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Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi:

Two Theories of the Leap

Anders Moe Rasmussen

I. Jacobi's Life and Work

Together with Johann Georg Hamann (1730–88) and Johann Gottfried Herder (1744–1803), Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi (1743–1819) constituted an important figure of the so-called "German Counter-Enlightenment" which arose in the 1770s and 1780s. Although the literary and philosophical writings of both Hamann and Herder had a great impact on contemporary intellectual life, especially on the formation of the Romantic movement within philosophy and literature, Jacobi was by far the most influential of these thinkers since his works had an impact not only on the Romantics but also on the development of post-Kantian German idealism. In fact, Jacobi's influence on German idealism is just as important as that of Kant.

Born into a rich Pietistic family in Düsseldorf on the Rhine, Jacobi received an education that prepared him for a business career, and for years he earned his living first as a merchant and later on as a civil servant. Finally, in 1807, he was appointed president of the Academy of Sciences in Munich.

In a way probably incomparable to any other intellectual at the time, Jacobi had personal contact with almost all the leading figures in the fields of literature, philosophy and the sciences, including notabilities such as Johann Wolfgang Goethe (1749–1832), Moses Mendelssohn (1729–86), Jakob Friedrich Fries (1773–1843) and Karl Leonhard Reinhold (1758–1823). The ground-breaking role of Jacobi, however, stems from two books: *On the Doctrine of Spinoza, in Letters to Moses Mendelssohn*¹ and *David Hume on Belief, or Idealism and Realism*.² In both books Jacobi displays his unique mastery of criticism. He detects hidden contradictions and inconsistencies in different forms of rational philosophy, whether it be the dogmatic rationalism of Spinoza or the critical rationalism of Kant. The book on Spinoza initiated a severe controversy between Moses Mendelssohn and Jacobi (the so-called "*Pantheismusstreit*"). The conflict was raised to a level of public scandal as it brought to an end the long period of Enlightenment in Germany. When Jacobi, in his letters to Mendelssohn, reported on Lessing's personal confession about being

¹ Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi, *Über die Lehre des Spinoza in Briefen an den Herrn Moses Mendelssohn*, Breslau: G. Loewe 1785 (2nd ed., 1789).

² Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi, *David Hume über den Glauben oder Idealismus und Realismus. Ein Gespräch*, Breslau: G. Loewe 1787.

a Spinozist, the intellectual world was shocked. The condemnation of Spinoza as an atheist, a figure who was seen as a destructive critic of the Holy Scriptures and as a revolutionary political thinker, was universally accepted in Germany. That Lessing, the most prominent German thinker between Leibniz (1646–1716) and Kant (1724–1804), identified himself with the pantheistic philosophy of Spinoza could not help but produce a public scandal.

The main purpose of Jacobi's Spinoza book, however, was not to make a public scandal or to discredit Mendelssohn (the biographer and greatest admirer of Lessing)—though this might to certain extent have been the case—but to strike a decisive attack on the entire Enlightenment project of rational philosophy. To that purpose Jacobi developed the strategy of making the philosophy of Spinoza the quintessence of all rationalist philosophy, including that of Wolff (1679–1754) and that of Leibniz.³ According to Jacobi, the nihilism of Spinoza's philosophical system is to be regarded as the natural and inevitable last stage in the development of the Enlightenment; he thereby claimed that Spinoza's pantheism was the most consistent system of rational philosophy. Any effort to create a demonstrable system, he believed, had to go in the direction of Spinozism. The superiority of Spinoza's pantheism is documented in his notion that "substance" was the first and universal cause, the "*causa sui*," of all existence. In order, however, to obtain such explanatory force, "substance" must be of such nature that it excludes any kind of reason or will; here one thinks of Spinoza's famous dictum "*deus sive natura*." So the consequences of a demonstrable and all-comprehensive system are fatalism and atheism since such a system leads to the total abolition of freedom.⁴ In Spinoza's rational philosophy the bankruptcy of the Enlightenment is ultimately revealed since Spinoza utterly fails to account for freedom of action. Spinoza did not neglect the notion of action; in fact, he explicitly talks about substance as a "*causa efficiens*." According to Jacobi, Spinoza is much more than a mechanistic philosopher since he is an opponent of a dynamic naturalism. Nevertheless, he never managed to account for any kind of becoming or beginning since activities and actions are nothing but modifications of the divine substance. Reason and explanation are in principle unable to grasp any kind of becoming. Against this background, Jacobi formulates a distinct "either/or" between a rational and explanatory philosophy (called "*Alleinphilosophie*") and a philosophy of freedom and becoming (Jacobi's alternative, which was called "*Unphilosophie*").⁵ This is clearly in evidence in the following quotation: "According to my opinion the greatest merit of the researcher is to uncover and to reveal existence—to him explanation is a means, a route to the goals—never an ultimate goal. His highest goal is what cannot be explained: the indissoluble, the immediate, the simple."⁶ Truth cannot be approached by way of rational thinking, but rather we embrace it in spite of rational thinking. A mortal leap (*mortale salto*) is needed. This leap away

³ Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi, *Werke: Gesamtausgabe*, ed. by Klaus Hammacher and Walter Jaeschke, Hamburg: Meiner and Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt: Frommann Holzboog 1998–, vol. 1.1, *Über die Lehre des Spinoza in Briefen an den Herrn Mendelssohn*, p. 123.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 120; p. 123.

⁵ Jacobi, *Werke: Gesamtausgabe*, vol. 2.1, p. 198.

⁶ Jacobi, *Werke: Gesamtausgabe*, vol. 1.1, p. 29.

from explanatory philosophy is, however, not to be regarded as a kind of skepticism since Jacobi actually undermines the distinction between dogmatism and skepticism thereby pointing to the prior condition of all cognition, called "belief."⁷ The "either/or" of explanatory philosophy and Jacobi's own so-called "*Unphilosophie*" addresses both the metaphysical problems of being and becoming, necessity and freedom and the epistemological problems of cognition and intuition or belief.

The epistemological aspect of Jacobi's philosophical enterprise is detailed in *David Hume on Belief, or Idealism and Realism*, which includes a decisive attack on the critical philosophy of Kant. Jacobi's relation to Kant is deeply ambiguous. On the one hand, he praises Kant for his destruction of rational metaphysics and his insistence on the limits of reason, but, on the other hand, he accuses Kant of just repeating the errors of Spinoza. According to Jacobi, there is no decisive difference between Spinoza's naturalism and Kant's transcendental idealism; once again we see his "either/or." Furthermore, he accuses Kant of a straightforward contradiction, which is rhetorically summarized in the following quotation: "I cannot get inside the system without this assumption and with this assumption I cannot stay in it."⁸ The assumption alluded to is Kant's notion of the "*Ding an sich*." The fundamental theorem in Kant's theoretical philosophy is the distinction between cognition and sensible intuition, cognition being of a spontaneous nature and sensible intuition being of a receptive nature. In order to secure the receptivity of intuition, Kant must presuppose objects outside the representations that cognition spontaneously produces. In this context Kant talks about the "*Ding an sich*" affecting our representations. Speaking in that way, however, produces a sheer contradiction in so far as Kant applies the concepts of cause and effect, which belong to cognition, to items that transcend representations. Contrary to the ultimate goal of Kant's philosophical enterprise, Jacobi states that he is unable to account for our natural convictions about reality and the world. Following in the footsteps of Hume and especially the common-sense philosophy of Thomas Reid (1710–96), Jacobi advances a realist theory about feeling and belief as absolute certainty about reality. To ask for explanations about our most natural and intuitive convictions and beliefs is an utter misunderstanding, leading only to unreality and abstraction.

Both of Jacobi's books had an enormous impact on German idealism as it developed in the 1790s, and reached right up to the very end of this philosophical tradition in Schelling's later philosophy. Although only very few, such as Jakob Friedrich Fries, came to acknowledge Jacobi's own philosophy of freedom, belief and action, his philosophical writings nevertheless came to formulate the agenda of German idealism. Both his criticism of Spinoza and his criticism of Kant reach into the very foundations of the philosophy of Fichte, Schelling and Hegel. Meanwhile Jacobi came to play a very ambiguous role as both an inspirer or inaugurator and a heretic. As much as the German idealists agreed with his criticism of Spinoza and Kant, they strongly rejected his own alternative (Jacobi was very much aware of this position, calling himself the "a privileged heretic" ("*priviligiierter Ketzer*").⁹

⁷ Jacobi, *Werke: Gesamtausgabe*, vol. 1.1.

⁸ Jacobi, *Werke: Gesamtausgabe*, vol. 2.1, p. 109.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 198.

None of the post-Kantian philosophers accepted his "either/or" between rational or explanatory philosophy and philosophy of freedom since they tried to reconcile system and freedom. Moreover, they also tried to overcome the inconsistencies in Kant's thinking, revealed by Jacobi, by transforming transcendental idealism into absolute idealism. It was just as much Jacobi as Kant who introduced the concept of freedom as a key concept in the philosophy of German idealism, and they also acknowledged the idea of "uncovering life" as the ultimate purpose of the philosophical enterprise. This is explicitly documented in the writings of the young Schelling and especially in the writings of Fichte, who was a great admirer of Jacobi. Nevertheless, the German idealists insisted that the goal of philosophy could only be achieved through a systematic enquiry into knowledge and reason, stating that there was an intimate relationship between philosophy and life. Though Jacobi appreciated this effort, as is explicitly documented in his *Brief an Fichte* (1799),¹⁰ he nevertheless maintained his view about the incompatibility of reason and knowledge, on the one hand, and freedom and life, on the other hand. Ironically, the ideal method of doing philosophy, for the German idealists, became exactly the rationalistic monism of Spinoza that Jacobi had portrayed in his book on Spinoza. All of the idealists, especially Schelling and Hegel, were fascinated by Spinozist thought about substance embracing the structure of all being, although at the same time they criticized Spinoza for straightforward mechanism. In a subtle way Jacobi predicted this renaissance of Spinozist monism just as he predicted the consequences of his attack on Kant.

Jacobi's diagnosis of Kant's philosophy as an utterly incoherent system also had an impact on the formation of both Fichte's transcendental philosophy and Hegel's speculative philosophy. Fichte's philosophy of the "I" can be regarded as an answer to Jacobi's criticism of Kant in so far as he gives a quite new definition of the problematic notion of causality, thereby avoiding the contradiction discovered by Jacobi. According to Fichte, the category of causality is to be deduced from the impact of the so called "Non-I" (*Nicht-Ich*) on the "I" since both the "I" and the "Non-I" are to be deduced from the so-called "positing I" (*setzendes Ich*). In this way, in the fashion of absolute idealism, Fichte turns receptivity into a kind of spontaneity or activity. Hegel in an interesting way shared Jacobi's opinion about Kant's subjectivism although he draws the opposite conclusion. Taking natural consciousness as his point of departure, Hegel measured all the stages of consciousness ending up in the notion of absolute knowledge. Furthermore, Jacobi's distinction between *Verstand* and *Vernunft*, explicitly documented in *Beilage VII of On the Doctrine of Spinoza, in Letters to Moses Mendelssohn*, had an impact on the idealists, especially Hegel, who took up the idea of transcending both Kant's notion of *Verstand* and his notion about regulative ideas while at the same accusing Jacobi of sheer irrationalism in talking about "his instinctive hostility to rational knowledge."¹¹

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 224.

¹¹ G.W.F. Hegel, "Glauben und Wissen oder die Reflexionsphilosophie der Subjektivität, in der Vollständigkeit ihrer Formen als Kantische, Jacobische und Fichtesche Philosophie," in *Jub.*, vol. 1, pp. 277–433, see p. 355 (*Jub.* = G.W.F. Hegel, *Sämtliche Werke. Jubiläumsausgabe*

While all the prominent and influential philosophers of the time moved in the opposite direction, Jacobi indefatigably continued to advocate his *mortal leap* and to denounce the philosophical enterprise of combining rational and systematic philosophy with freedom and life. According to Jacobi, all of the idealist systems were nothing but repetitions of Spinoza's determinism and fatalism. As much as the idealists wanted to distance themselves from what was called the mechanism of Spinoza, thereby infusing the absolute substance with agency and dynamics, in the eyes of Jacobi, they delivered just another version of Spinozism. Evidence of this ongoing controversy can be found in both *Sendschreiben an Fichte* (1799), in which he characterizes Fichte's philosophy as a "inverted Spinozism" (*umgekehrten Spinozismus*)¹² and *Von den göttlichen Dingen und ihrer Offenbarung* (1811), where he accuses Schelling of fatalism and atheism. Jacobi's impact on German idealism is not restricted to its formation but also includes its transformations. This is especially true of Schelling's philosophy as it transforms itself from the early philosophy of nature into the *Philosophie der Offenbarung* of the later Schelling. Much of the philosophy of the later Schelling is inspired by Jacobi with regard to both philosophical motifs and the form of philosophical argumentation.¹³ The basic feature of Schelling's later philosophy is the distinction between *negative* (or logical) and *positive* (or historical) philosophy, which resembles Jacobi's distinction between explanatory philosophy and philosophy of becoming and action. Furthermore, his polemics against Hegel, described as the culmination of negative philosophy, has pretty much the same outlook as Jacobi's criticism of Spinoza, claiming the inability of Hegelian metaphysics to account for the actual and real. Finally, there is a common methodological conviction that an alternative way of doing philosophy can only be worked out through an immanent critique of the opponent's theory. Neither in Jacobi nor in Schelling is the distinction between opposing kinds of philosophy to be understood in a dualistic way.

II. Direct References to Jacobi in the Works of Kierkegaard

There are rather few direct references to the philosophy of Jacobi in the works of Kierkegaard, and only in two cases does Kierkegaard involve himself in a more detailed discussion. In the following I will concentrate on the passage in which he deals most extensively with the thinking of Jacobi. In a passage that runs for several pages Kierkegaard reproduces the dialogue between Lessing and Jacobi in *On the Doctrine of Spinoza, in Letters to Moses Mendelssohn* (depicted by Kierkegaard as a dialogue between the old ironist and the young enthusiast), while at the same time he

in 20 Bänden, vols. 1–20, ed. by Hermann Glockner, Stuttgart: Friedrich Frommann Verlag 1928–41). English translation quoted from G.W.F. Hegel, *Faith & Knowledge*, trans. by Walter Cerf and H.S. Harris, Albany, New York: State University of New York Press 1977, p. 120.

¹² Jacobi, *Werke: Gesamtausgabe*, vol. 2.1, p. 195.

¹³ According to Axel Hutter the core of Schelling's later philosophy is to avoid Jacobi's dualism between reason and actuality. See Axel Hutter, *Geschichtliche Vernunft. Die Weiterführung der Kantischen Vernunftkritik in der Spätphilosophie Schellings*, Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp 1996, p. 276.

makes some critical remarks on Jacobi's notion of the leap. This criticism is summed up in the following passage:

Here I must pause for a moment. It might seem after all that Jacobi is the originator of the leap. Yet it must be noted, first of all that Jacobi is really not clear about where the leap essentially belongs. If anything, his *salto mortale* is only a subjectivizing act in comparison with Spinoza's objectivity; it is not a transition from the eternal to the historical. Next, he is not dialectically clear about the leap, that this cannot be expounded or communicated directly, precisely because the leap is an act of isolation, since it is left to the single individual to decide whether he will by virtue of the absurd accept in faith that which indeed cannot be thought: With the aid of eloquence Jacobi wants to help one to make the leap. But this is a contradiction, and all direct incitement is simply an obstacle to actually doing it, which must not be confused with assurances about wanting to have done it. Suppose that Jacobi himself has made the leap; suppose that with the aid of eloquence he manages to persuade a learner to want to do it. Then the learner has a direct relation to Jacobi and consequently does not himself come to make it.¹⁴

While recognizing Jacobi as the originator of the leap, Kierkegaard immediately raises two decisive objections: (1) the notion of the leap is misplaced; (2) the notion of the leap is misconceived. In the following I will comment on both of these objections.

(1) The description of Jacobi's notion of the leap as a transition from the objectivism of Spinoza's philosophy to subjectivism echoes and repeats the objections put forward by Hegel in his *Faith and Knowledge* (1802).¹⁵ This description of Jacobi probably was brought about by Kierkegaard's teacher Professor Hans Lassen Martensen (1808–84), who in his lectures on the history of more recent philosophy, which Kierkegaard presumably attended from 1838 to 1839, portrayed the philosophy of Jacobi in exactly the same way as Hegel did.¹⁶ Contrary to Hegel, who manifestly rejected the notion of the leap, putting Jacobi at the same time alongside Kant and Fichte as representatives of the so-called *Reflexionsphilosophie*, who were unable to grasp absolute knowledge, Kierkegaard's objection concerns the placement of the leap. According to Kierkegaard, the leap should be understood as a transition from the eternal to the historical. As pointed out by Birgit Sandkaulen,¹⁷ this objection, however, misses the point since Jacobi was intensively concerned with the problem about time, becoming and the historical. In fact, Jacobi's most decisive objection against Spinoza's metaphysics concerns its inability to account for time and becoming. In his very sensitive reconstructive interpretation of Spinoza, Jacobi in a penetrating way points to Spinoza's distinction between *essence* and *existence*

¹⁴ SKS 7, 98–9 / CUP1, 100–1.

¹⁵ The *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* also repeats Hegel's criticism of Jacobi when talking about "to play with the prepositions, something that Jacobi so greatly relished," SKS 7, 101 / CUP1, 103. See Hegel, "Glauben und Wissen oder die Reflexionsphilosophie der Subjektivität, in der Vollständigkeit ihrer Formen als Kantische, Jacobische und Fichtesche Philosophie."

¹⁶ See *Pap. II C 25* in *Pap. XII*, pp. 301–7.

¹⁷ Birgit Sandkaulen, *Grund und Ursache. Die Vernunftkritik Jacobis*, Munich: Fink 1999, p. 142.

(existence referring to duration and succession), while at the same time accusing him of turning existence into a purely logical thought. Jacobi's defense of freedom is just as much a defense of becoming and time since they are two sides of the same coin. When talking about a transition from the eternal to the historical, Kierkegaard refers to a turn from metaphysics to Christian revelation, something that is also evident from his notion of the "absurd." However, as documented in the "Interlude" in the *Philosophical Fragments*, Kierkegaard actually speaks about the historical in a way not exclusively connected to Christian revelation.

(2) The point of the second objection concerns what could be called the radicality of the leap. According to Kierkegaard, the leap, being an act of sheer individuality, is something that in principle cannot be communicated. Consequently, Jacobi's effort to persuade Lessing to perform the leap is rejected as a sheer contradiction. Trying to persuade, in the case of Jacobi, by the aid of eloquence, is nothing but an obstacle to perform the leap; Kierkegaard here evokes his general theory about teaching and communicating the truth. Meanwhile there seems to be some ambivalence in Kierkegaard's judgment about Jacobi's *salto mortale*. While maintaining his overall criticism of Jacobi for turning the leap into a kind of transition—here he alludes to the Hegelian notion of "mediation"—Kierkegaard nevertheless seems to moderate his critique quoted above. Commenting on Jacobi's phrase in *On the Doctrine of Spinoza, in Letters to Moses Mendelssohn*: "Wenn Sie nur auf die elastische Stelle treten wollen, die mich fortschwingt, so gehts von selbst."¹⁸ Kierkegaard says, "That incidentally, is rather well said, but there is the incorrectness that he wants to make the leap into something objective and the leaping into something analogous to, for example, finding the Archimedean point. The good thing about the reply is that he does not want to have a direct relationship, a direct companionship, in the leap."¹⁹ Apparently, Jacobi's concept of the leap is not entirely of an unsound character since it explicitly requires an act of choice to step on the "elastic spot." Accordingly, it seems to be the attitude of Jacobi, described as the attitude of eloquent persuasion, which is the target of Kierkegaard's objection.

Though the passages referred to by Kierkegaard surely concern Jacobi's most explicit statements about the leap, the notion is present in all of Jacobi's writings since the "either/or" between *Alleinphilosophie* and *Unphilosophie* is the structuring principle of his philosophy. The strategy of Jacobi's philosophy is that of making the leap unavoidable by way of uncovering inconsistencies and contradictions in rational philosophy, be it that of Spinoza or that of Kant. In his reconstruction of Spinoza's philosophy the aim is exactly to show the utter inability of rational and explanatory philosophy to account for freedom, life and becoming. He thereby evokes his own *Unphilosophie* of freedom and life as the only possible alternative, and consequently he rejects all the attempts made by the German idealists to reconcile his anti-Spinozism with Spinoza himself. This being the ultimate scope of Jacobi's leap, it cannot be reduced to some form of enthusiastic presentation or attitude, nor can it be assimilated to a version of Hegelian "mediation." Furthermore, the strategy of Jacobi is not alien to Kierkegaard since the enterprise of uncovering the

¹⁸ Jacobi, *Werke: Gesamtausgabe*, vol. 1.1, p. 30.

¹⁹ SKS 7, 100 / CUP1, 102.

inconsistencies and contradictions of rational metaphysics, *in casu* the speculative metaphysics of Hegel, is an essential part of his own thinking.

The second, more detailed, reference to Jacobi, also to be found in the *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, is of a much more sympathetic nature. Expressing his admiration of Hamann as well as of Jacobi, Kierkegaard here, contrary to his earlier negative statement about Jacobi's enthusiasm, praises this quality and speaks of Jacobi's "noble enthusiasm."²⁰ This positive statement is framed by a more general description of Jacobi, common to all the German idealists, as a proponent of feeling and enthusiasm, in opposition to rational philosophy. Moreover, when speaking about Jacobi "battling for the significance of existence" and his "inwardness," Kierkegaard seems to include Jacobi in his own project of protesting against systematic and explanatory speculation in the name of existence and spirit. This inclusion, however, is of a rather dubious character. Although the philosophy of Jacobi certainly could be called a philosophy of existence, "inwardness" is not part of his enterprise. As a proponent of freedom, Jacobi first of all is a philosopher of action who has nothing to do with inwardness. But then again action plays an essential role in the thinking of Kierkegaard.

III. Similarities between Kierkegaard and Jacobi

The direct references to Jacobi in the work of Kierkegaard do not exhaust the relation between the two thinkers. In fact I think there are a number of weighty and even decisive similarities between Jacobi and Kierkegaard. Jacobi is not just another thinker whom Kierkegaard resembles. In the following I will try to argue this by developing two points.

A. Strategy and Style of Thinking

In two respects Kierkegaard employs exactly the same strategy and procedure as Jacobi. The aim of Jacobi's reconstruction of Spinoza is to present his philosophy as the most coherent system of all rational metaphysics. According to Jacobi, the philosophy of Spinoza is simply irrefutable in terms of rational thinking. The same seems to hold for Kierkegaard's apprehension of Hegel's speculative metaphysics. Kierkegaard outspokenly considered Hegel's metaphysics to be the most coherent system of all modern rational philosophy, superior to all other forms of modern philosophy including the other idealist thinkers as well as Kant. Surely the reasons why Kierkegaard occupied himself so intensively with Hegel also had to do with the immense influence of Hegel's philosophy on the Danish intellectual scene, but the main reason is that he could only present his own way of thinking, as was also the case with Jacobi, by contrasting it to a philosophical system without any rational or conceptual flaws. This is concisely expressed in the following passage, which concerns the leap: "All honor to meditation! No doubt it can help a person in yet another way, as it presumably helped the author of *Fear and Trembling* to seek the

²⁰ SKS 7, 227 / CUP1, 250.

leap as a desperate way out, just as Christianity was a desperate way out when it entered the world and will continue to be that for everyone who actually accepts it."²¹ This I think is a Kierkegaardian reformulation of Jacobi's "either/or" between explanatory *Alleinphilosophie* and his own *Unphilosophie*. Just as Jacobi rules out a third way between explanatory philosophy and his own philosophy of freedom, action and reality, Kierkegaard insists on the strict alternative between Hegelian rational metaphysics and Christian existential and ethical thinking. Kierkegaard's criticism of Kant's critical philosophy is a clear illustration of his rejection of there being a third way:

Instead of admitting that idealism is in the right—but please note, in such a way that would reject the whole question about actuality (about a self-withholding *an sich*) in relation to thinking as a temptation, which like all other temptations cannot possibly be cancelled by surrendering to it—instead of putting a stop to Kant's deviation, which brought actuality into relation to thinking, instead of referring the actuality to the ethical....²²

In a vocabulary very close to Jacobi's original criticism of Kant's epistemology, Kierkegaard here claims that Kant's transcendental philosophy is an utterly unsustainable position that leaves only two options: either the option of absolute idealism or the option of a thinking of the actual or the ethical.

The second similarity concerning strategy and style of thinking has to do with the essence of Kierkegaard's and Jacobi's criticism of rational thinking. As mentioned above, the very essence of Jacobi's attack on Spinoza's philosophy concerns its inability to account for existence and becoming. Although clearly admitting a difference between *essence* and *existence* (something Hegel later on was to taunt him about), Spinoza, according to Jacobi, was unable to account for any kind of becoming or existence; this is most clearly stated in Jacobi's notion about "*der ungereimte Begriff einer ewigen Zeit*"²³ as the internal contradiction of Spinoza's rational system. Kierkegaard's attack on Hegelian speculation has exactly the same outlook since his most decisive criticism of Hegelian speculation concerns its neglect of time and becoming. Kierkegaard's constant complaints about Hegel's introduction of succession and movement into logic, which, however, depend largely on Schelling's later philosophy, are prefigured in Jacobi's criticism of Spinoza. Due to the very special character of Hegel's speculative metaphysics, Kierkegaard's criticism is, however, of a somewhat different nature. Contrary to Spinoza, Hegel rejects any notion of becoming, existence and succession as something belonging to a sphere external to logical thinking, while he at the same time integrates temporal notions such as change and transition into his system. In contrast to traditional rationalist metaphysics, which excludes temporality, Hegel boldly admits temporal terms into his logical system, especially at the beginning of the *Science of Logic*, while at the same time making these terms into a kind of mainspring of the self-movement of the

²¹ SKS 7, 103 / CUP1, 106.

²² SKS 7, 299 / CUP1, 328.

²³ Jacobi, *Werke: Gesamtausgabe*, vol. 1.1, p. 257.

logical categories. This transformation is the main target in Kierkegaard's criticism of Hegel's philosophy, which is most explicitly expressed in the following quotation:

Negation, transition, mediation are three disguised, suspicious, and secret agents (*agentia*) that bring about all movements. Hegel would hardly call them presumptuous, because it is with his gracious permission that they carry on their ploy so unembarrassedly that even logic uses terms and phrases borrowed from transition in time.... Let this be as it may. Let logic take care to help itself. The term "transition" is and remains a clever turn in logic. Transition belongs in the sphere of historical freedom, for transition is a state and it is actual. Plato fully recognized the difficulty of placing transition in the realm of the purely metaphysical, and for that reason the category of the moment cost him so much effort.²⁴

B. Actuality versus Abstraction

Kierkegaard's general project of securing freedom contains two parts: one trying to prevent time, becoming and the historical from being absorbed in logical categories and the other one concerning reality and actuality as irreducible to thinking.

Certainly, Kierkegaard's attack on Hegel's philosophy was strongly inspired by the later Schelling's contrasting the negative philosophy of Hegel as a rational discourse of pure possibility with his own positive philosophy of actuality and reality presiding over rational thinking. But upon closer examination, Kierkegaard seems much closer to Jacobi's position. Despite Schelling's severe criticism of rationalist metaphysics, which is most explicitly displayed in his critical discussions of the demonstrations of God's existence, he never gave up the idea that knowledge and thought, in some limited sense, were able to account for actuality. In fact, he rejected only a concept of reason in terms of *Denknotwendigkeiten* while still holding on to the project of a rational mapping of the actual. Thus Schelling, though very much in accordance with Jacobi's diagnosis of rational metaphysics, accused Jacobi of sheer dualism, that is, a dualism without any kind of evidence.²⁵ Kierkegaard, by contrast, devoted himself much more to the "either/or" position of Jacobi, abandoning any attempt to preserve the grip of knowledge on the actual and the real. This proximity is clearly documented in Kierkegaard's concept of actuality or reality. Kierkegaard's concept of actuality is rather complicated since it seems to denote quite different phenomena,²⁶ but the predominant notion of "actuality" is epistemological and very much in line with Jacobi and Hume. In the *Philosophical Fragments* Kierkegaard displays the whole repertoire of Jacobean/Humean-like notions. With explicit reference to Jacobi, Kierkegaard states:

²⁴ SKS 4, 384–5 / CA, 82.

²⁵ See [F.W.J. Schelling], *Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph von Schellings sämtliche Werke*, ed. by Karl Friedrich August Schelling, vols. 1–14, Stuttgart: Cotta 1856–61, vol. 10, p. 181.

²⁶ See Michelle Kosch, "Actuality in Schelling and Kierkegaard," in *Kierkegaard und Schelling. Freiheit, Angst und Wirklichkeit*, ed. by Jochem Hennigfeld and Jon Stewart, Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter 2003 (*Kierkegaard Studies Monograph Series*, vol. 8), pp. 235–51.

This is not entirely true, because I cannot immediately sense or know that what I immediately sense or know is an effect, for immediately it simply is. That it is an effect is something I believe, because in order to predicate that it is an effect, I must already have made it dubious in the uncertainty of coming into existence. But if belief decides on this, then the doubt is terminated; in that very moment the balance and neutrality are terminated—not by knowledge but by will.²⁷

This quotation clearly echoes the Jacobean/Humean dictum that conclusions from cause to effect cannot be drawn by way of proof or explanation but only by means of belief. The passage cited, however, also reveals a difference between Jacobi and Kierkegaard. By stressing the volitional nature of belief, Kierkegaard combines the epistemological aspect of the notion of "actuality" with another important aspect of this notion: namely, the ethical or practical aspect. According to Kierkegaard, we are just as responsible for the world as we are responsible for our actions. By contrast, Jacobi's concept of belief remains a purely epistemological concept. As much as Jacobi advocates the perspective of free human agency against the determinism of rational philosophy, he does not link his practical, ethical and existential enterprise with his epistemological project.²⁸

This difference, which characterizes Kierkegaard's practical and existential protest against speculative philosophy, nevertheless resembles Jacobi's objections against explanatory philosophy. When adopting Schelling's distinction between rational philosophy as a discourse of sheer possibility and a philosophy of the actual, this distinction has much more in common with Jacobi than with Schelling. While the distinction drawn by Schelling is of a metaphysical nature, denoting different modal categories of being, the distinction drawn by Kierkegaard is of practical and ethical nature, referring to a different kind of perspective: that is, the disengaged and disinterested perspective of the observer and the interested perspective of agency. This way of thinking is prefigured in the philosophy of Jacobi, which is most explicitly documented in *Sendschreiben an Fichte*. Here Jacobi states:

The philosophizing of pure reason must therefore be a chemical process through which everything else is transformed into nothing, and pure reason alone remains. This is a spirit so pure that it cannot itself exist in such purity, but can only construct everything; and it must do so, in turn, in a state of such purity that it cannot itself exist in it, but can only be intuited in the spirit's construction: the entirety a mere deed-deed. All human beings, in so far as they strive for knowledge at all, make this pure philosophy their final goal [even] without wanting to; for a human being knows only inasmuch as he conceives, and he conceives only inasmuch as—by transforming substance into mere form—he makes form into substance, and substance into nothing. We conceive of a substance only in so far as we construct it, in so far as we can let it appear to us in our thoughts. Insofar as we do not construct it, in so far as we cannot ourselves produce it in thoughts, we do not conceive of it.²⁹

²⁷ SKS 4, 283 / PF, 84.

²⁸ That might be the reason why commentators such as Günther Baum in his dissertation *Vernunft und Erkenntnis. Die Philosophie F.H. Jacobi* (1968) claims epistemology to be the core of Jacobi's philosophy, thereby ignoring its practical and existential aspects.

²⁹ Jacobi, *Werke: Gesamtausgabe*, vol. 2.1, pp. 201–2.

In this passage, containing the famous verdict of nihilism on Fichte's absolute idealism, Jacobi claims that reason and thought have their origin within the domain of experience and practical concerns since reason comes into being only by way of a destruction of this origin. Reason and cognition are entirely occupied with themselves since they are only governed by their self-produced rules of construction, and thereby abolish actuality and human practical and existential concerns. According to Jacobi, this is the *aporia* of all rational philosophy. By abstracting from experience, the subject of cognition falls prey to any kind of relation, both to the world and to itself, leaving it circulating in itself. Accordingly, Jacobi's "mortal leap," the leap into the domain of experience and human agency, is not a leap into naïve realism, but a conscious and deliberate renunciation of the efforts of justification, characteristic of explanatory philosophy.

Kierkegaard's critical description of Hegelian speculative metaphysics in significant ways echoes Jacobi's diagnosis of rational philosophy as abstracting from actuality and the perspective of experience and agency. In the works of Kierkegaard there are numerous examples, including the following from the *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*:

For the existing person, existing is for him his highest interest, and his interestedness in existing is his actuality. What actuality is cannot be rendered in the language of abstraction. Actuality is an *inter-esse* [between-being] between thinking and being in the hypothetical unity of abstraction. Abstraction deals with possibility and actuality, but its conception of actuality is a false rendition, since the medium is not actuality but possibility. Only by annulling actuality can abstraction grasp it, but to annul it is precisely to change it into possibility.³⁰

In a vocabulary quite similar to Jacobi's, Kierkegaard here states that rational thinking is nothing but an annihilation and a destruction of actuality resulting in a closed system of hypothetical thought-constructions that are in principle unable to grasp reality and human agency. The rational philosopher is an observer who has detached himself from the world of experience and agency without ever reaching or grasping that reality. However much rational and explanatory thinking intends to grasp actuality, this ambition fails. The leap to another kind of thinking, a thinking in the perspective of practical human agency, therefore is a deliberate one. Surely, Kierkegaard wanted to radicalize the scandal of the leap, but his actual practice is very much of the same nature as Jacobi's.

³⁰ SKS 7, 286–7 / CUP1, 314–15.

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