozist. But even this issue raised few polemical passions. Indeed, Jacobi had remarkably little interest in plumbing Lessing's mind or quarreling with Mendelssohn's interpretation of his Spinozism.[104] We can understand the significance of Lessing's Spinozism only when we recognize that it was only a symbol—a symbol for the consequences of all rational inquiry and criticism. If Lessing were shown to be a Spinozist, then every self-respecting *Aufklärer* would have to concede that reason was heading toward atheism and fatalism, an admission that in turn would threaten the most important dogma of the *Aufklärung:* the authority of reason. Jacobi was raising the very disturbing question, Why should we be loyal to reason if it pushes us into the abyss? Hence the biographical question of Lessing's Spinozism became weighted with the much larger question of the authority of reason itself. What the historical Lessing said or thought was relevant only insofar as it illustrated something about the general consequences of all rational inquiry.

At this point it should also be plain why the central problem of the controversy was not exegetical. It did not substantially concern the proper interpretation of Spinoza's philosophy, that is, whether or not it is atheistic or fatalistic. Still less did it deal with the truth or falsity of Spinoza's system, as if this were the only philosophical dimension of the controversy. These are indeed problems raised by the dispute; but they are important only in light of Jacobi's general thesis that reason of necessity leads to atheism and fatalism. What is at stake for Jacobi and Mendelssohn is not the specific question of whether *Spinoza*'s metaphysics ends in atheism or fatalism, but the more general question of whether all metaphysics ends in it. Jacobi might have taken some other metaphysical system to illustrate his point (for example, Leibniz's) since he believed that all metaphysical systems are ultimately identical (if they are only consistent), and that they all have damaging consequences for morality and religion.[105]

If, then, we are to distill the fundamental philosophical problem behind the pantheism controversy—and, indeed, the fundamental problem as it was seen by Jacobi and Mendelssohn themselves—we must focus our attention on Jacobi's critique of reason. We might summarize this critique in the form of a dilemma, a dilemma that Jacobi suggests at several points during his conversation with Lessing,[106] and that he explicitly states later on.[107] We are confronted with a difficult and dramatic choice: either we follow our reason and become atheists and fatalists; or we renounce our reason and make a leap of faith in God and freedom. In more general terms, we have to choose either a rational skepticism or an irrational faith. There is simply no comforting middle path between these options, no way to justify morality and religion through reason.

Prima facie it seems as if Jacobi's dilemma is nothing more than a rehash of the old conflict between reason and faith, philosophy and religion. Although this is certainly Jacobi's starting point, he did not stop here. He extended this conflict so that 'faith' covered not only religious, but also moral, political, and commonsense beliefs. The *salto mortale* had to be made apropos not only belief in God, but also the beliefs in freedom, other minds, the external world, and the permanent existence of the human soul.

Seen from a broader perspective, then, Jacobi's dilemma is a perennial one, and as old as philosophy itself. It is the business of philosophy to examine, criticize, and if possible justify our most fundamental principles and beliefs, the principles and beliefs that are the necessary presuppositions of science, religion, morality, and common sense. But in pursuing this task philosophy almost inevitably leads to skepticism: to doubts about induction and freedom, the existence of God, other minds, and the external world. A conflict arises between the standards of a purely critical reason and the demands of religion, morality, science, and common sense. What we find necessary to believe in order to act within our world often proves to be unacceptable when we examine it according to our critical reason. As purely rational philosophers, who stand outside the world, we find it necessary to reject many of our ordinary beliefs; but as simple human beings, who live and act in the world, we find it necessary to cling to them. Now Jacobi's dilemma is merely part and parcel of this eternal conflict between philosophy and ordinary belief. What Jacobi is trying to say is that this conflict is in principle irresolvable. He is claiming that the very hope that motivates us to pursue philosophy—the hope that we can rationally justify the beliefs of religion, morality, and common sense—is nothing more than an illusion. Hence Jacobi's attack upon reason forces us to reexamine our motives for doing philosophy in the first place.

Jacobi has a striking word to designate the skeptical consequences of all philosophical investigation: 'nihilism' (*Nihilismus*). He is indeed responsible for bringing this word into general use in modern philosophy.[108] What is indeed remarkable about Jacobi's use of this term, which has all the weight of precedence in its favor, is that it makes nihilism into the fundamental problem of all philosophy. If 'nihilism' is an appropriate word to denote the skeptical consequences of all philosophical inquiry, and if philosophy is trying to stave off the consequences of skepticism, then philosophy is indeed a desperate struggle against nihilism. If the philosopher cannot escape skepticism, then, by Jacobi's criterion, he ipso facto cannot avoid nihilism. Hence nihilism is Jacobi's final indictment and chief criticism of all philosophy.

What, more precisely, does Jacobi mean by 'nihilism'? Why does he use

the word in the sense he does? Jacobi's use of the term is important if only because he is the first to introduce it into modern philosophy. Understanding Jacobi's usage should help us to define this notoriously nebulous word at its very source. But, as we might expect of an antisystematic thinker like Jacobi, he never gives an explicit or general definition. Nevertheless, his use of the word is much more technical, philosophical, and literal than what one might at first glance assume. The most important point to note about Jacobi's use of the term is that he uses it to designate a specific epistemological position. The term is virtually synonymous with, although slightly broader than, another term of Jacobi's: 'egoism' (*Egoismus*). According to the early Jacobi, the egoist is a radical idealist who denies the existence of all reality independent of his own sensations.[109] He is indeed a solipsist, but a solipsist who disputes the permanent reality of his own self as much as the external world and other minds. In his later writings, however, Jacobi tends to replace the term 'egoist' with 'nihilist'.[110] Like the egoist, the nihilist is someone who denies the existence of everything independent of the immediate contents of his own consciousness, whether external objects, other minds, God, or even his own self. All that exists for the nihilist is therefore his own momentary conscious states, his fleeting impressions or representations; but these representations represent, it is necessary to add, nothing. Hence the nihilist is, true to the Latin root, someone who denies the existence of everything, someone who affirms nothingness. Or, as Jacobi puts it, the nihilist lives in a world "out of nothing, to nothing, for nothing and in nothing."[111]

The antithesis to nihilism, in Jacobi's sense, is realism, where 'realism' is defined in a broad sense as the belief in the independent existence of all kinds of entities, whether these be material things, other minds, or God. According to Jacobi, the only escape from nihilism, and indeed the only basis for realism, is the immediate perception of an external reality. This immediate perception is an intuitive grasp of existence, an intuition whose certainty cannot be demonstrated, and which has to be accepted as a mere article of faith. To try to demonstrate the truth of these intuitions, Jacobi contends, is to reinvite the danger of nihilism.

But 'nihilism', it is important to note, does not have a strictly epistemological meaning for Jacobi.[112] It also has an ethical meaning—a meaning that is not accidentally related to the modern sense of the word. Jacobi's use of the word provides all the stuff for the fiction of a Dostoyevsky or the anarchism of a Stirner. The ethical element of Jacobi's usage becomes perfectly explicit when he says that the nihilist denies the existence not only of things, but also of values.[113] Since he denies the existence of an external world, other minds, a soul, and God, the nihilist discharges himself from all obligations to such pseudo-entities. Since all that exists are his own

momentary states of consciousness, he cares only for them. He finds the only source of value within himself and believes that what he wills to be right is right—and just because he wills it. The nihilist is indeed such an egomaniac that he is convinced that he is God.[114]

2.5. Jacobi's First Critique of Reason

Having extracted the main philosophical problem behind the pantheism controversy, we are still left with the difficult task of explaining why Jacobi thinks that it is a problem. Or, to put the question more precisely: Why does Jacobi think that his dilemma is inescapable? Why does he believe that we have but two options, a rational nihilism or an irrational faith?

To appreciate Jacobi's position, we first have to come to terms with his interpretation of Spinoza. We have to uncover the rationale behind some of his apparently extravagant claims about Spinoza's philosophy. There are two claims in particular that deserve our attention: (1) that Spinoza's philosophy is the paradigm of metaphysics, the model of speculation; and (2) that Spinozism is atheism and fatalism. These two claims are important since they support the main premise behind Jacobi's dilemma: that reason of necessity ends in nihilism.

The key to Jacobi's later interpretation of Spinoza—the interpretation found in the first and second editions of the *Briefe*—is that Jacobi sees Spinoza as the prophet of modern science.[115] Spinoza represents not the apotheosis of a dying metaphysical rationalism, but the forefront of an emerging scientific naturalism. According to Jacobi's "Brief a Mr. Hemsterhuis" and the seventh "Beylage" to the *Briefe,* the aim of Spinoza's philosophy is to find a mechanistic explanation of the origin of the universe.[116] Spinoza's philosophy continues the ancient Epicurean and modern Cartesian traditions, both of which attempt to explain the origin of the universe in strictly mechanical and naturalistic terms. What Jacobi sees as the paradigm of rationality is not the syllogistic reasoning of Wolff's, Leibniz's, or even Spinoza's metaphysics, but the mechanistic principles of modern science.

The guiding principle behind Spinoza's philosophy, Jacobi tells us, is the governing principle behind all mechanistic or naturalistic philosophy: the principle of sufficient reason. This principle states, at least on Jacobi's reading,[117] that there must be some condition or set of conditions for everything that happens, such that given this condition or set of conditions, the thing occurs of necessity. It is this simple principle that Jacobi sees as the very heart of Spinoza's philosophy. Thus, during his conversations with Lessing, Jacobi sums up "the spirit of Spinozism" with the old scholastic maxim *ex nihilo nihil fit.*[118] This maxim is only a slogan for the principle of sufficient

reason, which says, to put it crudely, that something always comes from something else. Of course, Jacobi admits that there are many other philosophers who adhere to this principle. But what distinguishes Spinoza from them, Jacobi thinks, is that he so consistently and ruthlessly applies it.[119] Hence, unlike most philosophers, Spinoza affirms the infinity of the world and a system of complete necessity.

Now, to Jacobi, Spinoza's philosophy is the paradigm of metaphysics, the model of speculation, precisely because it consistently and universally applies the principle of sufficient reason, which is the basis of all rationality and discursive thought. We conceive or understand something, he says, only insofar as we grasp the conditions of its existence. If we want to explain something, then we have to know its conditions, the 'mechanism' behind it. As Jacobi explains, "We conceive a thing if we can derive it from its proximate causes, or if we can grasp its immediate conditions in a series; what we grasp or derive in this manner gives us a mechanical connection."[120] If, then, we consistently and universally apply the principle of sufficient reason, we also assume that everything which exists is explicable or conceivable according to reason. In other words, we are thoroughgoing metaphysicians or speculative philosophers. Jacobi therefore identifies a thoroughgoing rationalism with a complete and consistent naturalism or mechanism.

It is this radical naturalism, this uncompromising mechanism, that Jacobi sees as the source of Spinoza's atheism and fatalism. According to Jacobi, if we believe in the existence of God, then we must assume that God is the cause of his own existence and everything else that exists.[121] Similarly, if we believe in freedom, then we must suppose that the will is spontaneous, acting as a cause without any prior cause to compel it into action.[122] In both cases, then, it is necessary to assume the existence of some unconditional or spontaneous cause, that is, a cause that acts without any prior cause to compel it into action. But this is of course just the assumption that we cannot make if we universally apply the principle of sufficient reason. If universally applied, this principle states that for every cause there is some prior cause that compels it into action.

Assuming, then, this reading of the principle of sufficient reason along with Jacobi's interpretation of the concepts of freedom and God, we are again caught in a dilemma. If we universally apply the principle of sufficient reason, assuming a thoroughgoing naturalism, then we have to accept atheism and fatalism. If, however, we assume that God and freedom exist, committing ourselves to the existence of unconditional causes, then we have to admit that they are completely inexplicable and incomprehensible. We cannot explain or conceive them since that is tantamount to assuming that there is some condition for the unconditioned, which is absurd. If we believe

in God and freedom, then, we have no choice but to admit that they are a mystery.[123]

It should now be clear that Jacobi's theory of the nihilism of reason is not simply an attack on the methods of dogmatic pre-Kantian metaphysics.[124] Jacobi thinks that Spinoza's philosophy is the paradigm of reason not because of its geometric method or its a priori reasoning, but because of its rigorous use of the principle of sufficient reason. What this means, then, is that Jacobi's dilemma still retains its force *despite the demise of metaphysical rationalism* at the hands of Kant. Though Kant eventually argues against Jacobi that Spinozism has gone the way of all dogmatic metaphysics,[125] his argument does not affect Jacobi's main point. His point is that the radical application of the principle of sufficient reason is incompatible with the beliefs in God and freedom—and Kant himself would fully endorse this.

This sketch of Jacobi's interpretation of Spinoza also provides another general perspective in which to view his attack on reason. Accepting two of Jacobi's theses—that reason leads to nihilism, and that natural science is the paradigm of reason—we are bound to conclude that natural science is the source of nihilism. The target of Jacobi's attack on reason is therefore natural science itself. In order to undermine reason, Jacobi is raising some unsettling doubts about the consequences of scientific progress. He is preying upon a worry that many philosophers were beginning to have in the eighteenth century, and that many philosophers continue to have in the twentieth: namely, that the progress of the sciences is leading to the destruction of our essential moral and religious beliefs. The mechanism by which this happens is as familiar as it is frightening. The more the sciences progress, the more they discover the causes of life, human action, and the origin of the universe; but the more they find these causes, the more they support materialism, determinism, and atheism. In attacking reason, it is inter alia this scenario that Jacobi had in mind.[126] One explanation for his extraordinary success is that not a few people in the late eighteenth century feared that the sciences were heading in just this direction.

2.6. Jacobi's Second Critique of Reason

Despite all the time and effort that he spends on its elaboration and defense, Jacobi's interpretation of Spinoza is not his only weapon in his battle against the *Aufklärung*. He has other arguments against the hegemony of reason, which are no less challenging. In the concluding section of the first edition of the *Briefe*, Jacobi begins to attack reason from another—and even more vulnerable—direction.[127] Here Jacobi's line of approach is to consider not the consequences of rational inquiry and criticism, but the motives behind it. It is not only the *terminus ad quem* of reason—the atheism and fatalism

of Spinoza—but its *terminus a quo* that interests him. In a long and rambling disquisition, whose intent is unclear but whose purport is unmistakable, Jacobi casts doubt upon one of the most fundamental beliefs of the *Aufklärung:* that there is such a thing as purely objective inquiry, through which it is possible to determine truth and falsity apart from all our interests. If he could prove this belief to be false, then the *Aufklärung* would truly have met its end. There would no longer be an impartial and universal reason to destroy the prejudice, superstition, and ignorance protecting vested interests (the Church and aristocracy). For what motivates reason will prove to be nothing more than a prejudice and vested interest of its own.

This belief is an illusion, Jacobi argues, because it presupposes a false relationship between reason and the will. It is not the case that reason governs our interests and desires, he says; rather, our interests and desires govern our reason.[128] "Reason is not the master, but the servant of the will," as the old adage goes. Such a doctrine is of course anything but new, and it can even be found in such apostles of the Enlightenment as Hume and Helvetius. But Jacobi extends this doctrine in a new and dangerous direction. Reason is subordinate to the will not only in the realm of practice, he says, but also in that of theory. The will determines not only the ends of action—what is good and evil—but also the goals and standards of inquiry—what is true and false. It is Jacobi's chief contention that we cannot separate the realms of theory and practice, because knowledge is the consequence of right action, truth the result of the proper interests.

But why is this the case? What could possibly justify Jacobi in making such a radical and apparently reckless claim? We can find no satisfactory answer to this question in the first edition of the *Briefe.* It is only in *David Hume,* and in the much enlarged second edition of the *Briefe,* that Jacobi states the general theory behind his position.[129] There are two important points that bring Jacobi to this radical conclusion. First, reason knows only what it creates, or only that which conforms to the laws of its own activity. Such a claim is not meant as a criticism of reason, but only as a restatement of a definition of reason that is often found in the *Aufklärung.* It is found in Kant, for example, and it is possible that Jacobi has Kant in mind here.[130] Second, the creative activity of reason is not purely disinterested or an end in itself; it is governed by a more basic interest and desire, one that is beyond its control, and one that it does not even understand, namely, the sheer need for survival.[131] The task of reason is to control, organize, and dominate our environment for the sake of the survival of the species. Reason develops hand in hand with language, Jacobi contends, and the purpose of language is to transmit information from one generation to the next about the means for its survival.[132]

Added together, these points seriously undermine the possibility of ob-

jective inquiry in the sense assumed by Mendelssohn and the *Aufklärer*.[133] They bring into question any sense in which we can talk about purely 'objective' standards of truth. The first point implies that there is no such thing as objective truth in the sense of an external object in nature to which all our knowledge somehow corresponds. Reason does not conform to nature, but nature conforms to it. In other words, reason does not comply with given standards of truth but creates them. This point still leaves open the possibility of a Kantian notion of objectivity, however, where objectivity consists in conformity to universal and necessary rules. The only question then is whether or not there can be such rules. Jacobi answers this question with a very firm "No." His second point is directed against this Kantian position, bringing into question even its more modest concept of objectivity. Jacobi denies that there is any such thing as objectivity in the Kantian sense of conformity to disinterested, impartial, and autonomous rational criteria. The problem is that reason is not a completely self-governing faculty; it is controlled by our needs and desires as living beings. We cannot separate reason from our needs and functions as living beings because its task is to do nothing more than organize and satisfy them. Of course, it is the business of reason to create laws, Jacobi happily concedes to Kant. But he then adds: in doing so, reason is governed by our interests as living beings, which are not in turn subject to rational control and appraisal. Rather, they determine the very criteria of rational appraisal.

Prima facie this position does not seem to be dangerously relativistic. There still appears to be a plausible antirelativistic line of reply to Jacobi even if we admit his premises. We might concede to him that it is our interests that determine our standards of truth. But then we might argue that our interests are universal. This is indeed the case for such biological interests as self-preservation. Hence there could still be objectivity in the sense that there is a single objective behind all discourse, namely, self-preservation. We can then evaluate all the different criteria of truth in terms of one more general criterion, which asks whether adopting a criterion is an efficient means for survival.

In essence, however, Jacobi's position is much more relativistic than it appears. If we look closer, we find that Jacobi does not have a merely biological notion of interest. He also recognizes the role of culture in the formation of interests, and—even more ominously—he notes that cultural standards are frequently incommensurable with one another. In an early essay, for example, Jacobi writes that the philosophy and religion of one age are often complete nonsense when they are judged by the standards of another.[134] Thus, daring though it might be, Jacobi does take the plunge into relativism. He insists that the interests which determine our reason are conflicting, and that these are incommensurable with one another. There is

no rational standard to mediate between them since rationality is defined within the terms of each.

Jacobi does not conclude from this argument that we should drop the concept of truth from our vocabulary. But he does think that we should at least revise our notion of how truth is attained. We do not attain knowledge through disinterested contemplation, he maintains, but through having the right disposition and doing the right actions. "Knowledge of the eternal," Jacobi claims, "is given only to the heart that seeks it." As he sums up his general position in the *Briefe,* "We find ourselves placed upon this earth; and what our actions become there also determines our knowledge; what happens to our moral disposition also determines our insight into things."[135]

But Jacobi's hard-won position inevitably raises the question, How do we know how to act? How do we know what our dispositions should be? It seems that there must be some knowledge before acting in order to make the right choice between all the options available. Jacobi does not evade this question. But neither does he make any concessions about the necessity of having some prior knowledge. If we are to know how to act, he says, then all we need is faith, faith in the promises of Christ.[136] What does it mean to have faith in Christ, though, other than being willing to act upon his commandments? Once we obey his commandments, we can rest assured: we will then act in the right manner and acquire knowledge of the eternal as a result. It is pointless trying to examine and criticize Christ's word before we act, however, because we have knowledge only at the end of action. If we have faith, then we will act; and if we act, then we will have knowledge. But all criticism before acting is nothing more than a *petitio principii.* It is like a blind man denying that colors exist.

Jacobi claims that his epistemology of action represents the spirit of Christianity. "The spirit of my religion," he tells Mendelssohn, contrasting his Christianity with Mendelssohn's Judaism, "is that man comes to know God through leading the life of God."[137] Jacobi then elaborates this statement in the context of the Gospel of John. The God of Christianity is the God of love, he says, and such a God reveals himself only to those who love him and who act in his spirit.[138] To have faith is to love God and one's fellowmen; and the reward of such a life is the knowledge of God.

On the basis of this new epistemology, Jacobi develops a general theory about the nature and limits of philosophy itself. Since our actions determine our knowledge and, furthermore, our actions are determined by the general culture in which we live, it follows that philosophy is nothing more than the product of its time. "Can philosophy ever be anything more than history?" Jacobi asks. And he answers in the negative. Philosophy is nothing more than the self-reflection of an age. Some twenty years before Hegel's *Phänomenologie,* and some fifteen years before Schlegel's *Vorlesungen über*

Transcendentalphilosophie, Jacobi writes, "Every age has its own truth, just as it has its own living philosophy, which describes in its progress the predominant manner of acting in the age."[139]

Jacobi does not hesitate to draw an apparently radical political conclusion from all this. "If we are to improve the philosophy of an age," he argues, "then we must first change its history, its manner of acting, its way of life."[140] But the conclusion only appears to be radical and political. Jacobi does not envisage anything as revolutionary as Marx. The problems of the present age can be resolved, he thinks, only through the reform of its morals. The great problem of the present age is its increasing materialism, its preference for wealth and comfort above everything else, which is leading to a decline in such moral values as patriotism, justice, and community. The only way to remedy this sorry state of affairs is to revive morality, and this can only be accomplished by returning to religion, the good old Christian religion of our fathers. To Jacobi, it is an old and proven truth: "Religion is the only means to rescue the miserable plight of man."[141]

2.7. Jacobi's Defense of Faith

A central task of Jacobi's attack upon reason is to convince us of the necessity and omnipresence of faith. Faith is to Jacobi what reason is to Mendelssohn: the ultimate touchstone of truth. If Mendelssohn argues that we must examine every belief according to reason, Jacobi replies that any such examination in the end rests upon a *salto mortale.* Faith is inescapable, a necessary act of commitment. As Jacobi swore to Mendelssohn in response to his rationalist credo, "My dear Mendelssohn, we were all born in faith, and we must remain in faith, just as we were all born in society and must remain in it."[142]

Why is faith inescapable? We cannot avoid it, Jacobi tells us in the *Briefe,* because even our allegiance to reason is an act of faith.[143] All demonstration has to stop somewhere because the first principles of demonstration are themselves indemonstrable. Then what is our belief in the certainty of these principles, other than faith? All belief that cannot be demonstrated is faith; but these principles cannot be demonstrated; hence belief in them amounts to faith. Thus Jacobi's reply to Mendelssohn's credo is that it is just that: a simple act of faith. Mendelssohn cannot demonstrate his faith in reason without presupposing it.

Mendelssohn could reply to this argument, however, by exploiting a simple point that Jacobi himself admits: that the first principles of reason are self-evident, possessing an intuitive or immediate certainty. If they are self-evident, then we do not just *believe* that they are true; we *know* that they are true. But what we know is not just what we believe. So how is

belief in the first principles a simple act of faith? Jacobi's argument derives its plausibility from conflating two very different kinds of indemonstrable belief: that which is indemonstrable because it is self-evident and axiomatic; and that which is indemonstrable because it is uncertain or unverifiable. Mendelssohn could then disarm Jacobi's objection by replying that his belief in the first principles of reason belongs to the first and not the second kind of belief.

What allows Jacobi to conflate these two very different kinds of belief is his technical use of the word 'faith'. In the usual sense faith opposes all forms of knowledge, whether self-evident or demonstrable. But, like Hamann, Jacobi deliberately expands the use of the word, so that it opposes not all knowledge, but only demonstrable knowledge. All belief that does not permit rational justification or demonstration is faith, he argues, and that includes beliefs that are self-evidently true.[144] Hence Jacobi considers the belief in the first principles of demonstration just as much an act of faith as the belief in the existence of God.

Jacobi's broad use of the word 'faith' is clearly tendentious, serving to justify religious and moral belief. Since it conflates these two kinds of indemonstrable belief, it makes religious and moral beliefs seem as certain as the axioms of arithmetic and the axioms of arithmetic as uncertain as religious beliefs. And the palpable difference between these two kinds of belief is reason for rejecting rather than accepting Jacobi's usage. Indeed, Goethe and Herder dismissed Jacobi's concept of faith on just these grounds.[145]

Apparently, Jacobi's broad use of the word 'faith' is perfectly defensible, a strict consequence of the common definition of knowledge as *justifiable* true belief. If we stick to this definition, then beliefs that we regard as certain, but that we still cannot justify, cannot amount to knowledge. Hence even our belief in the first principles of reason can only be an act of faith. Such an interpretation does not excuse Jacobi for confusing two kinds of indemonstrable belief; but at least it makes his usage more understandable. The only problem with this reading is that Jacobi does not always abide by this definition. Thus he sometimes calls *indemonstrable* beliefs knowledge. Whereas the common definition contrasts faith with all forms of knowledge, Jacobi contrasts it only with discursive or demonstrable knowledge.

If Jacobi's attempt to persuade us of the necessity of faith is dubious, resting upon a tendentious use of the word 'faith', his attempt to persuade us of its omnipresence is plausible. Like Hamann, Jacobi thinks that we must limit the principle of sufficient reason, so that we cannot demand a justification or demonstration for all our beliefs. It is just a fact, he argues, that most of our commonsense beliefs cannot be demonstrated.[146] Take the belief in the existence of the external world. It cannot be demonstrated since, from all the evidence of our senses, we cannot infer that objects

continue to exist when we do not perceive them. For similar reasons, we cannot prove our belief in the existence of other minds or in the reliability of induction. If, then, we are not to lapse into skepticism, rejecting all beliefs that cannot be demonstrated, we have to restrict the demand for rational justification. We have to recognize that the sphere of faith is much wider than we at first thought. It encompasses all beliefs that are not capable of strict demonstration, and that includes not only our moral and religious beliefs, but also the most basic beliefs of common sense.

While arguing for the omnipresence of faith, Jacobi frequently appeals to the arguments of another philosopher he greatly admires: David Hume. Like Hamann, he admits that he owes a great debt to the Scottish skeptic.[147] It is Hume who taught him that the beliefs of common sense are not demonstrable by reason and that the sphere of faith extends into all the corners of life. In gratitude, Jacobi entitled one of his most important works *David Hume*.

But Jacobi's use of Hume's skepticism, much like Hamann's, was self-serving. Although Jacobi was happy to invoke Hume's skepticism to limit the province of reason, he was not willing to accept Hume's skeptical conclusion that all everyday beliefs are unfounded. Indeed, he used Hume's arguments for the opposite purpose of that intended. Whereas Hume argued that commonsense beliefs are indemonstrable in order to cast doubt upon them, Jacobi used the same point to show that they enjoy an immediate certainty that does not require demonstration. This is precisely where Jacobi betrayed his claim to be the legitimate heir of Hume. He retreated from the challenge of Hume's skepticism by granting an immediate certainty to the realm of faith. Insisting that this certainty is ineffable and inexplicable, Jacobi refused to answer Hume's skeptical question, How do I know this? It is difficult to resist the conclusion, then, that Hume would have dubbed his pietistic follower an 'enthusiast'.

· *Chapter 3* ·

Mendelssohn and the Pantheism Controversy

3.1. Mendelssohn's Place in the History of Philosophy

It is a sad legacy of our nonhistorical age that Moses Mendelssohn is now remembered only as the philosopher 'refuted' by Kant in the "Paralogismus" chapter of the first *Kritik*. This is no reputation for a thinker who was called "the Socrates of his age," and who was regarded as the leading light of the *Aufklärung* in Berlin. Mendelssohn's pivotal role in the *Aufklärung* is indisputable. Consider his famous friendship with Lessing and Nicolai, his influential essay "Was heisst aufklären?" his pioneering contributions to literary criticism in the *Allgemeine deutsche Bibliothek,* and his classic defense of religious freedom and tolerance, *Jerusalem.* Lessing had good reason for using Mendelssohn as the model for the character Nathan in his famous play *Nathan der Weise;* Mendelssohn was indeed a fitting symbol for his whole age.

The injustice of our contemporary image of Mendelssohn is all the more glaring, given Mendelssohn's influential role as a mediator between Judaism and modern secular culture. More than anyone before him, Mendelssohn deserves credit for bringing the Jew out of the ghetto and into the mainstream of modern culture.[1] In this respect Mendelssohn's impact on Jewish life has been compared to Luther's influence on the Germans.[2] Both Mendelssohn and Luther, it has been said, freed their people from the yoke of tradition and authority. What Luther did for the Germans vis-à-vis the Roman Catholic Church, Mendelssohn did for the Jews vis-à-vis Talmudism. An orthodox Jew himself, Mendelssohn was no apostle of assimilation. He wanted Jews to preserve their identity, to maintain their traditions, and to remain loyal to their religion. Nevertheless, he supported dialogue and symbiosis between German and Jew where each could learn from the other. Mendelssohn took two important steps toward this goal. First, he defended religious tolerance and freedom in his *Jerusalem,* a book that achieved

widespread recognition.[3] And, second, he made the German language more accessible to Jews through his German translation of the Hebrew Bible. For Jewish life, Mendelssohn's translation is an achievement comparable in its consequences to Luther's translation two centuries before.[4]

Even granting Mendelssohn's historical importance, we might ask why Mendelssohn is important in the history of philosophy per se. Literary criticism, a translation of the Bible, and a defense of political causes do not amount to philosophy in a strict sense, some might say, and a contribution to the culture of a nation does not necessarily amount to a contribution to the history of philosophy. Is there really any reason for granting Mendelssohn a more exalted place in the history of philosophy proper, other than as the hapless thinker ruined by Kant?

If we consider the field of aesthetics and political philosophy alone, Mendelssohn deserves a small but secure place in the history of philosophy. Mendelssohn's aesthetics, often seen as his most important contribution to philosophy,[5] was a significant step away from Baumgarten and toward Kant and Schiller.[6] And Mendelssohn's political theory, as a defense of the liberal values of the *Aufklärung,* is comparable in stature to Kant's. As an apology for religious tolerance, Mendelssohn's *Jerusalem* is indeed on par with Locke's *Letter on Tolerance* and Spinoza's *Tractatus theologicus-politicus.*[7]

Paradoxically, however, Mendelssohn is remembered least in the field in which he originally made his reputation and which was most important to him: metaphysics. Most of his time and energy was devoted to metaphysics, and almost all of his main philosophical works were in this field. Mendelssohn is indeed the last figure in the rationalist metaphysical tradition, the tradition of Descartes, Spinoza, Leibniz, and Wolff. His metaphysical writings are among the very best in that tradition. They are stylistically impressive, displaying clarity, rigor, and elegance—Kant considered Mendelssohn's works to be "a model of philosophical precision"—and they are philosophically illuminating, explaining many of the fundamental ideas of the rationalist tradition.[8] What is left unsaid or vague by Leibniz or Wolff is often articulated and defended by Mendelssohn.[9] All too often, though, Mendelssohn has been reduced to a minor disciple of the Leibnizian-Wolffian school, to a mere *Popularphilosoph* who simply popularized Leibniz's esoteric and Wolff's academic philosophies.[10]

But Mendelssohn was not just another rationalist, one figure among others in a common school of thought. Rather, he deserves a special place within the rationalist tradition. He was the most modern of all the rationalists because he was aware of, and responded to, 'the crisis of metaphysics', its struggle to maintain its credentials as a science. Descartes and Spinoza, Leibniz and Wolff were writing at a time when metaphysics still had authority, largely due to the continuing influence of the scholastic tradition.

But Mendelssohn had to write for a later generation that had lost its faith in metaphysics. Toward the third quarter of the eighteenth century, even before the appearance of Kant's *Kritik,* metaphysics was coming under increasing criticism from several quarters: the skepticism of Hume and the French philosophes; the empiricism of Crusius's and Locke's followers in Germany; and the whole horde of *Popularphilosophen,* who simply had no time for rationalistic *Gründlichkeit.* Mendelssohn's reactions to these criticisms are interesting and important because they put forward the case for the metaphysical tradition itself. Indeed, Mendelssohn was not only aware of the problem of metaphysics: it was his lifelong preoccupation. The main goal of his "Prize Essay" (1763) was precisely to show that metaphysics is capable of attaining the scientific status of mathematics. Mendelssohn's last metaphysical work, his *Morgenstunden* (1785), was a continuation of his earlier concerns, a rehabilitated "Prize Essay" whose purpose was to meet two new threats to the metaphysical tradition: Kant and Jacobi.

The task of the present chapter is, of course, not to examine the length and breadth of Mendelssohn's achievement, but to focus on one phase and aspect of it: his defense of reason and the metaphysical tradition in *Morgenstunden.* Although the history of philosophy usually classifies Mendelssohn under the pre-Kantian tradition, seeing him as the last rationalist in the series from Leibniz to Wolff to Baumgarten, his *Morgenstunden* forms a necessary chapter in the history of post-Kantian philosophy. History itself forces us to make this classification. *Morgenstunden* was published after the first *Kritik;* and it was a reaction against Kant's and Jacobi's criticisms of the rationalist tradition. More important, though, philosophical justice demands that we present the case for the defense as well as the prosecution. We cannot evaluate Kant's and Jacobi's criticisms fairly unless we first see how the rationalist tradition was defended. Both historically and philosophically, then, we are obliged to treat Mendelssohn's *Morgenstunden* in the history of post-Kantian thought.

3.2. In Defense of Reason

The primary aim of *Morgenstunden* is to defend Mendelssohn's credo, his allegiance to reason as the final standard of truth in philosophy. *Morgenstunden* is more ostensibly an exposition and defense of the metaphysical tradition of Leibniz and Wolff. But it is important to see that these issues were inseparable for Mendelssohn. A defense of reason was for him tantamount to a defense of the possibility of Leibnizian-Wolffian metaphysics. Without demonstrative knowledge of God, the soul, providence, and immortality, the case for reason would collapse. Jacobi would be right: we would have to turn our back upon reason to keep our faith.

The foundation of Mendelssohn's faith in reason, the basis of his confidence in it as a standard of truth, is nothing less than his theory of judgment.[11] Like Leibniz and Wolff, Mendelssohn supports the theory that all judgments are in principle identical, so that their truth or falsity ultimately rests on the principle of contradiction. According to this theory, the predicate of a judgment only makes explicit what is already contained in 'the notion of the subject'. Although most judgments appear to be nonidentical from the standpoint of our ordinary knowledge, where we have only a confused knowledge of things, they would prove to be identical if we could sufficiently analyze what is involved in the notion of the subject. If we had the infinite understanding of God, who has a clear and complete knowledge of all things, then we would know everything as a necessary and eternal truth. Thus Mendelssohn likens the analysis of a judgment to the use of a magnifying glass: it makes clear and distinct what is obscure and confused; but it does not add anything new.

This theory of judgment has an extremely important consequence for the general theory of knowledge. Namely, it is possible, at least in principle, for reason to determine the truth or falsity of all metaphysical judgments. In order to do this, it only has to analyze the notion of the subject to see whether the predicate follows from it. Through this simple procedure, reason will provide a sufficient criterion of truth in metaphysics.

Although simple and beautiful, Mendelssohn's theory of judgment is also problematic. In his *David Hume* (1787), which is a reply to *Morgenstunden*, Jacobi raised one of the classical objections to Mendelssohn's theory: that it fails to distinguish between conceptual and real connection.[12] It assumes that the connection between subject and predicate is also a connection between cause and effect in nature, so that it appears as if reason gives us insight into the real connections of things. But this assumption is a delusion, Jacobi argues, since it conceals a fundamental difference between these two kinds of connection. The conceptual connection between subject and predicate is nontemporal because the subject is logically prior to the predicate. But all real connection between cause and effect is temporal because the cause is temporally prior to the effect. We cannot assume that the connection between cause and effect corresponds to that between subject and predicate, Jacobi further maintains, because it is logically possible to affirm the cause and to deny the effect. Hence Jacobi concludes that real succession, the connection between things in time, is incomprehensible to reason. To assume that everything is comprehensible according to reason, we have to deny the reality of time entirely, just as Spinoza does in the *Ethica*.

Jacobi's objection to Mendelssohn's theory had a noble ancestry behind it. The same point had been made against Wolff by Crusius in his *Ver-*

nunftwahrheiten (1745) and by Kant in his *Negativen Grössen* (1763).[13] The problem of causality had indeed become a powerful challenge to the rationalist tradition ever since Hume first raised the matter in his *Treatise* in 1739. 'If something is, then why should there be something else?'—that is how Kant in 1763 formulated the problem that would continue to preoccupy him until the first *Kritik*'s completion in 1781. Despite the age and gravity of the problem, Mendelssohn fails to address it in *Morgenstunden*. Here he restates more than he defends the classical theory of judgment. His failure to deal with this problem is indeed a grave weakness in his defense of reason in *Morgenstunden*.

In addition to the problem of causality, there is another difficulty in Mendelssohn's theory of judgment: what Lessing calls "the broad ugly ditch between possibility and reality, concept and existence." All truths found through the analysis of judgment are only hypothetical in form, Mendelssohn concedes, such that they tell us nothing about existence itself.[14] They are of the form 'If S, then P' where it is still an open question whether there is an S. Mendelssohn recognizes that the philosopher, unlike the mathematician, has to determine not only the relationships between concepts, but also whether these concepts have objects. The transition from concept to reality is indeed "the most difficult knot the philosopher has to untie"; unless he unties it, he runs the risk of playing with concepts that have no reference to reality.

Having seen Lessing's ditch, Mendelssohn still attempts to hurdle it. He thinks that reason can cross it, though only at definite points, namely, those where a concept is self-validating, or where it would be absurd to deny its referent.[15] We are told that there are only two such concepts. The first is the concept of a thinking being; and the second is the concept of the most perfect being, God. Here Mendelssohn has in mind Descartes's *cogito* and Anselm's ontological argument. Like Wolff, he adheres to modified versions of both these arguments.

Rather than strengthening his position, Mendelssohn's response to this difficulty only betrays its underlying weakness. Mendelssohn's defense of reason depends inter alia upon the claim that reason provides conclusions of existential import; but that claim in turn depends upon two very disputable arguments, the *cogito* and ontological argument. When Kant and Jacobi attack these arguments, Mendelssohn is forced to defend his position by engaging in scholastic subtleties. Such niceties, however, are not likely to convince a *Stürmer und Dränger* who questions the authority of all demonstrations in the first place.

An integral part of Mendelssohn's defense of reason is chapter 7 of *Morgenstunden*. It is here that Mendelssohn defends the *Aufklärung*'s ideal of

objective inquiry—the need to investigate the truth regardless of interests and despite the consequences.

Mendelssohn's defense of objective inquiry takes the form of an attack on J. B. Basedow, an influential eighteenth-century educational theorist, whose philosophical claim to fame was his notion of 'the duty to believe' (*Glaubenspflicht*). According to Basedow, if a principle is necessary to moral conduct or human happiness, then we have a duty to believe it, even if we cannot establish its truth by purely rational means.[16] There is a patent similarity between Basedow's position and Kant's and Jacobi's; thus in criticizing Basedow, Mendelssohn was probably criticizing Kant and Jacobi as well.[17]

Mendelssohn makes the standard reply to all ideas like Basedow's: that they fail to distinguish between moral and intellectual standards.[18] He argues that all such ideas confuse moral and intellectual assent, that is, the reasons for accepting a belief as true (*Erkenntnisgründe*) and the reasons for morally approving and acting upon it (*Billigungsgründe*). In fact, these are completely distinct from each other. We cannot have a moral duty to believe in God, immortality, and providence, because we cannot be responsible for the truth or falsity of these beliefs. They are true or false apart from our will, so that it might be necessary to admit their falsity despite the moral consequences. The necessity of assenting to a belief is not 'moral' (*sittlich*) but 'physical' (*physisch*), in Mendelssohn's terms, since we have no choice concerning its truth or falsity. The sole duty of the philosopher with respect to belief, Mendelssohn declares, is the duty to investigate.

This argument is Mendelssohn's defense of metaphysics, or his way of saying that metaphysics is indispensable. According to this argument, to justify our moral and religious beliefs, we have to establish that they are true, or we have to acquire knowledge that they correspond to reality. It is not enough to establish that they are morally good or conducive to happiness. But the business of demonstrating our moral and religious beliefs—of acquiring knowledge of God, providence, and immortality—is metaphysics. Of course, Kant rejects metaphysics as too speculative. But, Mendelssohn would reply, if metaphysics is speculative, is it necessarily avoidable? The notion of a duty to believe is only an escape from the arduous task of investigation.

Mendelssohn admits that our investigation might not come to any definite conclusions. But he still thinks that there are more advantages to investigating truth without acquiring knowledge than to clinging to true beliefs without investigating them.[19] The problem with stubbornly adhering to beliefs—even true ones—without investigating the reasons for their truth is that it eventually leads to superstition, intolerance, and fanaticism. According to the natural cycle of things, Mendelssohn says, knowledge leads to contentment, contentment to laziness, and laziness to a failure to inquire;

but that neglect of inquiry ultimately results in superstition, intolerance, and fanaticism. If, then, we are to be cured of these vices, we have to revive the spirit of doubt and free inquiry.

What is important to Mendelssohn, then, is not so much what we believe, but how we believe—the reasons we give for our beliefs, our willingness to admit error, to consider opposing viewpoints and to continue investigation even though we are sure we are right. This is of course a cardinal principle of the *Aufklärung,* and especially of the Berlin circle centering on Lessing, Nicolai, and Mendelssohn. Lessing gave classic expression to it in the famous lines: "If God were holding all truth in his right hand and the erring search for it in his left, and then said 'Choose!' I would humbly fall upon his left hand and say, 'Father give! Pure truth is for thee alone.' "[20] In Mendelssohn's view the problem with a philosophy like Jacobi's is that it values what we believe more than how we believe, thus leading to all the dangers of intolerance, despotism, and dogmatism. A government that values dogma over freedom of thought will be likely to use coercion to maintain the moral and religious status quo.[21]

There is, however, an apparent circle in Mendelssohn's defense of objective inquiry. Mendelssohn is able to justify value-free inquiry only by using certain moral and political values, namely, those of liberalism. Hence it seems as if he has quit objective inquiry in order to justify it, or as if he has abandoned reason in order to defend it. This is of course precisely where Jacobi wants Mendelssohn, having to admit that his belief in reason is in the end only a *salto mortale* of its own.

But the question is whether this circle is a vicious one. And here the answer is not clear-cut. The problem has been thrown back another step. It now depends on whether or not we can determine the right or wrong, the good or evil, of Mendelssohn's political values by a process of sheer rational argument and objective inquiry. If not, Mendelssohn has to admit that his defense of objective inquiry is anything but objective. But if so, then the whole case for objective inquiry has moved into a new and hitherto unexpected field: that of political philosophy. In this case, Mendelssohn's defense of reason in *Morgenstunden* ultimately rests upon his defense of liberalism in *Jerusalem.*

3.3. Mendelssohn's Nightmare, or, the Method of Orientation

Although Mendelssohn disputes the validity of Jacobi's dilemma between reason and faith, he admits there is a prima facie conflict between philosophy and ordinary belief. He sees this as a conflict between 'common sense' (*Gemeinsinn*) and 'speculation' (*Spekulation*), however, and does not use the terms 'faith' (*Glaube*) or 'reason' (*Vernunft*).[22] Nevertheless, though the

terms are different, the conflict is the same. Mendelssohn thinks that speculation stands in the same critical relationship to common sense as reason does to faith. Even the extension of Mendelssohn's 'common sense' and Jacobi's 'faith' is the same. Both terms are used in a broad sense, so that they refer to all the fundamental beliefs of morality, religion, and everyday life.[23]

Where Jacobi and Mendelssohn part company, of course, is over whether the conflict between philosophy and ordinary belief is resolvable. Mendelssohn affirms and Jacobi denies that the conflict is in principle resolvable. If philosophy leads to skepticism, then to Mendelssohn that means philosophy has gone astray somewhere in its speculations. According to him, common sense and speculation derive from a single source, and they are merely two forms of a single faculty: the faculty of reason (*Vernunft*). Whereas common sense is the intuitive form of reason, speculation is its discursive form. What common sense sees at a glance, speculation accounts for step by step through a syllogistic analysis into premise and conclusion. Although common sense is essentially rational, it is not self-conscious of the reasons for its beliefs. It is the task of speculation to bring these reasons to self-consciousness and to produce a discursive justification of the intuitions of common sense.

What happens, though, if the claims of common sense and speculation happen to contradict one another? What if philosophy fails to find a rationale for a belief of common sense and tells us to be skeptical about a belief that is necessary for the conduct of life? Mendelssohn is deeply worried by this question, so worried that he devotes an entire chapter to it in *Morgenstunden*.[24] His answer takes the form of an allegory.

After listening one evening to a tale about a journey through the Alps, Mendelssohn tells us, he had a strange dream. He dreamt that he too was traveling through the Alps, and that he had the aid of two guides. One guide was a Swiss rustic, who was strong and robust, but who had no subtle intellect; the other was an angel, who was gaunt and delicate, introspective and morbid. The guides came to a crossroads and went off in opposite directions, leaving poor Moses standing there completely confused. But he was soon rescued by the arrival of an elderly matron, who assured him that he would soon know the way. The matron revealed the identity of his two guides. The rustic went by the name of 'common sense' (*Gemeinsinn*), and the angel by the name of 'contemplation' (*Beschauung*). She then told him that it often happens that these characters disagree with each other and go off in opposite directions. But, she consoled him, they eventually return to the crossroads to have their conflicts settled by her. "So who are you?" Mendelssohn asked the matron. She said that on earth she went by the name of 'reason' (*Vernunft*), while in heaven she was called . . . At this point their conversation was interrupted by the arrival of a fanatical horde who

had rallied around the angel of contemplation and who were threatening to overpower common sense and reason. They attacked with horrible screams. Mendelssohn then woke up in terror.

Mendelssohn thinks his dream contains some useful advice for the philosopher. If he wanders too far from the path of common sense, the philosopher ought to reorient himself. He should return to the crossroads where common sense and speculation part and compare their conflicting claims in the light of reason. Experience teaches the philosopher that right is usually on the side of common sense, and that speculation contradicts it only because of some error in its reasoning. Hence the philosopher should retrace his steps and find the error, so that there is agreement between common sense and speculation. This is Mendelssohn's famous 'method of orientation', which was later appropriated by Kant.

Although the method of orientation puts the burden of proof on the philosopher, Mendelssohn admits that there are times when speculation has right on its side. When reason cannot find any error in the demonstrations of speculation, no matter how carefully it retraces its steps, and when speculation is in a position to explain how the error of common sense arose, then Mendelssohn is willing to concede the argument to speculation. He recognizes that there are times when common sense will err because it is too hasty or careless in its judgment. Although common sense is a subconscious and intuitive form of reason, it does not follow that it is infallible. Indeed, it is precisely because common sense reasons in an intuitive and subconscious manner that it is so liable to go astray.

Looking at Mendelssohn's dream more closely, we find that it is really a confusing nightmare, concealing Mendelssohn's deep anxiety about the powerlessness of reason. The manifest content of Mendelssohn's dream, the method of orientation, conceals the horrors of its latent content, the fragile truce between philosophy and ordinary belief. The truth of the matter is that Mendelssohn subconsciously concedes a lot to Jacobi. By admitting that there can be a conflict between common sense and speculation where reason is on the side of speculation, Mendelssohn grants that Jacobi's dilemma is valid, if only in some cases.[25] Thus, the only difference between Jacobi and Mendelssohn is that Jacobi says reason always leads to nihilism, whereas Mendelssohn admits it sometimes results in it. What are we to do, though, in those cases where reason commands us to surrender a belief of common sense, and indeed a belief that is indispensable to morality and religion? What should I do, for example, if reason agrees with speculation that there are no grounds for the belief in the existence of other minds? If I am to act according to my reason, then I do not have to treat other beings with the same respect as I treat myself; but common sense, and indeed morality, vigorously protests against this policy. But if Mendelssohn is not

willing to accept some of the nihilistic consequences of speculation—and consequences that have been examined and certified by reason—then does that not show that his commitment to common sense is nothing more than an irrational leap of faith in the manner of Jacobi? And, indeed, does not sticking with common sense against the better judgment of reason invite the very charges of fanaticism, dogmatism, and superstition that Mendelssohn levels against Jacobi?

There is yet another aspect to Mendelssohn's nightmare, which becomes apparent as soon as we raise the question, what is this figure of reason that so blithely settles the conflicts between speculation and common sense? If it is a faculty of criticism, a faculty that demands to know the reasons for our beliefs, then it amounts to nothing more than speculation. If, however, it is an intuitive faculty, a faculty that judges all issues according to "a natural light," then it is little more than common sense. We therefore do not seem to have any criterion for the identity of this mysterious faculty, a criterion that does not boil down to either of the very faculties whose disputes are to be settled. We are then left with a difficult question on our hands: on whose side is reason? That of common sense or speculation? This is an especially embarrassing question, given that reason is supposed to arbitrate the disputes between these faculties.

Assuming there is no third faculty of reason to mediate between common sense and speculation, we have to decide which faculty to follow in the case of a conflict. But here Mendelssohn offers us only the most confusing advice. He cannot decide which faculty deserves priority. Sometimes he says that we must trust our common sense and silence our reason until it returns to the fold of our ordinary beliefs.[26] The truths of natural religion remain unshakable to him, he confesses in his *An die Freunde Lessings,* even though all the demonstrations of the existence of God should fail.[27] We must not let the beliefs of morality and religion rest upon speculation or metaphysical argument, he insists, for that is to leave them dangling perilously, on the thinnest of threads. But is not this faith in common sense, and this mistrust in the demonstrations of reason, a betrayal of Mendelssohn's credo? At other times Mendelssohn says that the task of reason is 'to correct' common sense,[28] and he recognizes the possibility that common sense can err by not sufficiently investigating the reasons for its beliefs.[29] Indeed, in arguing against Basedow, Mendelssohn unequivocally takes his stand with speculation, steadfastly maintaining the necessity of pursuing an investigation despite the moral and religious consequences.

Mendelssohn's ambivalence here only reflects his awareness of the serious consequences of following one faculty at the expense of the other. He is trapped by the old dilemma of dogmatism or skepticism. If he follows his speculation alone, then he could arrive at skepticism, rejecting some of the

essential beliefs of common sense, morality, and religion; but if he follows his common sense alone, then he might lapse into dogmatism, dismissing all inquiry and criticism as sophistry. In the case of a persistent conflict between speculation and common sense, Mendelssohn's method of orientation leaves us with no means of steering between these two dangerous extremes.

Predictably, Mendelssohn's ambivalence became a source of widespread dissatisfaction with his handling of the debate. There was the general feeling that, for better or worse, Mendelssohn had not unambiguously supported the sovereignty of reason. Kant argued that Mendelssohn, by sometimes siding with common sense against speculation, had betrayed his declared allegiance to reason. And Wizenmann pointed out that Mendelssohn's belief in common sense was not unlike Jacobi's leap of faith. So, for those who had cast their lot with reason, the problem still remained of how to defend its sovereignty while not making fatal concessions to common sense. We shall soon see how Kant tried to resolve this thorniest of problems.

3.4. The Critique of Spinozism and Purified Pantheism

An essential part of *Morgenstunden* is Mendelssohn's refutation of the Spinozists, his attack on the *Alleiner* in lectures 12, 14, and 15. The critique of the Spinozists has great importance for Mendelssohn because Jacobi uses Spinozism to threaten the authority of reason. Since Jacobi equates Spinozism with atheism and fatalism, his claim that all reason leads to Spinozism is tantamount to the claim that all reason ends in atheism and fatalism. Mendelssohn does not dispute Jacobi's point that Spinozism amounts to fatalism and atheism. Hence it is all the more imperative for him to refute Spinozism if he is to uphold the authority of reason. Only that will show that reason does not lead to atheism and fatalism.

Mendelssohn begins his refutation by defining Spinozism and pinpointing its differences from the deism of Leibniz and Wolff. Seeing Spinozism as a form of pantheism, Mendelssohn defines it as the doctrine that God is the only possible and necessary substance, and that everything else is a mere mode of him.[30] The Spinozist therefore believes that we and the world outside us have no substantial reality, that we are only modifications of the single infinite substance, God. Hence Mendelssohn sums up Spinozism with the pantheistic slogan used by Lessing during his conversations with Jacobi: *Hen kai pan*, 'One and All'.

Using the method of orientation that he outlined in an earlier lecture, Mendelssohn then raises the question "Where did we start from?"[31] Where did the pantheist and deist start from, and where do they part? Where do they agree with each other, and what is the source of the conflict between

them? According to Mendelssohn, the pantheist and deist both agree to several propositions: (1) that the necessary being has self-knowledge, that is, it knows itself as a necessary being; (2) that finite things form an infinite series without beginning or end; and (3) that finite beings depend for their existence on God, and that their essence cannot be conceived apart from him. But where the pantheist and deist part company, Mendelssohn says, is over the question whether finite things have a substantial existence apart from God. The deist affirms and the pantheist denies that finite things are distinct substances apart from God. What the deist sees as distinct substances, the pantheist regards as modes of a single substance. Hence Mendelssohn sees the issue between the deist and the pantheist as a conflict between monism and pluralism.

Mendelssohn's first strategy against the Spinozist is therefore to examine Spinoza's argument for the necessity of monism.[32] Borrowing a point from Wolff's critique of Spinoza,[33] Mendelssohn claims that this argument rests upon an arbitrary definition of substance. We can readily agree with Spinoza, he says, that if independent existence is a necessary condition of substance, then there can be only one substance, the infinite being itself; for only that which is infinite cannot depend on anything else in order to exist. But it is arbitrary, Mendelssohn then insists, to consider independence as a necessary condition of substance. What we normally mean by substance is simply some being with a permanent essence or nature that remains the same despite changes in its accidents. And it is consistent with the permanent nature of such a being that it still depends on things in order to exist. It is therefore necessary to distinguish between the independent (*das Selbständige*) and the subsistent (*das Fürsichbestehende*). Although there can be only one entity that is independent, since only the infinite does not depend on anything else in order to exist, there can be many entities that are subsistent.

Mendelssohn admits that this objection still falls short of a refutation of Spinoza. It affects only Spinoza's demonstrations, but none of his main doctrines.[34] To refute these doctrines, we must show their incapacity to explain some indisputable features of our ordinary experience. But Mendelssohn thinks that he has an argument that establishes just that.[35] He asks the reader to consider the following points. Spinoza makes thought and extension into the two attributes of divine substance. He sees extension as the essence of matter and thought as the essence of mind. But, Mendelssohn retorts, there is more to matter than extension, and there is more to mind than thought. Matter also consists in motion; and the mind also consists in will and judgment.[36] Now Spinoza cannot explain these additional features of the mind and body, Mendelssohn argues, because they cannot have their origin in his single infinite substance. This substance cannot be the source of motion since it is the universe as a whole, and the universe as a

whole cannot change its place and therefore cannot be in motion. Similarly, this substance cannot be the source of desire or judgment, since Spinoza expressly denies that we can attribute such human characteristics as will, desire, and judgment to God. Hence, Mendelssohn concludes, we have to reject Spinozism because of its failure to account for two fundamental features of experience: the motion of matter, and the presence of the faculties of desire and judgment in the mind. We cannot simply dismiss these aspects of our experience as illusions of the imagination, as Spinoza wishes to, because we would still have to explain the origin of such illusions.

At this point, just as the deist seems to be overwhelming the pantheist with objections, Mendelssohn allows the argument to take a surprising turn against himself. At the beginning of lecture 14 he introduces his friend Lessing to defend a new and more powerful version of pantheism, or what Mendelssohn calls 'purified pantheism'. "What you have at most refuted is Spinoza, but not Spinozism," Mendelssohn has Lessing say. In the ensuing imaginary dialogue between Lessing and Mendelssohn, Lessing happily concedes all of Mendelssohn's earlier objections. But he insists that a Spinozist can admit these points and still maintain his essential thesis: that all things exist in God. Purified pantheism avoids two of Spinoza's mistakes: it does not deny volition to God, and it does not attribute extension to him. The God of the purified pantheist is a strictly spiritual being, having both intellect and will but no extension. He is indeed extremely similar to the God of Leibniz and Wolff: he has an infinite intellect, which conceives all possible worlds in the clearest possible manner; and he chooses that world which is the best possible. Despite this similarity, there is still a serious point of disagreement between the deist and pantheist. Whereas the deist asserts that God, having chosen the best of all possible worlds, grants an independent existence to it outside the divine mind, the pantheist denies it such existence. According to the purified pantheist, all things exist only in the infinite intellect of God and have no existence other than as objects of his ideas. "If I understand you correctly," Mendelssohn asks Lessing, "then you admit a God outside the world, but deny a world outside God, making God as it were into an infinite egoist." Lessing admits that this is indeed his view.

Although Mendelssohn believes that Lessing's purified pantheism does not have the morally damaging consequences of Spinozism, he is not ready to embrace it.[37] He spends the rest of lecture 14 expounding his objections against it. The fatal weakness of purified pantheism, Mendelssohn argues, is that it fails to distinguish between God's concept of a thing and that thing itself. It is necessary to make such a distinction, however, since God's concept of a finite thing is infinite and perfect while the thing itself is finite and

imperfect. To refuse to make this distinction is to deny God's perfection by putting finite and imperfect things inside his mind. As Mendelssohn summarizes his point, "It is one thing to have a limitation, to be limited; and it is another thing to know the limitation possessed by a being distinct from us. The most perfect being knows my weaknesses; but he does not have them."[38]

The wider problem that Mendelssohn has in mind here is fundamental for any form of pantheism. Namely, if God is perfect and infinite, and if the world is imperfect and finite, then how can God be in the world or the world in God? This problem was to haunt the pantheistic generation after Mendelssohn. Herder, Schelling, and Hegel all struggled to find a solution to it.[39] Even the most purified of pantheists could not come away from *Morgenstunden* without some nagging doubts on his philosophical conscience.

3.5. Mendelssohn's Covert Critique of Kant

Mendelssohn's critique of pantheism in *Morgenstunden* is of course a disguised attack on Jacobi. But there is someone else behind the lines in *Morgenstunden,* someone who is just as important to Mendelssohn as Jacobi, though his name is also never mentioned. This figure is none other than Kant. Although Mendelssohn admits in his preface that he has not been able to study the *Kritik,*[40] it is still evident from many passages—either from the use of Kantian language or from the Kantian nature of the position—that he has Kant in mind.[41] It is not difficult to understand why Mendelssohn wants to discuss Kant, who is as much a threat to his metaphysics as Jacobi. Indeed, to Mendelssohn, Kant and Jacobi each represent the two horns of a dilemma: dogmatism versus skepticism, or mysticism versus nihilism. Jacobi is a dogmatist or mystic since his *salto mortale* evades the demands of criticism; Kant is the skeptic or nihilist since he destroys the metaphysics necessary to justify moral and religious belief.[42] To vindicate his rationalist metaphysics, Mendelssohn has to show that it is the only middle path between these extremes; but that means he must settle his accounts with Kant as well as Jacobi. The struggle with Kant would have to be a silent one, though, since Mendelssohn was already too old and frail to risk a contest with Jacobi, let alone such a formidable opponent as Kant.

Mendelssohn's hidden quarrel with Kant occupies a place of central importance in *Morgenstunden:* the discussion of idealism in the first seven chapters, which is the very heart of the book.[43] Kant's idealism is the main danger of his philosophy, in Mendelssohn's view. It is an affront to common sense and a threat to morality and religion. How can we act in the world, how can we perform our obligations, and how can we worship a God, if

we think everything consists only in representations? Mendelssohn's interpretation of Kant's idealism is typical of the *Popularphilosophie* of his day.[44] Like Garve, Feder, and Weishaupt, Mendelssohn sees no essential difference between Kant's and Berkeley's idealism. Whether Kantian or Berkeleyan, the idealist maintains that nothing exists but spiritual substances; and he denies the existence of an external object corresponding to his representations.[45] Mendelssohn also wrongly assumes—again with Garve, Feder, and Weishaupt—that Kant does not affirm but denies the existence of things-in-themselves.

Mendelssohn's case against idealism largely consists in inductive arguments for the reality of the external world. There cannot be a logically certain inference from all the evidence of the senses to the existence of the external world, Mendelssohn realizes, but he thinks that such inferences are capable of "a high degree of probability."[46] All our inductive inferences about the existence of the external world rest upon evidence from the correspondence or agreement of perceptions. If all the senses agree with one another, and if the experiences of several observers agree with one another, and if, finally, observers with different sense organs also agree with one another, then it is probable, even if not logically certain, that the object of perceptions continues to exist. The more often we perceive something the more likely that it is in fact the case.

Although Kant, despite early plans, did not write a reply to *Morgenstunden,* it is not difficult to imagine his reaction to Mendelssohn's arguments.[47] Resting upon the legitimacy of inductive inference, they beg the question against Hume's skepticism. According to Hume, the fact that we have always perceived something in the past gives us no reason to assume that we will continue to perceive it in the future.[48] Although Kant attempts to reply to this point in the transcendental deduction of the first *Kritik,* Mendelssohn simply ignores it in *Morgenstunden.* Kant's readiness to reply to Hume is indeed one of the major strengths of his philosophy over Mendelssohn's.[49]

The last lecture of *Morgenstunden,* lecture 17, also silently takes issue with Kant. Here Mendelssohn makes a brave attempt to rescue the ontological argument after Kant's attack on it in the *Kritik.* In his 1763 "Prize Essay" Mendelssohn presented a new version of the ontological argument by avoiding the concept of existence and using instead the concepts of nonexistence and dependence, which he felt were not so fraught with difficulties.[50] Although many of his contemporaries, notably Kant and Jacobi, were unconvinced in 1763, Mendelssohn still thinks in 1785 that his argument is as

valid as ever. His confidence in the argument remains unshaken because he thinks that it avoids Kant's objections to the concept of existence.[51]

Mendelssohn does not simply restate his old argument, however; he also makes two replies to Kant's criticisms. His first reply is that the inference from possibility to reality, from essence to existence, is valid in one case only, and that is with the one and only infinite being, God.[52] There is a difference in kind between the nature of finite and infinite being, such that existence is necessary to the essence of a perfect and infinite being, but is not necessary to the essence of an imperfect and finite being. Now Kant ignores this point in his critique of the ontological argument, Mendelssohn suggests, because he surreptitiously assumes that the distinction between possibility and reality in the case of a finite being applies *mutatis mutandis* in the case of an infinite being. Hence all his examples that are to prove the distinction between essence and existence are taken from finite beings, for example, the notorious case of the one hundred talers. But while the essence of one hundred measly talers does not involve its existence, as Kant argues, the essence of God does involve his existence, for his essence is incomparably more perfect than that of one hundred talers.

Mendelssohn's second reply to Kant's criticisms claims the ontological argument is not affected by Kant's argument that existence is not a predicate. Assuming that existence is not a predicate but only the affirmation or positing of all the properties of a thing, it is impossible to think of the essence of the infinite being without positing or affirming all its properties. There is indeed still a difference between the contingent existence of the finite and the necessary existence of the infinite. Namely, the infinite is that which of necessity posits all its properties, while the finite is that which might not posit all its properties.[53] In Mendelssohn's view, then, the inference from the infinite or most perfect being to existence is not affected by how we analyze the concept of existence.

If we look back over his contribution to the pantheism controversy, it is difficult to resist the conclusion that, despite his noble intentions, Mendelssohn had weakened the case for reason more than he had strengthened it. He made the case for reason dependent on the claims of rationalist metaphysics; but these claims were, to say the least, very disputable. He assumed that reason could be a sufficient criterion of truth in metaphysics only if the rationalist theory of judgment were correct; but that theory had serious weaknesses, namely, it could not explain real connection or guarantee conclusions of existential significance. Mendelssohn had also based some central moral and religious beliefs—the beliefs in God, providence,

and immortality—upon a priori demonstrations. But these demonstrations were severely criticized by Kant in the first *Kritik;* and Mendelssohn's failure to reply to Kant in any thorough and rigorous fashion left his entire position exposed. So, in the end, it seemed as if Mendelssohn had imperiled, rather than defended, two fundamental claims of reason: its claim to be a sufficient criterion of truth in metaphysics; and its claim to justify our essential moral and religious beliefs.

Another serious weakness of Mendelssohn's defense of reason was that, at bottom, it failed to address the deeper problem that Jacobi had raised. In summoning the ghost of Spinoza, Jacobi was alluding to the apparent fatalistic and atheistic consequences of modern science. It was indeed these consequences of modern science that so deeply disturbed late eighteenth-century thinkers. Mendelssohn did little to allay these fears, however, with his antique Wolffian-style refutation of Spinoza. For what was at stake was not the geometric demonstrations of Spinoza's system, but the naturalistic spirit behind it.

There was also the nagging suspicion that Mendelssohn had betrayed the very credo he set out to defend. His moral and religious beliefs meant more to him than his reason, which he was willing to abandon should it continue to contradict them. That, at any rate, was the sad lesson to be learned from his method of orientation. It seemed that, when the going got rough, Mendelssohn was really on Jacobi's side. Who, then, was going to defend the cause of reason?

Given Mendelssohn's poor showing, it was crucial that someone else enter into the fray to defend the crumbling authority of reason. A new defense was needed that did not repeat Mendelssohn's mistakes. It would have to separate the case for reason from the claims of metaphysics; it would have to respond to the deeper challenge behind Jacobi's Spinozism; and it would have to take an unambiguous stand in favor of reason. It was the destiny of Kant to undertake just such a defense. We shall soon see how his defense fared at the hands of Jacobi and his allies.

· *Chapter 4* ·

Kant, Jacobi, and Wizenmann in Battle

4.1. Thomas Wizenmann's *Resultate*

In May 1786, six months after the publication of Mendelssohn's *Morgenstunden* and Jacobi's *Briefe*, a strange anonymous tract appeared that was to have an important effect upon the course of the pantheism controversy. Its title was striking and cryptic: *Die Resultate der Jacobischer und Mendelssohnischer Philosophie von einem Freywilligen*. This tract created a stir through its passionate and provocative tone, and it helped to convince a wider public of the importance of the controversy.[1] Who, though, was this 'volunteer' *(Freywilligen)*? There was much speculation about his identity, and for a while rumor had it that he was none other than Herder.[2] But in a short time the truth came out: the author was the little-known, but extremely gifted friend of Jacobi, Thomas Wizenmann.

On many points, though certainly not all, Wizenmann sided with Jacobi in the pantheism controversy. He agreed with Jacobi that all philosophy ends in Spinozism, and that we can avoid atheism and fatalism only through a *salto mortale*.[3] Nonetheless, Wizenmann still insisted—rightly—that he was no mere disciple of Jacobi, and that he arrived at his position through independent reflection.[4] This is surely the clue to the term 'volunteer' that appears in his title. Wizenmann chose this term in order to stress that he was not a recruit of Jacobi's.[5] And, indeed, his claim to independence vindicates itself time and again in his work. Wizenmann often came forward with new ideas, and he frequently defended Jacobi with fresh arguments. At times, furthermore, he was sharply critical of Jacobi on several points, as we shall soon see.

Wizenmann made several important contributions to the pantheism controversy. First, he clarified the state of the controversy, explaining the similarities and differences between Jacobi and Mendelssohn. It was particularly helpful that he pointed out the hidden irrationalism in Mendelssohn's position. Second, he did much to give Jacobi's position a fairer hearing. This

was necessary since the Berliners were all too keen on dismissing Jacobi as a mere *Schwärmer* along the lines of Lavater. Third, he raised the whole tone of the controversy by ignoring the personal, biographical, and exegetical issues and by concentrating on the philosophical ones. This too was a timely deed since, during the spring of 1786, Jacobi's and Mendelssohn's friends were hurling mud at one another at an alarming rate and losing sight of all their original philosophical interests.

What, more than anything else, ensures Wizenmann a short but safe place in the history of philosophy is his impact on Kant. The *Resultate* was the starting point for Kant's reflections on the pantheism controversy. It was indeed Wizenmann who convinced Kant that Jacobi and Mendelssohn were both heading in the dangerous direction of irrationalism, and that something had to be done about it.[6] Wizenmann's later dispute with Kant was also important for Kant because it forced him to clarify his doctrine of practical faith for the second *Kritik*.[7] If one bothers to read behind the lines of the second *Kritik*, then it becomes clear that several of its concluding sections are covert polemics against Wizenmann. Kant himself recognized Wizenmann's merits, his rare combination of honesty, clarity, and philosophical depth. When Wizenmann died tragically at the age of twenty-seven, at the very height of the controversy, Kant paid him a generous and deserved tribute. "The death of such a fine and clear mind is to be regretted," he wrote in the second *Kritik*.[8] It has even been said that Wizenmann's untimely death was "a serious loss to German philosophy."[9]

The central polemical result of the *Resultate* is that, ultimately, there is no essential difference between Jacobi's and Mendelssohn's views on the authority of reason.[10] All that prevents these philosophers from agreeing with each other, Wizenmann argues, is a serious inconsistency in Mendelssohn's position. Although Mendelssohn declares that he recognizes no standard of truth other than reason, he also says that reason must orient itself according to common sense. But how is it possible, Wizenmann asks, for reason to be the supreme authority in metaphysics *and* for common sense to be its guide?

According to Wizenmann, there is a fatal ambiguity in Mendelssohn's position concerning the relationship between common sense and reason.[11] Sometimes Mendelssohn assumes that the knowledge of common sense is identical with reason, so that it is only an intuitive form of reason; but at other times he supposes that it is distinct from reason, so that it guides and corrects reason in its speculation. But both of these options are unsatisfactory. In the first case we can no longer use common sense to direct and discipline reason when it goes astray in speculation; for by definition reason

only explains and demonstrates the intuitions of common sense. In the second case we can continue to use common sense to guide and correct reason; but then we forfeit the sovereignty of reason. We will be forced to endorse beliefs that are contrary to reason in those cases where speculation contradicts common sense. Assuming that Mendelssohn plumps for the latter of these uncomfortable options, as he seems to do in *Morgenstunden,* then there is indeed little difference between his notion of common sense and Jacobi's concept of faith. Both Jacobi's faith and Mendelssohn's common sense give intuitive insights that transcend the explication and demonstration of reason, and that demand assent even when reason contradicts them.

Having shown the inconsistency in Mendelssohn's position, Wizenmann then proceeds to attack Mendelssohn's method of orientation. He rejects this method because, like Kant, he cannot accept its underlying standard of truth, common sense. Wizenmann makes all the usual objections against common sense: that it is full of contradictions, that it is often mistaken, and that it does not go beyond mere appearances to explain the cause of things.[12] Although he is in general eager to limit the powers of reason, particularly with regard to religion, Wizenmann still insists upon granting reason sovereignty over common sense. In this respect he feels that he is more loyal to reason than Mendelssohn. Rather than guiding reason by common sense, Mendelssohn should allow reason to guide it, Wizenmann contends,[13] for does he not claim that he recognizes no standard of truth higher than reason? By giving priority to common sense, however, Mendelssohn lays himself open to the same charge that he makes against Jacobi: he admits a 'blind faith' that is beyond all criticism. This critical stance toward common sense is one of Wizenmann's more important differences from Jacobi, who always puts the beliefs of common sense on a par with the certainties of faith.

Wizenmann's criticism of common sense does raise a serious problem for his general polemic against Mendelssohn. Namely, if reason has the right to criticize common sense, and if it is true that Mendelssohn's common sense and Jacobi's faith are essentially the same, then why should not reason also have the right to criticize faith? Why should faith be immune from criticism when common sense is not? All this raises the even more basic question: what is wrong with Mendelssohn's claim that reason has the right to criticize faith?

It is to Wizenmann's credit that he squarely faces this difficulty, and his answer to it is interesting because it resembles Kant's position in the pantheism controversy. Wizenmann claims that there is an important difference between Jacobi and Mendelssohn concerning their justification of moral and religious belief.[14] Whereas Mendelssohn attempts to give a theoretical jus-

tification of belief by attributing immediate knowledge to common sense, Jacobi tries to prove a practical justification by showing the genesis of belief in the will. It is the essence of Jacobi's position, Wizenmann asserts, that faith is not a claim to knowledge, but a demand of the heart.[15] According to Jacobi, we acquire faith not by gaining knowledge, but by having the right disposition and performing the right actions.

Now Wizenmann thinks that this practical concept of faith solves the problem at hand, clearing away the apparent inconsistency involved in demanding a criticism of common sense but not faith. It is unfair to criticize faith but not common sense, Wizenmann contends, because it is the task of reason to criticize claims to knowledge, while it is certainly not its province to criticize the demands of the will. A practical demand about what ought to be the case is just not subject to verification or falsification like theoretical claims about what is the case.[16]

It is one of the merits of the *Resultate* that Wizenmann puts forward a simple and powerful argument in favor of positive religion. Where Jacobi is vague and merely suggestive, Wizenmann is clear and bluntly argumentative. His argument is especially interesting since it begins with Kantian premises and then draws fideistic conclusions from them. In the hands of the pietists an essentially Kantian-style epistemology becomes a powerful weapon in humbling the claims of reason and uplifting those of faith.

The main premise of Wizenmann's argument is his definition of reason, which he explicitly states at the very beginning. According to this definition, which is truly Kantian in spirit, the task of reason is *to relate* facts, that is, to compare and contrast them, or to infer them from one another. But it cannot create or reveal facts, which must be given to it. Appealing to Kant's criticism of the ontological argument,[17] Wizenmann advances the general thesis that it is not possible for reason to demonstrate the existence of anything. If we are to know that something exists, then it has to be given to us in experience. Of course, it is possible *to infer* the existence of something, but only when the existence of something else is already known. All inferences are only hypothetical in form, Wizenmann explains, such that we can infer the existence of one thing only if another is already given. Hence Wizenmann concludes in the manner of Kant that there is a twofold source of knowledge: experience, which gives us knowledge of matters of fact; and reason, which relates these facts through inference.[18]

On the basis of this Kantian definition and distinction, Wizenmann builds his case for positive religion. If we know that God exists, then we cannot know it through reason, which cannot demonstrate the existence of anything. Rather, we must know it through experience. But what kind of ex-

perience gives us knowledge of God? There is only one kind that gives us such knowledge, Wizenmann insists, and that is revelation. The basis of all religion is therefore positive, resting upon the belief in God's revelation.[19] Thus Wizenmann comes to the dramatic conclusion that there is either positive religion or no religion. As he puts it in these stirring lines: "Either no religion or positive religion. Men of Germany! I challenge you to find a more correct and impartial judgment of reason. Is from my side another relationship to God possible other than through faith, trust and obedience? And can from God's side another relationship to me be possible other than through revelation, command and promise?"[20]

The *Resultate* is particularly interesting since it introduces a new note of skepticism into the pantheism controversy. While Mendelssohn rests his case with reason, and while Jacobi makes his stand with intuition, Wizenmann accepts neither of these standards of truth. He questions not only Mendelssohn's trust in reason, but also Jacobi's faith in intuition. In a remarkably candid passage in the *Resultate,* Wizenmann doubts whether there are any intuitions or feelings that give us an immediate knowledge of the existence of God.[21] Although he admits the possibility of such intuitions, he argues that they will never provide sufficient proof for the existence of God. They will never completely reveal the nature of God, he maintains, because any experience of a human being is finite and therefore inadequate to the infinitude of God.[22] Rather than attempting, like Jacobi, to justify faith as a peculiar form of immediate knowledge, Wizenmann insists that we have to rest content with mere belief, and in particular the belief in God's revelation in history.[23] This is a belief that has to be accepted on trust, the trust in those who first witnessed such supernatural events.

Sadly, this skeptical strand in Wizenmann's philosophy remained largely unexplored due to his untimely death in February 1787. Nevertheless, Wizenmann lived long enough to articulate explicitly the skeptical direction of his thought. In a letter to Jacobi written just six months before his death, Wizenmann expressly declared that the best philosophy is not Spinozism but skepticism: "Spinoza's philosophy is the only consistent one, if one must have a naturalistic philosophy of God. But much better is skepticism, which makes no claim to such knowledge. Skepticism is my proper and explicit position."[24]

4.2. Kant's Contribution to the Pantheism Controversy

It was not easy for Kant to stay out of the pantheism controversy. Both sides to the dispute saw Kant as their ally, and both did their best to cajole

him into fighting for their cause. Hamann and Jacobi were especially eager to gain Kant for their 'party of faith'. In his *Wider Mendelssohns Beschuldigungen,* Jacobi had already surreptitiously attempted to enlist Kant on his side by citing him as another philosopher of faith.[25] And during the autumn of 1785, Hamann encouraged Kant in his plans to launch an attack on Mendelssohn's *Morgenstunden.*[26] But Mendelssohn and his sympathizers were no less active in soliciting his support. On October 16, 1785 Mendelssohn himself wrote Kant, summarizing his version of events and insinuating that he was on Kant's side in the struggle against "intolerance and fanaticism."[27] Then in February 1786, only a month after Mendelssohn's death, two of his allies, Marcus Herz and Johann Biester, pushed Kant to enter the fray against Jacobi and to avenge poor Moses' death. As if this was not enough pressure, two of Kant's young disciples, C. G. Schütz and L. H. Jakob, wrote Kant in the spring of 1786 also urging him to join battle.[28] Interestingly enough, they saw Mendelssohn, not Jacobi, as Kant's great foe. They warned Kant that the Wolffians were closing ranks around Mendelssohn and 'singing a song of triumph' over the defeat of criticism.

What was Kant's attitude toward the controversy raging around him? Initially, it was one of ambivalence, reflecting Kant's desire to support and refute both Mendelssohn and Jacobi. Vis-à-vis Mendelssohn, Kant had good reason to feel ambivalent. He could neither accept Mendelssohn's dogmatic metaphysics nor reject his defense of reason. These mixed feelings toward Mendelssohn then led to some wavering in his plans. In November 1785 Kant intended to attack *Morgenstunden,* which he regarded as a "masterpiece of dogmatic metaphysics."[29] But by April 1786 Kant's plans were not to bury Mendelssohn but to praise him. Kant decided to write a piece for the *Berlinische Monatsschrift* in honor of Mendelssohn and his *Jerusalem.*[30] A tribute to *Jerusalem* could mean only one thing: that Kant was siding with Mendelssohn on the point that reason is the ultimate arbiter of truth in metaphysics and religion.

Vis-à-vis Jacobi, Kant's attitude was no less ambivalent. He felt some affinity with Jacobi, given their common disenchantment with metaphysics. He told Hamann, for example, that he was "perfectly satisfied" with Jacobi's *Briefe* and that he had nothing against Jacobi using his name in *Wider Mendelssohns Beschuldigungen.*[31] But Kant was still no 'silent admirer' of Jacobi and had plans to attack him just as he did Mendelssohn.[32] Thus he wrote Herz on April 7, 1786 that he might write an essay for the *Berlinische Monatsschrift* exposing Jacobi's 'chicanery'.[33]

Kant was finally goaded into action on June 11, 1786, when Biester wrote him with another of his entreaties.[34] On the face of it, there is not much new in Biester's June 11 appeal, which again warns Kant of the dangers of the new *Schwärmerei,* and which again begs him to say a word against it.

Kant had heard this refrain before, and indeed on two occasions from Biester alone.[35] But this time Biester hit upon a new tactic. He insinuated that Kant had a grave political responsibility to enter the controversy. A 'change' was likely to take place soon, Biester said, referring to the sad state of Frederick II's health and the imminent succession of Frederick Wilhelm II. There was a great deal of anxiety in liberal circles in Berlin and Prussia at this time about whether freedom of the press would be maintained or a new censorship imposed. Kant shared in this anxiety. He always appreciated the liberal policies of Frederick II—the age of Enlightenment was the age of Frederick, in his opinion—and any reimposition of censorship would be bound to affect a professor of philosophy who was holding a public office. Now Biester knew about Kant's anxiety and exploited it. What would the public think—and, more to the point, Frederick II and his ministers—if 'the first philosopher of the land' were accused of supporting 'a dogmatic fanatical atheism'? That was the accusation that the Berliners were hurling against Jacobi, and many people thought that Kant was on Jacobi's side after Jacobi cited him in *Wider Mendelssohns Beschuldigungen*. So if Kant did not say something soon, then he would be tarred with Jacobi's brush. Even worse, remaining silent certainly would not give the new monarch a good opinion of the consequences of a free press. The die had now been cast. Kant had to enter the controversy to uphold the dignity of the free press, "the only treasure that remains for us amid all civil burdens."[36]

In October 1786 the *Berlinische Monatsschrift* finally came out with Kant's contribution to the pantheism controversy, the short essay "Was heisst: Sich im Denken orientiren?" Although it is little read, this essay is extremely important for a general understanding of Kant's philosophy. It provides us with what we find almost nowhere else in Kant's writings: a settling of accounts with mysticism and the philosophy of common sense. To locate Kant's philosophy in relation to competing contemporary systems, it is necessary to consider it as the alternative not only to Hume's skepticism and Leibniz's rationalism, but also to Jacobi's mysticism and Mendelssohn's philosophy of common sense. When Kant challenged Hume and Leibniz, he could always take for granted one important assumption: that reason is the final standard of truth in philosophy. But when he took issue with Jacobi and Mendelssohn, he was forced to examine and justify just this assumption. Hence the importance of Kant's essay is that it reveals the motivation and justification behind his allegiance to reason.

In this essay Kant takes a middle position between Jacobi and Mendelssohn. He accepts some of their principles but refuses to draw such drastic conclusions from them. On the one hand, he agrees with Jacobi that knowl-

edge cannot justify faith; but he disagrees with his conclusion that reason cannot justify it. On the other hand, he concurs with Mendelssohn that it is necessary to justify faith through reason; but he does not accept the conclusion that to justify faith through reason demands knowledge.

What allows Kant to steer a middle path between Jacobi and Mendelssohn is his denial of one of their common premises: that reason is a faculty of knowledge, a theoretical faculty whose purpose is to know things-in-themselves or the unconditioned. Resting his case upon the central thesis of the second *Kritik*, which would appear only fourteen months later in January 1788, Kant assumes that reason is a practical faculty: it does not describe the unconditioned, but prescribes it as an end of conduct. Reason prescribes the unconditioned in either of two senses: when it commands us to seek the final condition for a series of conditions in nature; or when it commands us categorically to perform certain actions, regardless of our interests and circumstances. In both these cases the unconditioned is not an entity that we know, but an ideal for our conduct, whether that be scientific inquiry or moral action. By thus separating reason from knowledge, Kant creates the opportunity for a rational justification of faith independent of metaphysics.

At the very heart of Kant's essay is his concept of 'rational faith' *(Vernunftglaube)*. This he defines as faith based solely on reason.[37] All faith is rational in the minimal sense that it must not contradict reason, Kant states, but rational faith is peculiar in that it is based only on reason (as opposed to tradition or revelation). It is based on reason alone because it requires nothing more for its assent than the categorical imperative, the logical consistency of a maxim as a universal law. Here Kant implies that the categorical imperative provides a sufficient foundation for our belief in God, providence, and immortality, although it is only in the second *Kritik* that he actually engages in the details of such a deduction.[38]

Even though Kant, like Jacobi, denies that faith must be justified by knowledge, it is important to see that his rational faith is the diametrical opposite of Jacobi's *salto mortale*. While Kant's rational faith is based on reason alone, Jacobi's *salto mortale* is contrary to reason. Noting just this point, Kant flatly dismisses Jacobi's *salto mortale*.[39] He argues that it is absurd, not to say perverse, to believe that P when reason demonstrates that not-P.

Although based on reason alone, Kant still insists that rational faith amounts not to knowledge, but only to belief *(Fürwahrhalten)*. He expresses this point by saying that 'faith' is 'subjectively' sufficient, but 'objectively' insufficient, belief.[40] It is 'subjectively' sufficient in the sense that it is based upon the universality and necessity of the categorical imperative, which

holds for every rational being; but it is 'objectively' insufficient in the sense that it is not based on knowledge of things-in-themselves.

Armed with this concept of rational faith, Kant walks down his middle path between Mendelssohn's dogmatism and Jacobi's mysticism. Since rational faith does not presuppose knowledge of things-in-themselves, it avoids Mendelssohn's dogmatism; and since it is based on the rationality of the categorical imperative, it escapes Jacobi's irrational mysticism.

Kant's essay not only outlines his position in relation to Jacobi's and Mendelssohn's but also subjects their positions to severe criticism. Kant makes one basic point against both Jacobi and Mendelssohn: that they are both guilty of undermining reason, which must remain the final criterion of truth in philosophy. What Jacobi does intentionally against reason Mendelssohn does unintentionally. But the effect is the same: they advocate a faculty of knowledge whose insights stand above all the criticism of reason. The choice between Jacobi and Mendelssohn is therefore a choice between two species of irrationalism, one of common sense and another of faith. Thus Kant implies that the critical philosophy alone upholds the authority of reason.

In Kant's eyes there can be no question that Jacobi is guilty of irrationalism.[41] Jacobi tells us that Spinozism is the only consistent philosophy; but then he advocates a *salto mortale* to avoid its atheism and fatalism. It is not so plain, however, that Mendelssohn is guilty of this charge. Indeed, is it not his intention to defend reason? Kant notes Mendelssohn's intentions, and duly praises them.[42] But, like Wizenmann, he thinks that Mendelssohn unwittingly betrays his own ideals. The ambiguities of his concept of common sense lead him astray, so that he sometimes sees common sense as a special faculty of knowledge that has the power to correct reason. But to attribute a power of intuition to common sense, and then to give it priority over reason in cases of conflict, is to sanction irrationalism.

Assuming, however, that Kant is correct in charging Jacobi and Mendelssohn with irrationalism, the question still remains: what is wrong with irrationalism? Why cannot common sense or intuition be the criterion of truth in philosophy? Why must reason be our guide?

In the course of his essay, Kant advances two arguments in behalf of reason. His first argument makes a simple but basic point: that reason is inescapable.[43] It is not simply that we ought to follow reason: we must follow it. According to Kant, the general rules or abstract concepts of reason are a necessary condition of all knowledge. An immediate intuition by itself cannot be a sufficient source of knowledge, since it is necessary to justify the conclusions drawn from it, and such justification demands the appli-

cation of concepts. If, for example, we want to know that we intuit God, then we must apply some general concept of him. Otherwise, how do we know that what we intuit is God and not something else? Hence the mere demand that we justify our intuitions forces us to admit that reason is at least a necessary condition of truth.

Kant's second argument defends reason on liberal political grounds. We must make reason into our standard of truth, he argues, if we are to guarantee freedom of thought.[44] Reason is a bulwark against dogmatism—the demand that we accept a belief on mere authority—because it requires that we question all beliefs and accept only those which agree with our critical reflection. With reason, no one stands above anyone else since everyone has the power to ask questions, draw inferences, and assess evidence. The same cannot be said for intuition, however. If we make it our standard of truth, then we sanction dogmatism. Only an elite few can have an intuition of God, so that those who cannot have such intuitions will have to accept the elite's word for it. In other words, they will have to bow to intellectual authority.

Kant has a striking way of summing up his case against Jacobi's and Wizenmann's irrationalism: complete intellectual freedom destroys itself.[45] Jacobi and Wizenmann want such freedom because they overthrow the constraints of reason in order to explore their intuitions and feelings; but, in doing so, they also sanction despotism since only an elite few can have such intuitions and feelings. Here Kant applies a general theme of his whole philosophy: that freedom demands the restraint of law. Intellectual freedom requires the rule of reason just as moral freedom demands the moral law.

Kant closes his essay with a stern warning to Jacobi and Wizenmann: they are undermining the very freedom necessary for their philosophy. In a few stirring lines, which are a direct response to Wizenmann's address to "the young men of Germany," Kant begs them to consider this consequence of their irrationalism: "Men of intellect and broad dispositions! I honor your talent and love your feeling for humanity. But have you thought of where your attacks upon reason are heading? Surely you too want freedom of thought to be maintained inviolate; for without this even the free fancies of your imagination will soon come to an end."[46] Without doubt, this was a timely entreaty given the imminent succession of Frederick Wilhelm II.

4.3. Wizenmann's Reply to Kant

In his *Berlinische Monatsschrift* essay, Kant praised "the perspicuous author of the *Resultate*," whose identity was still unknown to him, for so clearly pointing out the similarities in Jacobi's and Mendelssohn's views. But he also suggested that Wizenmann had embarked on "a dangerous course,"

one leading to *Schwärmerei* and "the complete dethronement of reason."

Wizenmann was so deeply offended by Kant's insinuation that, despite failing health, he resolved to write a reply to Kant. His reply, "An den Herrn Professor Kant von dem Verfasser der *Resultate,*" appeared in the *Deutsches Museum* of February 1787, only four months after the publication of Kant's essay. Wizenmann's essay took the form of an open letter to Kant, which finally revealed his authorship to the public at large. In this long, dense, and obscure piece Wizenmann sets himself two objectives: first, to rebut Kant's charge of irrationalism; and, second, to demonstrate the incoherencies of Kant's concept of practical faith.

To clear himself of the charge of irrationalism, Wizenmann denies that he ever held the Jacobian position that Kant attributes to him.[47] He agrees with Kant that it would be irrationalist to enjoin a leap of faith if reason could prove the nonexistence of God. But Wizenmann protests that he never said that reason has such powers. Rather, all that he said is that reason neither proves nor disproves the existence of God. In that case, belief in God cannot be described as 'irrational' but only as 'extra-rational' or 'non-rational'.

Yet honesty forces Wizenmann to qualify these disclaimers. He admits that he did say at one point that reason proves the nonexistence of God; but he then quickly adds that this is the God of the deists, that is, an abstract, impersonal, and transcendent entity. But he still insists that he did not say that reason proves the nonexistence of the God of the theists, the personal God who reveals himself to man in history. In other words, faith in the deistic God is irrational, while faith in the theistic God is not. With this distinction Wizenmann deftly avoids Kant's charge of irrationalism and lays it on the doorstep of the Berliners, who were one and all deists.

However clever, Wizenmann's reply escapes Kant's accusation only by abandoning the original standpoint of the *Resultate.* There Wizenmann's position was indeed perfectly Jacobian, despite all his disclaimers. Thus he said that Spinoza's philosophy is the only consistent one, and that it proves the nonexistence of God precisely in the theist's sense of a personal being.[48] At the same time, however, Wizenmann enjoined us to have faith in this theistic God. This is surely irrationalism, and not only by Kant's, but also by Wizenmann's, own criterion. At least in the *Resultate,* then, Wizenmann is guilty as charged.

But if Wizenmann's self-defense fails, his counterattack on Kant is more successful. He goes on the offensive against Kant by throwing the charge of *Schwärmerei* back in his face. He argues that Kant's defense of faith as "a need of practical reason" itself leads to all kinds of *Schwärmerei,* since it moves from the presence of a need to the existence of an object that will satisfy it. But is it not the very essence of *Schwärmerei,* Wizenmann asks,

that it mistakes a wish for reality? On Kant's reasoning it is proper for a man in love to dream that the woman of his desires also loves him simply because he has a need to be loved.[49]

In the second *Kritik* Kant explicitly addresses himself to this objection, mentioning Wizenmann by name.[50] He agrees with Wizenmann that it is illegitimate to infer the existence of something from a need when that need arises from sensibility, as in the case of a man in love. But it is another matter when that need arises from reason and is justified by a universal and necessary law. In other words, there is a difference between believing something because one wants to and because one ought to.

Although Kant's reply is effective against the charge of arbitrariness—it puts severe restrictions upon the kinds of need that justify faith—it still does not reply to Wizenmann's main point: that it is illegitimate to infer the existence of something from *any* need, whether of sensibility or reason. According to Wizenmann, it makes no difference whether one wants to believe or ought to believe; in either case there is an illegitimate inference from a need to the existence of the object that satisfies it.

After defending himself against the charge of *Schwärmerei,* Wizenmann engages in an elaborate and subtle polemic against Kant's notion of 'rational faith'.[51] His polemic is of historical as well as philosophical interest: it marks the first critical response to Kant's notion and makes several classic objections to it. Wizenmann's arguments may be summarized as follows: (1) Kant cannot infer that God exists from the need of reason. All he can infer is that we ought to think and act *as if* God exists. In more Kantian terms, the need of reason justifies a regulative, but not a constitutive, principle. It cannot justify a constitutive principle, for it is a glaring non sequitur to infer that God exists simply because we have a moral obligation to believe in his existence. (2) If Kant does attempt to justify a constitutive principle, then he reenters the sphere of speculation where it is necessary to determine the truth or falsity of a belief on theoretical grounds. But this would trespass the Kantian limits on knowledge. (3) Kant is caught in a vicious circle: he bases faith upon morality, in that he says we have a moral duty to believe in God; but he also bases the moral law upon faith, in that he claims morality would not be possible without it. (4) If, as Kant claims, morality is independent of religion, such that neither its incentive nor rationale requires belief in God, providence, or immortality, then how is there a need to have such belief? (5) The notion of a 'need of reason' is a *contradictio in adjecto.* If one justifies a belief by a need, then all rational argument comes to a stop, for the only task of reason is to consider whether a belief is true or false, not whether it is good or bad. On this issue Wizenmann finds an

unexpected ally in Mendelssohn, who also holds that the only rational justification for a belief must be theoretical.

Kant attempts to answer Wizenmann's objections at various places in the "Dialektik" of the second *Kritik*. Although, except in a footnote, Kant omits direct reference to Wizenmann, it is not difficult to detect his counterarguments beneath the surface. The second *Kritik* is indeed a palimpsest, revealing Kant's earlier intention to write a polemic against his critics.[52]

Of all Wizenmann's objections, Kant is especially worried by the first and second, devoting two whole sections in reply to them.[53] The third and fourth objections are dealt with in a few odd paragraphs, while the fifth finds no explicit reply. Let us consider Kant's replies to the first four objections, taking each objection in turn. (1) A regulative principle does not satisfy the need of reason, since it demands that there be not a hypothetical but an actual harmony between nature and freedom, happiness and virtue. The condition of such harmony, however, is that God exists, and not only that we think and act as if he exists. Hence we are justified in inferring a constitutive principle from the need of reason.[54] (2) In giving practical reason a right to constitutive principles not possessed by theoretical reason, one is not reopening the door to all kinds of speculation. For all that practical reason has a right to assume is *that* God exists; it has no license to make further judgments about *how* he exists.[55] (3) Although the moral law is indeed necessary to justify faith, the converse does not hold, and thus there is no vicious circle. The beliefs in God and immortality are not necessary either to justify the moral law or to act upon it. Rather, they are necessary only as an incentive to act upon the ideal of the highest good, that ideal where happiness is received in direct proportion to virtue. Wizenmann thinks that there is a circularity only because he confuses two senses of the term 'highest good': 'the supreme good', which is the unconditional good or the absolute standard of goodness, the moral law; and 'the consummate good', which is the greatest possible degree of goodness, the harmony between happiness and virtue. In these terms faith is not a necessary condition of the justification or realization of the supreme good; but it is a necessary condition for the realization of the consummate good.[56] (4) Although morality in the sense of an obligation toward the supreme good is independent of faith, morality in the sense of an obligation toward the consummate good is not. But the obligation toward the consummate good depends upon faith only for its realization, not its normative rationale. In other words, faith provides only an incentive for a finite being to act upon his obligation toward the consummate good.[57]

Sadly, despite a promising beginning, Kant's controversy with Wizenmann came to a premature and tragic close in early 1787. Wizenmann's reply to Kant proved to be his last burst of strength, and indeed his epitaph.

Wizenmann had been suffering from tuberculosis for many years, and the slightest exertion always became a heavy setback for his health. Working on the *Resultate* severely weakened him; and writing his reply to Kant literally killed him.[58] Shortly after Wizenmann finished the reply, his health worsened dramatically; and on the twenty-first of February, the very month it appeared in print, he died. The pantheism controversy had thus claimed its second victim and, tragically, its most promising contestant.

4.4. Jacobi's Attack on Kant

In the spring of 1786, during the very height of the pantheism controversy, Jacobi was still hoping for Kant's support in his struggle against Mendelssohn and the Berliners. In his *Wider Mendelssohns Beschuldigungen,* which appeared in April of that year, he invoked the name of Kant to defend himself against the charge of *Schwärmerei.*[59] Kant, "that Hercules among thinkers," had a position broadly similar to his own, Jacobi claimed. He too denied the demonstrability of God's existence, and he too thought that knowledge cannot justify faith. "So if no one dares to call Kant a '*Schwärmer*'," Jacobi asked, "then why should they dare to call me one?" He was modest and cautious enough to add that he did not mean to lower Kant's philosophy to the level of his, or to raise his to the level of Kant's. But it was still evident that Jacobi was making a bid for Kant's support, and that certainly alarmed Mendelssohn's friends.

As late as autumn 1786, Jacobi nurtured hopes for Kant's support. His expectations were raised by some promising news from Königsberg: Hamann told him that Kant was pleased with the *Briefe* and that he planned to attack Mendelssohn.[60] So, when Kant's essay finally appeared in October, Jacobi was naturally disappointed. It was now clear to him that Kant wanted to found 'a sect' of his own by taking a middle position between himself and Mendelssohn. Eager for a fight, Jacobi immediately drew up his battle plans. In a letter written on October 31, 1786 to Hamann,[61] the very letter that voices his disappointment with Kant's essay, Jacobi sketched the criticism of Kant that he would later append to his *David Hume.* This criticism, destined to become famous in the history of post-Kantian philosophy, is one of the most influential criticisms of Kant ever written, particularly considering its effects upon the development of post-Kantian idealism. So let us see what Jacobi had to say.

Jacobi's critique of Kant grew out of his controversy with Mendelssohn, and it is indeed only part and parcel of his general critique of the *Aufklärung.* His chief objection to Kant's philosophy is the same as his objection to all

philosophy: it leads to the abyss of nihilism. Kant's philosophy, if it were made consistent, proves to be "a philosophy of nothingness."

Furthermore Kant begins to acquire a special symbolic significance for Jacobi. He is not just another philosopher, like Leibniz or Spinoza, whose philosophy happens to end in nihilism. Rather, starting in 1799 with his *Brief an Fichte,*[62] Jacobi sees Kant's philosophy, especially as it is consistently and systematically developed by Fichte, as the paradigm of all philosophy—and hence as the very epitome of nihilism. Jacobi's attack on philosophy has now become first and foremost an attack on Kant, and in particular on Fichte, whom Jacobi sees as nothing more than a radical Kantian.

The supreme importance of Kant, his pivotal position in the history of philosophy, rests upon a single fact, in Jacobi's view. Namely, Kant is the first thinker to discover the principle of all knowledge, or what Jacobi calls "the principle of subject-object identity." Although it is not explicit, what Jacobi is referring to is nothing less than the principle behind Kant's 'new method of thought', the foundation stone of his Copernican revolution as explained in the prefaces of the first *Kritik*.[63] This principle states that reason knows a priori only what it creates according to its own laws. Since it implies that the self knows only the products of its own activity, it makes self-knowledge into the paradigm of all knowledge. Jacobi's term 'subject-object identity' refers to that self-knowledge where the subject makes the object into the mirror of its own activity.

Jacobi's main objection to Kant is that this principle results in nihilism. If it is universalized (as Fichte would have it), so that knowledge through reason is made into the paradigm of all knowledge, then it leads straight to 'speculative egoism', that is, a solipsism that dissolves all reality into my own representations. This solipsism is a direct consequence of Kant's principle, Jacobi contends, because it implies that all we know is our own representations, the products of our intellectual activity.[64] We do not know any reality that exists apart from and prior to this activity, something that is not created by it, whether that be nature, other minds, God, or the very self that is the source of this activity. Hence we are caught inside the circle of our own consciousness, a circle consisting of nothing but representations, which represent nothing.

Jacobi now confronts us with another of his dilemmas. Either I assume that knowledge is in principle infinite—and dissolve all reality into nothingness—or I suppose that it is limited—and admit that the reality outside my consciousness is unknowable to me. So I know either myself or nothing. There is no middle option, though, where I know something that exists apart from me. This dilemma soon became a formidable challenge to Schelling and Hegel, whose objective idealism was designed to escape it.[65]

Jacobi's famous argument against the thing-in-itself has to be understood in the light of his general critique of Kant. Jacobi regards the thing-in-itself as Kant's final, desperate measure to prevent his philosophy from collapsing into nihilism. If this expedient fails—and it does of necessity, Jacobi argues—then Kant has to admit that he reduces all reality to the contents of our consciousness. It was the sad destiny of Fichte, Jacobi says, to develop Kant's philosophy in just this direction. Fichte rid Kant's philosophy of the thing-in-itself; but in doing so he revealed its true tendency and inner spirit: nihilism.

Jacobi's argument against the thing-in-itself proceeds in two steps.[66] The first step accuses Kant of an inconsistency in assuming that objects are the causes of representation. According to Jacobi, Kant cannot assume that *empirical* objects are the causes of representations; for he explicitly states that they are nothing but representations, and so they cannot be the cause of representations. But Kant also cannot hold that the *transcendental* object is the cause of representations. For he expressly teaches that we cannot have any knowledge of it; and if we cannot know it, then we a fortiori cannot know that it is the cause of our representations.

The second step of Jacobi's argument makes the added claim that this inconsistency is inevitable. In other words, if it is contradictory for Kant to postulate objects that are the causes of representation, it is also *necessary* for him to do so. It is necessary, Jacobi argues, because Kant assumes that we have a passive sensibility, and to talk about a passive sensibility implies that there is something to act upon it. Kant postulates a passive sensibility in the first place because he wants to maintain a semblance of realism in his system.

Hence the assumption of things-in-themselves is incompatible with, but necessary to, Kant's system. As Jacobi sums up Kant's predicament in a famous epigram: "I need the assumption of things-in-themselves to enter the Kantian system; but with this assumption it is not possible for me to remain inside it."[67]

In 1787, when Jacobi first made his charge of nihilism against Kant in his *David Hume,* he was not yet aware of Kant's second *Kritik,* which was published only one year later. Little did he know that Kant would soon devote his second *Kritik* to an explanation and defense of his practical faith in freedom, God, and immortality. Prima facie the notion of practical faith rescued Kant from nihilism because it justified belief in things beyond one's own consciousness (namely, God, providence, and immortality).

Even after the second *Kritik* appeared, however, Jacobi did not retract his charge of nihilism. Rather, he pressed his point home. He saw Kant's practical faith as nothing more than another ad hoc device to stave off nihilism. In his later writings Jacobi makes two objections against Kant's notion of practical faith.[68] (1) Since Kant denies that faith is a form of knowledge, and since he also forbids the possibility of an intellectual intuition of things-in-themselves, his faith remains 'subjectivistic', that is, it does not give us any knowledge of a reality independent of our representations. All that we ever know from our practical faith is that *we* must postulate some ideas of reason, and that we must think and act *as if* they are true. In other words, we only know something more about ourselves, and nothing about reality itself. (2) Kant's attempt to establish faith on the basis of practical reason fails because his categorical imperative provides only a necessary, but not a sufficient, condition of the morality of a maxim. But if the categorical imperative is empty, there is no reason to believe that faith in God, providence, and immortality is moral.

These criticisms show that Jacobi had become aware of the very important differences between his and Kant's concepts of faith. Indeed, Jacobi had begun to compare Kant's concept unfavorably to his own. In his *Brief an Fichte* of 1799 Jacobi sees his 'natural faith', which stems from the heart, as the antidote to Kant's 'rational faith', which allegedly comes from pure reason.[69] "Nothing more fills me with disgust," he writes, "than Kant's attempt to introduce reason into morality." That this attempt is bankrupt is clear to him from the emptiness of the categorical imperative. Kant, in Jacobi's view, fails to grasp the proper relationship between reason and interest. He rightly sees that interests determine belief—on that score Jacobi and Kant agree—but he goes astray in assuming that reason can in any way determine or limit these interests. The emptiness of the categorical imperative shows us that the very opposite is the case: interest determines rationality, and not conversely.

Jacobi's and Wizenmann's counterattack on Kant had apparently given them a winning edge in their battle against the *Aufklärung*. It was Kant's philosophy alone that made an unequivocal stand in behalf of reason during the pantheism controversy. But Kant's philosophy seemed to be heading straight toward the abyss. To be consistent, it had to drop its thing-in-itself, and then become a thoroughgoing nihilism, which denied the existence of anything beyond momentary states of consciousness. Kant's moral faith was no escape from this solipsistic nightmare, since, even if consistent, it could at best allow us to think and act *as if* God, providence, and immortality existed.

After Jacobi's and Wizenmann's counterattack, the burden of proof was on the *Aufklärer* to defend the holy name of reason. To uphold the authority of reason, the *Aufklärer* had to show—somehow—that reason could justify faith. Yet the prospects looked bleak, very bleak indeed. It was clearly no longer feasible to give a theoretical justification of faith as Mendelssohn had. The Kantian critique of rationalism seemed to bar that option. But at the same time it was also plain that Kant's practical justification of faith was extremely problematic. It rested upon the categorical imperative, which was empty; and it could at best secure regulative ideas, which were not sufficient to satisfy belief. Thus, in the end, it seemed as if reason had drawn a blank. There did not seem to be any solution to Jacobi's dilemma. Either we forswore our reason to save our faith, or we abandoned our faith to uphold our reason.

philosophical development. As will be discussed in section 8.2, Reinhold was under Hamann's influence in searching for the common source of Kant's faculties.

91. Hamann himself was prone to such language. In his later correspondence he often refers to Bruno's *principium coincidentiae oppositorum,* which he regards as the solution to "all contradictions in the elements of the material and intellectual world." See Hamann to Jacobi, January 16, 1785, in Hamann, *Briefwechsel,* V, 327.

2. Jacobi and the Pantheism Controversy

1. This is a misnomer since the main issue behind the controversy did not concern pantheism. I shall continue to use this name, however, because it is so traditional.

2. Setting any single time as the beginning of the dispute is a largely arbitrary matter. Jacobi first told Mendelssohn of Lessing's Spinozism in the summer of 1783. But Jacobi and Mendelssohn did not formally decide to enter into a dispute until the autumn of 1784. The dispute became public only with the publication of Jacobi's *Briefe* in autumn of 1785.

3. In this connection Hermann Timm rightly remarks: "The *Kritik der reinen Vernunft* made no break in the philosophical self-understanding of the age. But it was otherwise with the Spinozistic legacy of Lessing. Its *pro et contra* made contemporaries conscious of the change of epochs." See *Gott und die Freiheit,* I, 6.

4. See Heine, *Werke,* VIII, 175.

5. See Jenisch to Kant, May 14, 1787, in Kant, *Briefwechsel,* p. 315.

6. Goethe, *Werke,* X, 49.

7. Hegel, *Werke,* XX, 316–317.

8. Concerning the influence of Pascal and Rousseau on the young Jacobi, see Heraeus, *Jacobi und der Sturm und Drang,* pp. 117–118.

9. Concerning Pascal's importance for the philosophes, see Cassirer, *Enlightenment,* pp. 144–145.

10. See Jacobi to Hamann, June 16, 1783, in Hamann, *Briefwechsel,* V, 55.

11. See Hamann to Herder, February 3, 1785, in Hamann, *Briefwechsel,* V, 351. Also see Hamann to Jacobi, October 23, 1785, in Hamann, *Briefwechsel,* VI, 107–108, where Hamann is skeptical of Spinoza's metaphysics, which Jacobi thinks proves the necessity of atheism.

12. Ever since its publication in 1916, the standard text on the controversy has been Scholz, *Hauptschriften.* But this work is more an anthology than an analysis of the dispute.

The best treatments of the complicated background to the dispute are given by Altmann, *Mendelssohn,* pp. 593–652, 729–744, and Strauss in the "Einleitung" to vol. III/2 of Mendelssohn's *Schriften.* My own account of the background to the controversy is greatly indebted to Altmann and Strauss. The most thorough and systematic treatment of the views of Lessing, Jacobi, and Mendelssohn is Timm, *Gott und die Freiheit.*

13. See, for example, Hettner, *Geschichte,* I, 761.

14. See, for example, Scholz, *Hauptschriften,* pp. xi–xii.

15. Concerning the early history of Spinozism in Germany, see Mauthner, *Atheismus,* III, 170–173; Hettner, *Geschichte,* I, 34–38; and Grunwald, *Spinoza in Deutschland,* pp. 45–48.

16. See Wolff, *Werke,* VIII/2, 672–730.

17. See Leibniz, *Schriften,* I, 139–150.

18. See Wolff, *Herrn D. Buddens Bedencken,* pp. 9–15, 35–37, 66–76, 134–135.

19. Thus Mauthner points out that most of the first attacks on Spinoza were against the *Tractatus.* The *Ethica* contained a much more obscure message than the *Tractatus,* and was not 'refuted' until 1692, a decade after the first polemics against the *Tractatus;* see Mauthner, *Geschichte,* III, 171.

20. For more detailed information on all these thinkers, see Mauthner, *Geschichte,* III, 170–272, and Grunwald, *Spinoza in Deutschland,* pp. 41–45, 67–83. Concerning Lau and Stosch, see Stiehler, *Materialisten,* pp. 7–35. Also helpful for the early Spinozists is the chapter "Spinoza," in Adler, *Der junge Herder,* pp. 233–270.

21. In adopting the term 'Protestant Counter-Reformation', I follow Beck, *Early German Philosophy,* pp. 148–156.

22. Although the *Ethica* was a rare book in Germany, the *Tractatus* had a considerable clandestine circulation. See Beck, *Early German Philosophy,* p. 353.

23. See Heine, *Geschichte, Werke,* VIII/1, 57ff.

24. It is significant that the connection between pantheism and political radicalism had already been firmly established in the German mind long before the arrival of Spinoza in the late seventeenth century. In the early sixteenth century two of the leading thinkers of the Protestant Counter-Reformation, Sebastian Franck and Valentin Weigel, used pantheism in their struggle against the new orthodoxy of the Reformation. Franck and Weigel were also, more than a century before the dawn of the *Aufklärung* in Germany, the advocates of such progressive doctrines as tolerance, biblical criticism, natural religion, equality, and the separation of church and state. All the radical doctrines of Spinoza's *Tractatus* are clearly prefigured in their writings. Weigel and Franck thus laid the ground for the later reception of Spinoza in Germany. Their doctrines exercised a deep influence over the pietist movement—the very movement from which most of the early Spinozists sprang. Concerning Franck's and Weigel's pantheism, see Franck, *Paradoxa,* no. 2, 48–49, and Weigel, *Nosce teipsum,* erster Teil, das ander Buchlein, chapter 13.

25. Thus it is interesting to note that those Lutherans with pietistic backgrounds who rejected pantheism maintained their faith in the Bible. This is true for Hamann, Jacobi, and Wizenmann.

26. The customary view is that Jacobi deserves the credit for resurrecting Spinoza; see, for example, Scholz, *Hauptschriften,* p. xvii. But it is important to be clear about Jacobi's precise role in the revival of Spinozism: though his *Briefe* was the immediate stimulus for the general acceptance of Spinoza, he was by no means the first to demand a reappraisal of his views.

27. Wolff's *Theologicus naturalis* cannot make any such claim to objectivity, although, much too generously, Mendelssohn bestows his own laurels upon Wolff. See Mendelssohn, *Schriften,* I, 15–16.

28. See Lessing to Michealis, October 16, 1754, in Lessing, *Werke,* XVII, 401.

29. The legend is that Mendelssohn, while visiting Edelmann's house in Berlin, refused to drink a glass of wine for orthodox reasons. This irked Edelmann, who felt that Mendelssohn's orthodoxy was nothing but superstition. Edelmann boasted to Mendelssohn: "We strong spirits recognize no such constraints and follow our appetites." Offended, Mendelssohn abruptly took his leave. This story is reported in Mauthner, *Geschichte,* III, 228.

30. See Altmann, *Mendelssohn,* p. 37.

31. Mendelssohn, *Schriften,* I, 15.

32. Ibid., I, 7.

33. Ibid., I, 22.

34. Ibid., I, 17.

35. Mendelssohn's purified pantheism will be discussed in section 3.4.

36. This important passage occurs only in the first edition of *David Hume* (1787), pp. 79–81, and was deleted in the later edition of the *Werke.*

37. See Kant, *Werke,* II, 155–163.

38. Jacobi later gave a different basis for this idea. In the *Briefe* of 1785 he focuses on the principle of sufficient reason rather than the ontological argument to drive home his point that all philosophy ends in Spinozism.

39. See Lessing, *Werke,* XIV, 175–178.

40. See Altmann, *Mendelssohn,* p. 37.

41. See Lessing, *Werke,* XIV, 292–296.

42. See Hettner, *Geschichte,* I, 758.

43. See Lessing's *Anti-Goeze,* in *Werke,* XIII, 143.

44. For a more detailed discussion of Reimarus's work, see Hettner, *Geschichte,* I, 360–372, and Beck, *Early German Philosophy,* pp. 293–296.

45. Hettner, *Geschichte,* I, 364.

46. See *AdB* 90 (1780), 385.

47. See Goeze, *Etwas Vorläufiges.*

48. Lessing, *Werke,* XII, 428.

49. Lessing did not conclude from this, however, that the concept of revelation was useless and should be banished from religion. In his *Erziehung des Menschengeschlechts,* which arose directly from his controversy with Goeze, Lessing saw revelation as God's means of educating mankind. See Lessing, *Werke,* III, 416, 431–432.

50. Thus both Jacobi and Hamann saw the debate with Mendelssohn in just this light. See Hamann's letter of December 5, 1784, to Jacobi, and Jacobi's letter of December 30, 1784, to Hamann, in Hamann, *Briefwechsel,* V, 274, 301.

51. Jacobi, it is important to note, had extremely liberal political views, which he expounded in his *Etwas, das Lessing gesagt hat;* see Jacobi, *Werke,* II, 325–389. Jacobi published this work just before the debate with Mendelssohn, perhaps so as to avoid being tarred with Goeze's brush.

52. Concerning the effect of Ernesti's and Michealis's biblical criticism, see Hettner, *Geschichte,* I, 354–355.

53. In his *Early German Philosophy,* p. 359, Beck notes it is a paradox that Spinoza's influence was on the rise in Germany as that of rationalism was on the

wane. This paradox disappears, however, once we recognize the Lutheran dimension of *Goethezeit* pantheism.

54. Jacobi, *Werke,* IV/1, 38n.

55. Ibid., IV/1, 39–40.

56. According to Jacobi, Lessing had already told him that he never informed Mendelssohn of his latest views; see *Werke,* IV/1, 42.

57. Jacobi, *Werke,* II, 334.

58. Mendelssohn, *Schriften,* VI/1, 103–108.

59. Jacobi, *Werke,* II, 404–405.

60. Mendelssohn, *Schriften,* XIII, 120ff.

61. Ibid., XIII, 123ff.

62. That Mendelssohn wanted to preempt Jacobi and save Lessing's reputation is evident from two later letters of Mendelssohn's. See his letters of October 8, 1785, to Nicolai, and of October 21, 1785, to Reimarus, in *Schriften,* XIII, 309, 320.

63. Jacobi, *Werke,* IV/1, 43–46.

64. Ibid., IV/1, 46–47.

65. This is one part of Jacobi's report that rings slightly untrue. In an early fragment, "Durch Spinoza ist Leibniz nur auf die Spur der vorherbestimmten Harmonie gekommen," Lessing doubts the identity of Leibniz and Spinoza. See Lessing, *Werke,* XIV, 294–296.

66. Mendelssohn, *Schriften,* XIII, 156–160.

67. Ibid., XIII, 157.

68. Ibid., XIII, 165–166.

69. The original is lost. See Altmann's comments on its likely comments in Mendelssohn, *Schriften,* XIII, 398.

70. Mendelssohn, *Schriften,* XIII, 398.

71. See Mendelssohn's "Erinnerungen an Herrn Jacobi," in Mendelssohn, *Schriften,* III/2, 200–207.

72. Mendelssohn, *Schriften,* XIII, 216–217.

73. See Jacobi to Hamann, October 18, 1784, in Hamann, *Briefwechsel,* V, 239–242.

74. Jacobi, *Werke,* IV/1, 210–214.

75. Ibid., IV/1, 167.

76. Mendelssohn, *Schriften,* XIII, 281.

77. That Mendelssohn was acting according to this strategy is evident from his letter of April 29, 1785, to Elise Reimarus; see Mendelssohn, *Schriften,* XIII, 281. Here Mendelssohn insists that Reimarus should not allow Jacobi to see the manuscript of his forthcoming book. Only the published copy was meant for Jacobi's eyes; but by then, of course, it would be too late for Jacobi to take effective action.

78. Mendelssohn, *Schriften,* XIII, 282.

79. Ibid., XIII, 292.

80. Jacobi, *Werke,* IV/1, 226–227.

81. See Mendelssohn to Kant, October 16, 1785, and to Reimarus, October 21, 1785, in Mendelssohn, *Schriften,* XIII, 312–313, 320–321.

82. Jacobi, *Werke,* IV/1, 42.

83. See Mendelssohn to Reimarus, October 21, 1785, in *Schriften,* XIII, 320–321.

84. See, for example, the preface by Engel to *An die Freunde Lessings,* in Mendelssohn, *Schriften,* III/2, 179–184. Engel cited Marcus Herz's report on Mendelssohn's last illness.

85. Karl Phillip Moritz made the charge explicitly in the January 24, 1786, edition of the *Berlinische privilegirte Zeitung.*

86. As cited in Altmann, *Mendelssohn,* p. 745.

87. Concerning this controversy, see Altmann, *Mendelssohn,* pp. 744–745.

88. We have to read a little behind the lines to see this; but it is unmistakably the case. See Jacobi, *Werke,* II, 410–411, and IV/2, 248–249, 272–273. Also see Jacobi to Hamann, June 16, 1783, and Jacobi to Buchholtz, May 19, 1786, in *Jacobi's Nachlass,* I, 55–59, 80.

89. Jacobi, *Werke,* IV/2, 250, 268–270.

90. Ibid., IV/2, 244–246, 272.

91. Ibid., IV/2, 244–246.

92. See Mendelssohn's essay "Was heisst aufklären?" in *Schriften,* VI/1, 115–119.

93. See the "Fünftes Gesprach" to Lessing's *Ernst und Falk,* in Lessing, *Werke,* XIII, 400–410. Jacobi cites this work in *Werke,* IV/2, 182.

94. See Lessing's "Gegensatze des Herausgebers," in Lessing, *Werke,* XII, 431ff. Also see his letters of April 8, 1773, and February 2, 1774, to his brother Karl in Lessing, *Werke,* XIX, 83, 102.

95. It was indeed Lessing's precedent in publishing this heretical work of Reimarus that sanctioned Jacobi's later decision to divulge Lessing's Spinozism to the public. Jacobi accepted Lessing's teaching about one's duty to state the truth, no matter how uncomfortable. See his *Wider Mendelssohns Beschuldigungen,* in *Werke,* IV/2, 181–182.

96. Jacobi, *Werke,* IV/1, 216–223.

97. Mendelssohn, *Schriften,* XIII, 157–158.

98. Ibid., III/2, 194–196.

99. Ibid., XIII, 398.

100. Concerning the details of this controversy, see Altmann, *Mendelssohn,* pp. 201–263.

101. Mendelssohn, *Schriften,* III/2, 205. Mendelssohn defended these views on Judaism and Christianity in his *Jerusalem.* See Mendelssohn, *Schriften zur Aesthetik und Politik,* II, 419–425.

102. Mendelssohn, *Schriften,* III/2, 303.

103. In his more desperate moments in *An die Freunde Lessings,* Mendelssohn does question this. See, for example, *Schriften,* III/2, 191–192. On the whole, however, Mendelssohn's stategy was to accept the reality of Lessing's confession, but then to interpret it in some harmless way.

104. See, for example, *Wider Mendelssohns Beschuldigungen,* in *Werke,* IV/2, 181, where Jacobi virtually rules out Mendelssohn's 'purified pantheism'.

105. In this respect it is interesting to note that, in his *Brief an Fichte* (1799),

Jacobi saw Fichte's philosophy, not Spinoza's, as the paradigm of all speculation. But this, he insists, does not involve any fundamental change in his views since he thinks that Fichte's system is just as fatalistic as Spinoza's. See Jacobi, *Werke,* III, 9–11.

106. Jacobi, *Werke,* IV/1, 59, 70–72.

107. Ibid., III, 49.

108. In 1799 Jacobi uses this term for the first time, in his *Brief an Fichte;* see Jacobi, *Werke,* III, 44.

109. See, for example, the "Beylage" to *David Hume, Werke,* II, 310.

110. See the *Brief an Fichte, Werke,* III, 22–23, 44.

111. Jacobi, *Werke,* III, 22.

112. Thus Baum, *Die Philosophie Jacobis,* pp. 37ff., rightly stresses the epistemological meaning of 'nihilism' in Jacobi; but he then underplays its ethical significance. I suggest that Jacobi replaced the earlier term 'egoism' with 'nihilism' precisely to stress the ethical consequences of egoism.

113. Jacobi, *Werke,* III, 36–37.

114. Ibid., III, 49.

115. Judging from Jacobi's account of his discovery of Spinoza, he had a different interpretation earlier on, when he did stress Spinoza's rigor as a metaphysician. See the first edition of *David Hume,* pp. 79–81.

116. Jacobi, *Werke,* IV/1, 124–125; IV/2, 133–139.

117. Ibid., IV/2, 145–146, 153–155, 159.

118. Ibid., IV/1, 56.

119. Ibid., IV/1, 125–126.

120. Ibid., IV/2, 149, 154.

121. Ibid., IV/2, 153–157.

122. Ibid., IV/2, 157.

123. Ibid., IV/1, 155.

124. This has been assumed by Beck in his *Early German Philosophy,* p. 335.

125. Kant, *Werke,* VIII, 143n.

126. See Jacobi, *Werke,* IV/2, 149; IV/1, 147–148. Earlier, during his years in Geneva, Jacobi reacted against the atheism and determinism of some of the French encyclopedists. See Levy-Bruhl, *Philosophie Jacobi,* pp. 29–50.

127. See Jacobi, *Werke,* IV/1, 230–253. Jacobi's intention is not perfectly clear from these passages. He does not explicitly state that he intends to criticize this belief of the *Aufklärung.* But see his *Fliegende Blätter,* in *Werke,* VI, 167–168.

128. Jacobi, *Werke,* IV/1, 234–235, 248.

129. See Jacobi, *Werke,* IV/2, 125–162 and *Werke,* II, 222–225.

130. See, for example, Jacobi's *Brief an Fichte,* where he restates this definition of reason with Kant explicitly in mind. *Werke,* III, 3–16.

131. Jacobi, *Werke,* IV/2, 130–131.

132. Ibid., IV/2, 131. Here Jacobi is probably writing under the influence of Herder. See his early essay on Herder's *Ueber den Ursprung der Sprache,* in *Werke,* VI, 243–264.

133. Mendelssohn's belief in the possibility of objective inquiry will be discussed in sections 3.2 and 3.3.

134. See the "Vierter Brief" to Jacobi's *Briefe über Recherches philosophiques* (1773), in *Werke,* VI, 325–344.
135. Jacobi, *Werke,* IV/1, 232.
136. Ibid., IV/1, 212–213, 240–244.
137. Ibid., IV/1, 212–213.
138. Ibid., IV/1, 212.
139. Ibid., IV/1, 237.
140. Ibid., IV/1, 238.
141. Ibid., IV/1, 240.
142. Ibid., IV/1, 210.
143. Ibid., IV/1, 210–211, 223.
144. Ibid., II, 144–146.
145. See Goethe to Jacobi, October 21, 1785, in *Briefwechsel zwischen Goethe und Jacobi,* pp. 94–95. Also see Herder to Jacobi, June 6, 1785, in Herder, *Briefe,* V, 128–129.
146. Jacobi, *Werke,* II, 142ff.
147. Ibid., II, 128–129, 156–157, 164–165.

3. Mendelssohn and the Pantheism Controversy

1. The only figure of comparable stature to Mendelssohn was Spinoza. But Spinoza turned his back on Jewish life, thus abandoning any attempt at reconciliation.
2. Thus Heinrich Heine in his *Zur Geschichte der Religion und Philosophie in Deutschland.* See Heine, *Werke,* VIII, 185.
3. Concerning the influence of *Jerusalem,* see Altmann, *Mendelssohn,* pp. 530–531, 533–535, 550, 593.
4. Concerning the significance of Mendelssohn's translation, see Schoeps, *Mendelssohn,* pp. 131ff.
5. Thus Beck in his *Early German Philosophy,* p. 326.
6. For a useful summary of Mendelssohn's place in the history of aesthetics, see Beck, *Early German Philosophy,* pp. 326–332, and Best, "Einleitung" to Mendelssohn's *Aesthetische Schriften,* pp. 3–24.
7. Concerning Mendelssohn's political theory, see Altmann, *Mendelssohn,* pp. 514ff., and Schoeps, *Mendelssohn,* pp. 126–149.
8. See Kant to C. G. Schütz, late November 1785, in *Briefwechsel,* 280–281. Also compare Kant's tribute to Mendelssohn's style in the *Prolegomena, Werke,* IV, 262.
9. Thus Beck writes of Mendelssohn's "Prize Essay": "No other single work gives so perspicuous a presentation of the Leibnizian-Wolffian epistemology; every strength of that tradition is persuasively presented, every fault inadvertently revealed." See his *Early German Philosophy,* pp. 332, 335.
10. See, for example, Hegel's view of Mendelssohn in his *Geschichte der Philosophie, Werke,* XX, 264.
11. This theory and Mendelssohn's general epistemology are expounded in the first seven lectures of *Morgenstunden,* the section entitled "Vorerkenntnis." See

Schriften, III/2, 10–67. Mendelssohn's argument here is largely a repeat of his earlier position in the "Prize Essay" (1763). I have therefore read *Morgenstunden* in the light of this earlier work. The relevant passages from the "Prize Essay" are in *Schriften,* II, 273–275, 277–278, 302–303, and 307–308.

12. Jacobi, *Werke,* II, 193–199.

13. See Crusius, *Werke,* II, 52–53, 123–124; and Kant, *Werke,* II, 52–53, 123–124. It is important to note, however, that Kant corrects Crusius's own formulation of the distinction between logical and real connection. See Kant, *Werke,* II, 203.

14. Mendelssohn, *Schriften,* II, 283, 293, 299.

15. Ibid., II, 293–294.

16. See Basedow, "Vorbericht," in *System der gesunden Vernunft,* esp. pp. 5, 76, 144.

17. Although Mendelssohn complained in the preface to *Morgenstunden* that he had not been able to keep up with all the new advances in philosophy, and particularly with the works of "the all-crushing Kant," he had still read the *Kritik* and was well apprised of its contents. See his letter of April 10, 1783, to Kant, in Mendelssohn, *Schriften,* XIII, 99–100. He had also read Garve's review of the first *Kritik* and discussed the critical philosophy with Nicolai. Concerning Mendelssohn's knowledge of the first *Kritik,* see Altmann, *Mendelssohn,* pp. 673–675.

18. Mendelssohn, *Schriften,* III/2, 69–72.

19. Ibid., III/2, 72.

20. Lessing, *Werke,* XIII, 24.

21. See Mendelssohn's *Jerusalem,* in *Schriften zur Aesthetik und Politik,* II, 275ff.

22. Mendelssohn, *Schriften,* III/2, 81ff.

23. Thus Mendelssohn holds that the fundamental beliefs of morality and religion are only common sense. See his *An die Freunde Lessings,* in *Schriften,* III/2, 197ff.

24. See "Vorlesung X," and "Allegorischer Traum," in *Schriften,* III/2, 81ff.

25. Mendelssohn, *Schriften,* III/2, 82.

26. Ibid., III/2, 79–80.

27. Ibid., III/2, 197–198.

28. Ibid., III/2, 198.

29. Ibid., III/2, 82.

30. Ibid., III/2, 104.

31. Ibid., III/2, 105–106.

32. Ibid., III/2, 106–107.

33. See Wolff, *Theologica naturalis, Werke,* VIII/2, 686, par. 683.

34. Mendelssohn, *Schriften,* III/2, 107.

35. Ibid., III/2, 107–110.

36. Here Mendelssohn is referring to his three-faculty theory according to which the mind consists in the faculties of thought, desire, and judgment. He expounds this theory in *Morgenstunden,* lecture 7, in *Schriften,* III/2, 61ff.

37. It is sometimes assumed that Mendelssohn accepts a purified pantheism. See, for example, Beck, *Early German Philosophy,* pp. 354, 339. But this assumption

is flatly inconsistent with the text of the latter half of lecture 14, where Mendelssohn refutes Lessing.

38. Mendelssohn, *Schriften,* III/2, 118.

39. It is interesting to note that Mendelssohn explicitly rejects Hegel's and Schelling's later solution to this problem. He denies the possibility of God 'alienating' his nature—of the infinite understanding embodying itself in the finite—because this would be incompatible with God's infinity. See *Morgenstunden, Schriften,* III/2, 120.

40. Mendelssohn, *Schriften,* III/2, 3.

41. See, for example, the passages in *Schriften,* III/2, 10, 60ff., 152ff., 170–171.

42. Mendelssohn's image of Kant as a dangerous skeptic was formed long before the appearance of the *Kritik.* In his review of Kant's *Träume eines Geistessehers* (1766), Mendelssohn expressed his dismay at the skeptical and derisory tone of Kant's tract. See Mendelssohn's article in *AdB* 4/2 (1767), 281. This image lost none of its power for Mendelssohn. In *Morgenstunden* he refers to the works of *der alles zermalmenden Kants.* The *Popularphilosophen,* from whom Mendelssohn received much of his information about Kant, probably reinforced this image in his mind. Garve, Nicolai, Feder, and Platner all told Mendelssohn their views of Kant; but they all saw him as a skeptic.

43. Mendelssohn, *Schriften,* III/2, 10–67, esp. 35–67.

44. Mendelssohn accepted the interpretation of Kant in Garve's review in the *Allgemeine deutsche Bibliothek.* See Mendelssohn to Reimarus, January 5, 1784, in *Schriften,* XIII, 168–169. After Feder's editing, Garve's review equated Kant's and Berkeley's idealism.

45. Mendelssohn, *Schriften,* III/2, 56–57, 59.

46. Ibid., III/2, 47, 15–17, 53–55.

47. Concerning Kant's plans, see Hamann to Jacobi, September 28 and October 28, 1785, in Hamann, *Briefwechsel,* VI, 77, 107. As it happened, Kant did eventually attack *Morgenstunden,* but in no polemical detail. See his "Bemerkungen" to *Jakobs Prüfung der Mendelsohnischen Morgenstunden,* in *Werke,* VIII, 151–155.

48. See Hume, *Treatise on Human Nature,* bk. I, sec. 2, pp. 187–218.

49. Mendelssohn's exposition of the concept of probability in *Morgenstunden* is based on his earlier *Gedanken von der Wahrscheinlichkeit* (1756). See Mendelssohn, *Schriften,* I, 147–164. But as Beck said of this work: "Mendelssohn completely missed the difficulty of Hume's problem." See his *Early German Philosophy,* p. 321.

50. Mendelssohn, *Schriften,* II, 300.

51. Ibid., III/2, 153.

52. Ibid., III/2, 148–149.

53. Ibid., III/2, 152–153.

4. Kant, Jacobi, and Wizenmann in Battle

1. Concerning the impact of the *Resultate,* see Jenisch to Kant, May 14, 1787, in Kant, *Briefwechsel,* p. 315; and Goltz, *Wizenmann,* II, 158–159, 164, 166–167, 186–187.

2. See Hamann to Jacobi, May 13, 1786, in Hamann, *Briefwechsel,* VI, 390.