

*Concerning the Doctrine of Spinoza
in Letters
to
Herr Moses Mendelssohn*

dós moí pou stō¹

Give me a place to stand. Archimedes.²

Breslau
at Gottl. Löwe
1785

NOTE: This translation is made from the first edition (1785), which I have chosen for two reasons: It is substantially shorter than the two subsequent ones, and its relative brevity makes it all the more effective as a piece of philosophical polemic. I have made no attempt to note all the textual variations from the later editions, but I have noted a few significant ones, and I have also appended under an independent heading substantial excerpts from the edition of 1789. This edition also differs in places, but not substantially, from the third edition of 1819. The text is complete except for certain footnotes (as indicated) in which I have only made reference to sources that Jacobi cites in full. Pagination from the first edition is in square brackets, that from the second edition in curly brackets.

The precepts of the dialecticians [are] forms of reasoning in which the conclusions follow with such irresistible necessity that if our reason relies on them, even though it takes, as it were, a rest from considering a particular inference clearly and attentively, it can nevertheless draw a conclusion which is certain simply in virtue of the form. But, as we have noticed, truth often slips through these fetters, while those who employ them are left entrapped in them. Others are not so frequently trapped and, as experience shows, the cleverest sophisms hardly ever deceive anyone who makes use of his untrammelled reason; rather, it is usually sophists themselves who are led astray.

Descartes³

Be noble, Man,
Heart-good, lordly helper!
For this alone
Sets us apart
From all the beings
That we *know*.

Hail, then, unknown
Higher powers
That we *divine*!
Man is like to them:
From his example we learn
Belief in those others.

Nature is blind, unfeeling;
The sun gives light
To both evil and good,
On the best of men
And the breaker of laws
The moon and stars cast their glance.

Wind, streams,
Thunder, hail;
They storm on their ways,
Seizing up
In their headlong rush
The one and the other.

Luck, too,
Groping through the crowd,
Touches now the innocent
Curly-headed boy,
Now the old sinner's
Bald crown.

All, we all must,
According to great,
Honoured, eternal laws
Accomplish the cycle
of our existence.

But only Man
Strives for *what cannot be*:
Divides,
Elects, and orders;
Can make the instant
Endure.

Only he may give
Rewards to the good,
Chastise the wicked man:
May heal and deliver,
May bring together
All that is drifting and straying
And *give it a use*.

[page] And we revere
The Undying Ones
As if they were human,
In their great deeds
As the best of us
In our little doings are
Or might be.

O Noble Man,
Be generous, be good!
Unresting, shape
The useful and the right!

Be for us a pattern
Of those mysterious powers!

Goethe⁴

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PREFATORY NOTE

I have named this book after its occasion and most of its content, since even the Letter to Hemsterhuis* should here be counted as a supplement to my letters to Mendelssohn.

The story of these letters, which I give here with them, will itself justify my giving it.

After the last letter I have briefly stated the purpose of the work. I believe that from there to the end I have made my purpose known clearly enough.

For the moment I have no more to say to the *attentive* and *enquiring* reader, *whose only concern is the truth*. [page] If a different sort of reader takes up this book, that is not my fault. Let him make no demands on me, just as I make none on him.

Pempelfort, near Düsseldorf⁵

August 28, 1785

Friedrich Heinr. Jacobi

. . . . It is in relation to the king of all and on his account that everything exists, and that fact is the cause of all that is beautiful. In relation to what comes second, the second class of things exists, and in relation to a third, the third class. Now the mind of man, when it has to do with them, endeavours to gain a knowledge of their qualities, fixing its attention on

* See p. 56 of Jacobi's text, below.

the things with which it has itself some affinity; these, however, are in no case adequate. In regard to the king and the things I mentioned there is nothing like this. Thereupon the soul says, "But what are they like?" This question, thou son of Dionysius and Doris—or rather the travail that this question occasions in the soul—is the cause of all the trouble, and if that be not expelled from a man, he shall never genuinely find the truth.

Plato to Dionysius, *Letter II* [312e–313a; tr. L. A. Post]

[1] [The first edition has a vignette here portraying a resplendent altar, with smoke (perhaps of burnt offerings) rising from it, and a harp leaning against it.]

In February of the year 1783 a close friend of Lessing, who through him became my friend too, wrote to me that she was planning to make a trip to Berlin, and asked me whether I had any commission for her there.⁶

She wrote to me again from Berlin. Her letter dealt mainly with Mendelssohn, "this true admirer and friend of our Lessing." She reported to me that she had talked a lot with him about the deceased of glorious memory, and about me as well; and that Mendelssohn was about to begin his book about [2] Lessing's character and writings.⁷

Various obstacles made it impossible for me to reply to this letter immediately, and my friend's stay in Berlin lasted only a few weeks.

When she was home again, I wrote to her, and asked how much, or how little, Mendelssohn knew of Lessing's religious inclinations.—I said that *Lessing had been a Spinozist*.⁸

Lessing had declared himself on the matter to me without any reticence, and since he was not generally inclined to conceal his opinions, I could fairly presume that what I knew about him had become known to several others as well. However, I came to know that he had never clearly declared himself on the matter to Mendelssohn, in the following way.

I once invited Lessing to accompany me to Berlin;⁹ and [3] his answer was that we would discuss the matter together at Wolfenbüttel.¹⁰ When I got there, some serious obstacles developed. Lessing wanted to persuade me to travel to Berlin without him, and every day he grew more

insistent. The main motive for this was Mendelssohn, whom Lessing treasured most among all his friends. He was very eager that I would get to know Mendelssohn personally. In one discussion I expressed my amazement that a man of such clear and straight understanding as Mendelssohn could have endorsed the proof of God's existence from the idea [of God] as zealously as he had done in his treatise on evidence;¹¹ and Lessing's excuses led me straight to the question whether he had ever declared his own system to Mendelssohn. "Never, Lessing replied. . . . I once only told him, more or less, just what struck you in §73 of the *Education of Mankind*.¹² We never came to a conclusion, and I let it go at that."

[4] So the likelihood that several had been informed of Lessing's Spinozism on the one hand, and the certainty that Mendelssohn had never known anything reliable about it on the other, induced me to drop him a hint about it.

My friend fully grasped what I had in mind; to her the matter seemed to be extremely important, and she wrote to Mendelssohn at once to reveal to him what I had told her.

Mendelssohn was astounded, and his first reaction was to doubt the accuracy of my statement.¹³ He wanted to know precisely "how Lessing had expressed the opinions that I was attributing to him. Whether he had bluntly said: 'I hold Spinoza's system to be true and well-grounded'; and which system was he speaking of? the one expounded in Spinoza's *Tractatus Theologicus Politicus* or the one in his *Principia Philosophiae Cartesianae*, or the one that Ludovicus Mayer had [5] published after Spinoza's death in his name.¹⁴ And if it was the system that is universally known for its atheism, then, Mendelssohn also wanted to know, whether Lessing had taken it in the way that it was misunderstood by Bayle,¹⁵ or as others have better explained it.¹⁶ He added, moreover, that if Lessing had reached the stage where he could simply go along with anybody's system without further qualification, then at the time he was no longer in his right mind, or else he was in that peculiar mood of his, when he would assert something paradoxical which he then himself rejected in a more serious moment.

Or perhaps Lessing had said something of this sort: "Dear Brother, the much decried Spinoza may well have seen further on many points than all the criers who have become heroes at his expense. His *Ethics*, in particular, contains many admirable things, better things than many an orthodox moral doctrine, or many a compendium of world-wisdom perhaps. His system is not as absurd as is believed." [6] If this is what had happened, then Mendelssohn could endure it.

In conclusion he reiterated the wish that I would be so good as to inform him of the relevant details exhaustively—what Lessing said on the matter, how, and on what occasion—for he was convinced that I had thoroughly understood Lessing, and that I retained in my memory every circumstance of such an important conversation.

As soon as I had done this, Mendelssohn certainly meant to discuss the incident in what he still proposed to write about Lessing. “For,” so the guileless wise man said, “even the name of our best friends should not shine in posterity either more or less than it deserves. The truth above all. With truth the good cause always triumphs.”

I did not have the least misgiving in following this invitation, and on the fourth of [7] November I sent him the following letter by way of my friend. And to preserve its documentary status, I shall have it printed without change, from the first line to the last.¹⁷

Pempelfort near Düsseldorf
November 4, 1783.

Because of certain opinions that I have attributed to the departed Lessing in a letter to ****,¹⁸ you wish to learn the precise detail from me; in that case, it seems best that I direct whatever I am capable of communicating straight to you.

It pertains to the matter at hand, or at least to the statement of it, that I preface it with something about myself. And since I will thereby bring you into a somewhat closer acquaintance with me, I shall gain more courage to tell you everything freely, and shall perhaps forget what would otherwise worry or intimidate me.

[8] I was still wearing my child-frock when I began to worry about things of another world.* I was eight or nine years old when my childish depth of sense[†] led me to certain remarkable “visions” (I know no better word for them) that still stick with me to this day. My yearning to attain certainty regarding the higher expectations of man grew with the years; and it became the leading thread on which all my fortunes were to hang. My innate character and the upbringing that I received conspired to keep me duly diffident about myself and, for too long a time, in all the greater expectation of what others might have to offer. I came to Geneva where I found excellent men who received me with magnanimous love

* See Supplement III, below.

† *Tiefsinn*

and truly fatherly fidelity. I later came across others, some of equal reputation, and others of even greater fame, who did not however ever become as much to me; and I often entrusted myself to them to my own great disadvantage. This gradually brought me back to some [9] trust in myself; I learned how to gather my own forces and muster them for counsel.

Spiritually minded men who search for the truth out of inner need—of these there are only a few, as you know. Yet to each of them truth has revealed something of its inner life, so that none of them is so insignificant that there is not some advantage in heeding to him.* I picked up this clue, and followed it among the living and the dead; and the more I did so, the more intimately I noticed that real depth of sense[†] has a common direction, like gravity in bodies, but that this direction, since it runs from different points on the periphery, cannot yield either parallel lines or lines that cross. It is quite different with sharpness of sense,[‡] which I may compare to the chords of the circle and is often taken for profundity of sense because it has depth as regards relations and form. Here the lines intersect at will, and at times are also parallel. A chord can run so close to the diameter as to be taken for the [10] diameter itself; yet it only cuts across a greater number of radii without touching the ends of *those* it gave the impression to be.¹⁹ Where both depth and sharpness are missing—where there is only mere *so-called* knowledge, without sharpness or depth, without the need or the enjoyment of truth—what could there be more disgusting? . . . Please forgive all this imagery most honoured Sir—I come to Lessing.

I had always revered the great man. But ever since his theological disputes,²⁰ and after I had read the *Parable*,²¹ the desire for a closer acquaintance with him had become more lively in me. It was my good fortune that he took an interest in *Allwill's Papers*; he sent me many a friendly message, at first through travellers, and finally, in the year 1779, he wrote to me.²² I replied that I planned a trip for the following spring which would take me by Wolfenbüttel, and there I yearned to [11] conjure up in him the spirits of several wise men whom I could not induce to speak to me about certain things.²³

* I am following the text of the first edition, which also corresponds to the text of Jacobi's letter in the *Briefwechsel*. Jacobi made some stylistic improvements in the second edition.

† *Tiefsinn*.

‡ *Scharfsinn*.

My trip took place, and on the fifth of July, in the afternoon, I held Lessing in my arms for the first time.

On that very same day we talked about many important things; and about individuals, moral and immoral, atheist, theist and Christian.

The following morning Lessing came to my room where I was still busy at some letters that I had to write. I reached out to him a number of things from my briefcase, to help him while away his time as he waited. When he gave them back he asked me whether I had something else that he could read. "But yes!" I said (I was ready to seal my letter), "here's a poem yet—you have given so much scandal; you might as well receive some for once. . . ." *1

[Cover, Zeus, your heavens with
A mist of clouds:
Practice, like a boy
With thistles, cutting
The heads off oaks and mountains heights;
But leave my Earth
Standing for me;
My cottage (you did not build it!)
My hearth, too,
Whose warmth
Gives you such envy.

Gods, I have seen nothing
Under the sun sorrier than you!
Miserably you feed
Your greatness
On tithes of sacrifice,
On breaths of prayers;
If babes and beggars
Were not filled with foolish hopes,
You would be starving.

When I was a child,
And all was new and strange,

*1. There are good reasons why this poem, which inveighs with harsh expressions against all Providence, cannot be communicated here. ¹

I turned my straying eyes
 Sunward—as if there was an ear
 Above to hear my complaint,
 A heart like mine,
 Formed to pity the afflicted.

Who helped me
 Against the Titans' hubris?
 Who delivered me from death
 And slavery?
 Did you not achieve all this yourself,
 My holy, ardent heart?
 Yet, young and good, beguiled,
 You glowed with thanks for your life
 To one who is sleeping up there.

I, give you honour? Why?
 Have you ever lightened his sorrows
 For one who is labouring?
 Have you ever stilled his tears
 For one in anguish?
 Was I not forged into a Man
 By Time, the all-mighty,
 And everlasting Fate,
 My lord, and yours?

Did you believe, then,
 I would come to hate life,
 And flee to the wasteland,
 Since budding dreams of my youth
 Have failed to ripen?

Here sit I, shaping Men
 In my likeness:
 A race that is to be as I am,
 To suffer and weep,
 To relish and delight in things,
 And to pay you no regard—
 Like me!] ²⁴

Lessing: (After reading the poem, [12] and as he was giving it back to me) I took no scandal. That I already did long ago, but at first hand.²⁵ I: Do you know the poem? Lessing: The poem I have never seen before; but I think that it is good. I: It is good in its kind, I agree; otherwise I would not have shown it to you. Lessing: I mean it is good in a different way. . . . The point of view from which the poem is treated is my own point of view. . . . The orthodox concepts of the Divinity are no longer for me; I cannot stomach them. *Hen kai pan!*²⁶ I know of nothing else. That is also the direction of the poem, and I must confess that I like it very much. I: Then you must be pretty well in agreement with Spinoza. Lessing: If I have to name myself after anyone, I know of nobody else. I: Spinoza is good enough for me: yet, what a wretched salvation we find in his name! Lessing: Yes indeed! If you like . . . ! And yet. . . . Do you know of a better one . . . ?

In the meantime Wolke, the director from Dessau, had come in, and we went together to the library.

[13] The following morning, when I had returned to my room to dress after breakfast, Lessing joined me after a while. I was in a chair, having my hair done, and in the meantime Lessing quietly settled himself near a desk at the end of the room. As soon as we were alone, and I sat down on the other side of the desk against which Lessing was leaning, he began: "I have come to talk to you about my *hen kai pan*. Yesterday you were frightened. I: You surprised me, and I may indeed have blushed and gone pale, for I felt bewilderment in me. Fright it was not. To be sure, there is nothing that I would have suspected less, than to find a Spinozist or a pantheist in you. And you blurted it out to me so suddenly. In the main I had come to get help from you against Spinoza. Lessing: Oh, so you do know him? I: I think I know him as only very few can ever have known him. Lessing: Then there is no help for you. Become his friend all the way instead. There is no other philosophy than the philosophy of Spinoza. [14] I: That might be true. For the determinist, if he wants to be consistent, must become a fatalist: the rest then follows by itself. Lessing: I see that we understand one another. I am all the more anxious to hear what you hold to be the spirit of Spinozism; I mean the spirit that inspired Spinoza himself. I: It is certainly nothing other than the ancient *a nihilo nihil fit*²⁷ that Spinoza made an issue of, but with more abstract concepts than the philosophers of the cabbala or others before him. In keeping with these more abstract concepts he established that with each and every coming-to-be in the in-

finite, no matter how one dresses it up in images, with each and every change in the infinite, *something* is posited *out of nothing*. He therefore rejected any *transition* from the infinite to the finite. In general, he rejected all *causae transitoriae, secundariae* or *remotae*, and in place of an emanating *En-Soph*²⁸ he only posited an *immanent* one, an indwelling cause of the universe eternally unalterable *within itself*, One and the same with all its consequences. . . . *² [15]

This immanent infinite cause has, as such, *explicite*, neither understanding nor will. For because of its transcendental *unity* and thoroughgoing absolute infinity, it can have no object of thought and will; and a faculty to produce a concept before *the concept*, or a concept that would be prior to its object and *the complete cause of itself*, or so too a will [16] causing the willing and thus determining itself entirely, are nothing but absurdities. . . .

. . . . The objection that an infinite series of effects is impossible (*bare* effects they are not, for the indwelling cause is always and everywhere) is self-refuting, for if a series is not to arise from *nothing*, it must be infinite absolutely. And from this it likewise follows that, since each and every concept must arise from some other individual concept and refer to an *actually present object immediately*, neither individual thoughts nor individual determinations of the will can be found in the first cause, which is infinite by nature, but only their inner, primal, and universal material. . . . The first cause cannot act in accordance with intentions or final causes, any more than it can exist for the sake of a certain intention or final cause; it cannot have an *initial* ground or a *final* end for performing something, any more than it can itself have a *beginning* or *end*. . . . Fundamentally, what we call consequence or duration are mere illusions; for since a *real effect* coincides with *the totality of its real cause*, and is distinguished from it only in representation, consequence and duration must *in truth* only be a certain way of intuiting the manifold in the infinite.

*2. I carry on with this exposition joining things together as I can, without writing down what was said in between, not to be too long-winded. What now follows was occasioned by Lessing referring to, as the darkest in Spinoza, something that Leibniz had found obscure too, and had not quite understood (*Theod.*, #173).²

I note this here once and for all, and shall not repeat it in what follows, whenever I take similar liberties.

Lessing: We shall not dissent about our *credo* therefore. I: We wouldn't want to do that in any case. But, my *credo* is not in Spinoza. Lessing: I dare hope that it is not in *any* book. I: That's not all. I believe in an intelligent personal cause of the world. Lessing: Oh, all the better! I must be about to hear something entirely new.* I: You had better not get your hopes up too much. I extricate myself from the problem through a *salto mortale*,[†] and I take it that you are not given to any special pleasure in leaping with your *head down*. Lessing: Don't say that; provided that I need not imitate you. Moreover, you will come down standing on your feet. So, if it is not a [18] secret, let's have it. I: You can always pick it up by looking at me. The whole thing comes down to this: from fatalism I immediately conclude against fatalism and everything connected with it.—If there are only efficient, but no final, causes, then the only function that the faculty of thought has in the whole of nature is that of observer; its proper business is to accompany the mechanism of the efficient causes. The conversation that we are now having together is only an affair of our bodies; and the whole content of the conversation, analyzed into its elements, is extension, movement, degree of velocity, together with their concepts, and the concepts of these concepts. The inventor of the clock did not ultimately invent it; he only witnessed its coming to be out of blindly self-developing forces. So too Raphael, when he sketched the School of Athens,²⁹ and Lessing, when he composed his *Nathan*. The same goes for all philosophizing, arts, forms of governance, sea and land wars—in brief, for everything possible. For [19] affects and passions would have no effect either, so far as they are sensations and thoughts; or more precisely, so far as they *carry* sensations and thoughts *with them*. We only *believe* that we have acted out of anger, love, magnanimity, or out of rational decision. Mere illusion! What fundamentally moves us in all these cases is *something that knows nothing of all that*, and which is *to this extent* absolutely devoid of sensations and thoughts. These, the sensations and thoughts, are however only concepts of extension, movement, degrees of velocity, etc.—Now, if someone can accept this, then I cannot refute his opinion. But if one cannot, then one must be at the antipodes from Spinoza. Lessing: I note that you would like to have a free will. For my part, I don't crave one. On the whole I am not in the least frightened by what you have just said. It is

* The second edition refers here to Supplement IV.

† Literally, "a mortal jump," i.e. a leap in which a person turns heels over head in the air.

human prejudice to consider thought as being first and pre-eminent, and to want to derive everything from it—whereas everything, representations included, [20] depends on higher principles. Extension, movement, thought, are patently grounded in a higher power that is yet far from being exhausted by them. It must be infinitely more perfect than this or that effect; hence there can be a kind of pleasure which not only surpasses all concepts, but lies totally *outside* the concept. The fact that we cannot entertain any thought about it does not remove its possibility. I: You go further than Spinoza; for him *insight* was above everything.* Lessing: For *men!* But he was far from pretending that our dismal manner of acting by way of purposes is the highest method, or from placing thought on top. I: For Spinoza insight is the best part *in all finite* natures, for it is the part through which each finite nature reaches beyond its finitude. One could almost also say that he has attributed two souls to each and every being—one, that only relates to the present individual thing; and another, that relates to the whole.*³ [21] To this second soul he also grants immortality. But as far as the One infinite Substance of Spinoza is concerned, it has no determinate or complete existence on its own outside the individual things. If it had a particular and individual actuality of its own as its unity (to express myself in this way), if it had personality and life, insight would be the best part of it too. Lessing: Good. But then, how do you represent your personal, extra-mundane, Divinity on your assumption? In the way perhaps that Leibniz represented it? I am afraid that he was a Spinozist at heart too. I: Are you serious? Lessing: Do you seriously doubt [22] it?—Leibniz's concepts of truth were of such nature that he could not tolerate any narrow limits being imposed on it. Many of his assertions derive from this kind of thinking, and it is often difficult to uncover his true meaning even with the greatest acumen. This is just the reason why I appreciate him so much—I mean, because of the far-reaching character of his thought and not because of this or that opinion which he only appeared to have, or may even actu-

*₃. Although only by means of this body which [21] cannot be an absolute individual (for an absolute individual is just as impossible as an individual Absolute. *Determinatio est negatio, Op. Posth.*, p. 558) but must rather contain universal and unalterable properties and qualities, the nature and the concept of the infinite. With this distinction one has one of the principal keys to the system of Spinoza, without which one only finds confusion and contradictions in it.³

* The second edition refers here to Supplement v.

ally have held. I: Quite. Leibniz liked to “strike a spark from every flint.”³⁰ But you said with reference to a specific opinion, namely Spinozism, that at heart Leibniz *was committed* to it. Lessing: Do you recall a place in Leibniz where it is said of God that he is in a state of incessant expansion and contraction: would this be the creation and conservation of the world?³¹ I: I know about his “fulgurations”;³² but the passage you speak of is unknown to me. Lessing: I’ll look for it, and then you’ll have to tell me what a man like Leibniz could, or *must*, have thought by it.³³ I: [23] Show me the passage. But I must tell you from the start that with so many other places that I recall in this very same Leibniz—so many other letters, essays, his *Theodicy* and *Nouveaux Essais*, his philosophical course in general—I reel at the hypothesis that this man did not accept a transcendent cause of the world, but only an immanent one. Lessing: On that side I must yield to you. And it is this side that will retain the upper hand. I must grant that I have said a bit too much. But, for all that, the passage that I have in mind, and many another yet, remain odd.—But let’s not forget our problem! On what representations do you base your anti-Spinozism? Is your view that Leibniz’s *Principia*³⁴ put an end to Spinozism? I: How could I when I am firmly convinced that the consistent determinist does not differ from the fatalist . . . ? The monads, with all their *vincula*,* leave extension and thought—*reality* in general—just as incomprehensible to me as before, and I can’t tell [24] right from left. I feel as if I am being led. . . . For the rest, I know of no doctrinal system that concurs with Spinozism as much as Leibniz’s does; and it is difficult to say which of the two authors was fooling himself and us most—with all due respect of course . . . ! Mendelssohn has clearly demonstrated that the *harmonia præstabilita* is in Spinoza. From this alone it already follows that Spinoza must contain much more of Leibniz’s fundamental teachings; for otherwise Leibniz and Spinoza (who would hardly have been touched by Wolff’s lesson) would not be the consistent minds that they incontestably were.*⁴ I would dare to extrapolate the whole of Leibniz’s doctrine of the soul from Spinoza. . . . Fundamentally they have the same teaching on freedom too, and it’s only an illusion that distinguishes their theories. If Spinoza can explain our feeling of freedom through the example of a stone that thinks and that knows that it is striving to maintain its move-

*4. See Mendelssohn’s *Philosoph. Writings*, the 3rd discourse, at the end.⁴

* bonds

ment as much as it can, (Epist. LXII, *Op. Posth.*, pp. 584 & 585), [25] Leibniz, for his part, explains the feeling with the example of a magnetic needle that desires to move in the direction of the North and believes itself to be moving independently of another cause, for it cannot be aware of the unnoticeable movement of the magnetic matter. (*Theod.*, #50.)^{*5}. . . Leibniz explains the final causes through an *appetitus*, a *conatus immanens (conscientia sui pæditum)*.^{*} Spinoza could [26] say the same, for he could perfectly well allow them in this sense; and for him, as for Leibniz, *representation of the external, and desire, constitute the essence of the soul*.—In brief, when we penetrate to the heart of the matter, it turns out that each and every final cause presupposes an efficient one in Leibniz just as much as in Spinoza. . . . Thought is not the source of substance; rather, substance is the source of thought. Hence a non-thinking something must be assumed before thought as being first—something that must be thought as prior to everything else, if not in its very actuality, then in representation, essence, and inner nature. For this reason Leibniz has called the souls, honestly enough, *des automates spirituels*.^{*6} But how can the principle of all souls *subsist* on its own somewhere and

^{*5}. In the same 63rd *Letter*, Spinoza says: “And this is that human freedom, which all boast to possess, and which consists solely in the fact that *men are conscious of their own desire but ignorant of the causes by which they are determined*.”⁵

Spinoza did not at all lack the concept of that expedient by which the determinists seek to avoid fatalism. But it appeared to him to be so far from being genuinely philosophical, that he preferred the *arbitrium indifferentiæ* or the *voluntas æquilibrii*. See, among other places, in Part I of the *Ethics*, the 2nd *Schol.* of the 33rd *Prop.*, at the end. Farther, in Part III, the *Schol.* of the 9th *Prop.*, and especially the Preface of Part IV.

^{*6}. The same characterization can be found in Spinoza, although not in his *Ethics*, but in the fragment *De Intellectus Emendatione*. The passage deserves quotation here: “As regards a true idea, we have shown that it is simple or composed of simple ideas; and what it shows, how and why something is or has been made; [27] and that its subjective effects in the soul proceed according to the formal *ratio* of its object. This conclusion is identical with what the ancients said, that true science proceeds from cause to effect; though the ancients, so far as I know, never conceived the soul (as we do here) as acting in accordance with fixed laws, like an immaterial automaton as it were.” (*Op. Posth.*, p. 384) I am aware of the derivation of the word *a'utomaton*, and what Bilfinger says about it.⁶

* endowed with consciousness of itself

be efficient (I speak here in accordance with Leibniz's deepest and [27] fullest sense, so far I understand it) . . . ; how can the spirit be before the matter; or thought before the object? This great knot, which he ought to have untied for us if he was really going to help us get out of our predicament—he left it just as tangled as it was. . . .

Lessing: . . . I won't leave you be; you must clarify this parallelism. . . . Yet people always speak of Spinoza as if he were a dead dog still. . . . I: And so they will go on speaking of him. It takes too big an effort of mind, and too much determination to understand Spinoza [28]. And no-one to whom a single line in the *Ethics* remains obscure has grasped his meaning; nor has anyone who does not comprehend how this great man could have as firm an inner conviction in his philosophy as he so often and so emphatically manifested.³⁵ At the end of his days he wrote still: “. . . *non præsumo, me optimam invenisse philosophiam; sed veram me intelligere scio.*”^{*7}—Few can have enjoyed such a peace of the spirit, such a heaven in the understanding, as this clear and pure mind did. Lessing: And you, Jacobi, are no Spinozist? I: No, on my honour! Lessing: But then, on your honour, by [29] your philosophy you must turn your back on all philosophy. I: Why turn my back on all philosophy? Lessing: Come, so you are a perfect sceptic. I: On the contrary, I draw back from a philosophy that makes perfect scepticism a necessity. Lessing: And where do you turn to then? I: Towards the light, of which Spinoza says that it illumines itself and the darkness as well.—I love Spinoza, because he, more than any other philosopher, has led me to the perfect conviction that certain things admit of no explication: one must not therefore keep one's eyes shut to them, but must take them as one finds them. I have no concept more intimate than that of the final cause; no conviction more vital than that *I do what I think*, and not, *that I should think what I do*. Truly therefore, I must assume a source of thought and action that remains completely inexplicable to me. But if I want to have absolute explanation, then I must fall back upon the sec-

*7. In his *Letter* to Albert Burgh.⁷ He adds: “And if you ask how I know it, I reply: In the same way as you know that the three angles of a triangle are equal to two right angles: that this is sufficient will be denied by no one whose brain is sound, and who does not go dreaming of unclean spirits inspiring us with false ideas resembling the true. For the truth is the index of itself and of what is false.”—Spinoza drew a clear distinction between being certain and not doubting.⁸

ond proposition, and hardly any human intellect could countenance the application of it to individual cases, [30] taken in its full compass. Lessing: You express yourself with almost as much boldness as the Augsburg Diet;³⁶ but I remain a honest Lutheran, and I hold to the error and blasphemy that is more bestial than human, namely that there is no free will—an error in which the *pure* and *limpid* mind of your Spinoza could find itself embroiled even so. I: Spinoza also had to wriggle quite a bit to hide his fatalism when he turned to human conduct, especially in his fourth and fifth Parts [of the *Ethics*] where I could say that he degrades himself to a sophist here and there.—And that’s exactly what I was saying: even the greatest mind, if it wants to explain all things absolutely, to make them rhyme with each other according to distinct concepts and will not otherwise let anything stand, must run into absurdities. Lessing: And he who will not explain? I: He who does not want to explain what is incomprehensible, but only wants to know the boundary where it begins and just recognize that it is there—of such a one I believe that he [31] gains the greatest room within himself for genuine human truth. Lessing: Words, dear Jacobi, words! The boundary that you want to establish does not allow of determination. And moreover, you give free play to phantasies, nonsense, obscurantism. I: I believe that that boundary can be defined. I have no intention of *establishing* a boundary, but only of finding one that is already established and leaving it in place. And as for nonsense, phantasies, obscurantism. . . . Lessing: These are to be found wherever confused concepts rule. I: And even more where *fictional* concepts do. Even the blindest, most nonsensical faith, if not the stupidest, finds its high throne there. For once one has fallen in love with certain explanations, one accepts blindly every consequence that can be drawn from an inference that one cannot invalidate—even if one must walk on one’s head.*

. . . . In my judgment the greatest service of the scientist is to unveil *existence*, and to reveal it. . . . Explanation is a means for him, a pathway to his destination, a proximate—never [32] a final—goal. His final goal is what cannot be explained: the unanalyzable, the immediate, the simple. Explanation

. . . . Obsession with explanation makes us seek what is common to all things so passionately that we pay no attention to diversity in the process; we only want always to join together, whereas it would often be much

* In the second edition Jacobi refers to Supplement v11 here. See *David Hume*, p. 62 of the 1787 ed.

more to our advantage to separate. . . . Moreover, in *joining* and *hanging* together only what is explainable in things, there also arises in the soul a certain lustre that blinds us more than it illumines. And then we sacrifice to the cognition of the lower genera what Spinoza (being of profound sense and sublime as he was) calls the cognition of the supreme genus; we shut that eye of the soul tight by which the soul sees God and itself, to look all the more undistractedly with the eye of the body alone. . . .

Lessing: Good, very good! I can make use of all this too; but I myself cannot do the same with it. On the whole I don't dislike your *salto mortale*, and I see how [33] a man can turn his head up-side-down in this way, to move from it.* Take me with you, if it can be done. I: If you were just to step on the elastic place that propels me, it would be no sooner said than done.³⁷ Lessing: But that too takes a leap that I can no longer ask of my old legs and heavy head.³⁸

This conversation, of which I have here conveyed only the essentials, was followed by others that brought us back to the same topics by more than one route.

Lessing once said, with half a smile, that perhaps he was himself the supreme Being, and he was now in the state of extreme contraction.—I beseeched him for my existence.—He replied that that was not at all how it was intended to be, and explained himself in a way that reminded me of Henry More³⁹ and von Helmont.⁴⁰ Lessing became ever more explicit, to the point that, when pressed, I [34] could again raise the suspicion of cabbalism against him. That delighted him not a little, and I took the occasion to speak in favour of the Kibbel, or the cabbala in the *strict sense*—that is, *taking as starting point the view* that it is impossible, in and for itself, to derive the infinite from a given finite, or to define the transition from the one to the other, or their proportion, through any for-

* “. . . und ich begreife, wie ein Mann von Kopf auf diese Art Kopf-unter machen kann, um von der Stelle zu kommen.” “. . . von Kopf. . . Kopf-unter machen” conveys the double image of jumping heels over head starting from one's head, and of bringing down (i.e. humbling) the head. I take it that Jacobi is here referring to the kind of man, of whom he has just spoken, who is addicted to explanation and therefore “must walk on his head.” The head inversion would of course bring the man back on his feet. See Supplement v, p. 353 of the second edition. The expression “leap of faith” is nowhere to be found in Jacobi.

mula whatever. Hence, if anyone wants to say anything on the subject, one must speak on the basis of revelation. Lessing insisted on having everything “*addressed to him in natural terms,*” and I, that there cannot be any natural philosophy of the supernatural, yet the two (the natural and the supernatural) obviously exist.

Whenever Lessing wanted to represent a personal Divinity, he thought of it as the soul of the All; and he thought the Whole after the analogy of an organic body. Hence, *as soul*, the soul of this Whole would be [35] only an effect, like any other soul in all conceivable systems.*⁸ Its organic compass, however, cannot be thought after the analogy of the organic *parts* of this compass, inasmuch as there is nothing existing outside it to which it can refer, nothing from which it can take or give back. In order therefore to preserve itself in life, this organic compass must somehow withdraw within itself from time to time; unite death and resurrection within itself with life. One can however envisage several representations of the internal economy of such a being.

Lessing was fascinated by this idea, and he applied it to all sorts of cases, sometimes jokingly, sometimes in earnest. At Gleim’s house,⁹ when it suddenly began to shower while we were sitting at table and Gleim was moaning because we were to have retired to the garden after dinner, Lessing, who sat next to me, said: “You know, Jacobi, perhaps I am doing it.”¹⁰ And I said: “Or perhaps I.” Gleim looked at us as if we were going too far;* but then, for the whole three days that we spent with him he took great care to face us constantly and untiringly with his cheerful, intelligent, and spirited whimsicality, his humorous wit, and his always loving and friendly teasing, sharp though it is.

*8. According to Leibniz’s system too.—The entelechy only becomes spirit through the body (or the concept of body).⁹

*9. Lessing was kind enough to accompany me to Halberstadt [where Gleim lived] the second time I visited him, on my way back from Hamburg.¹⁰

*10. In the sense in which one says, I digest, I produce good or bad fluids, etc.

* Second edition: “looked at us somewhat perplexed, but did not investigate further.”

Lessing could not accept the idea of a personal, absolutely infinite Being, unflinchingly enjoying his supreme perfection. He associated an image of such infinite *boredom* with it, that he was troubled and pained by it.

[37] He regarded a continuation of life associated with personality after death not unlikely. He told me that he had run across ideas on this subject that coincided remarkably with his own and with his system in general in Bonnet, whom he was reading up just then. Because of the tenor of the conversation and my exact acquaintance with Bonnet (whose collected works I had just about learned by heart), I neglected at the time to question him more closely on this point. After that, since there was nothing either obscure or debatable left in Lessing's system for me, I never consulted Bonnet on this score, until the present occasion led me to do it. The essay of Bonnet that Lessing was reading at the time was probably none other than the *Palingénésie* that you know so well;⁴¹ and Section VII of Part I, in connection with the 13th main paragraph of Section IV of *Contemplation de la Nature* (to which Bonnet himself refers), presumably contains the ideas that Lessing had in mind. [38] I was struck by a passage (p. 246 of the original edition) where Bonnet says: "Serait-ce donc qu'on imagineroit que l'univers seroit moins harmonique, j'ai presque dit, moins organique, qu'un Animal?"⁴²

There still was much and lively talk on all these subjects the day I parted from Lessing to continue my journey to Hamburg. We were not far apart in our philosophy, and only differed in faith. I gave Lessing three writings of the younger Hemsterhuis of whom, apart from the *Letter concerning Sculpture*,⁴³ he knew nothing. They were, *Lettre sur l'homme & ses rapports*, *Sophyle [ou de la philosophie]*, and *Aristée [ou de la divinité]*.⁴⁴ I let him have the *Aristée*, which I had just obtained as I was journeying through Münster and had not yet read, reluctantly; but Lessing's desire was so very great.

On my return I found Lessing totally fascinated by just this *Aristée*, so much so that he had resolved to translate it himself.—It was patent Spinozism, [39] Lessing said, and in such a beautiful and exoteric a guise that this very guise contributed in turn to the development and the explication of the inner doctrine.—I assured him that Hemsterhuis, so far I knew him, (and at that time I still did not know him personally) was no Spinozist; Diderot had personally said this to me about him.—⁴⁵

"Read the book," retorted Lessing, "and you won't doubt it any more. In the letter *sur l'homme & ses rapports* there still is a bit of hesitation, and it is possible that Hemsterhuis did not at the time know his Spinozism fully yet; but now he is quite clear about it."

One must be as conversant with Spinozism as Lessing was, not to find this judgment paradoxical. What he called the exoteric guise of the *Aristée*, can with all justice be considered a mere elaboration of the teaching on the indivisible, inner, and eternal conjoining of the infinite with the finite; of the universal and (to this extent) indeterminate power with the determinate and individual; and of the necessarily contrary tendencies of these [40] powers. As for the rest of the *Aristée*, one would hardly want to use it against a Spinozist.⁴⁶—Here I must however solemnly attest that Hemsterhuis is certainly not an adept of Spinozism, but that on the contrary he is entirely opposed to the essential tenets of the doctrine.

At that point Lessing had not yet read the essay of Hemsterhuis, *Sur les désirs*. It arrived in a packet at my address just as I was leaving.^{*11} Lessing wrote to me that impatient curiosity had given him no peace until he had broken open the envelope; he sent the rest of the contents to me in Cassel. "About the essay itself (he added), which gave me uncommon gratification, more later on."⁴⁷

Not long before his death, on the fourth of December, he wrote to me: "A propos of***,⁴⁸ it [41] occurs to me that I committed myself to communicate to you my thoughts on Hemsterhuis's 'love system'. You wouldn't believe how exactly those thoughts chime with this system. And this, in my opinion, does not help explaining anything but, to speak with the analysts, seems to me only to *be* the substitution of one formula for another, by which I am more likely to end up on some new wrong track than come closer to a solution.—But am I in a condition to write what I want?—Not even what I *must*, etc."

Before I came to know Lessing's opinions in the way just narrated, but had firm and convincing evidence that Lessing was an orthodox theist,* there were things in his *Education of Mankind* that were totally inexplica-

*11. I had had to write home for it during my stay at Wolfenbüttel in order to satisfy Lessing's great desire for this essay.

* Second edition: "deist"

ble to me, especially §73.⁴⁹ I would like to know how anyone can make sense of this passage except in accordance with Spinozistic ideas. With these, the commentary becomes quite easy. Spinoza's God is the *pure* principle of the [42] actuality in everything actual, of *being* in everything existent; is thoroughly without individuality, and absolutely infinite. The unity of this God rests on the identity of the indiscernible and hence does not exclude a sort of plurality. However, considered *merely* in its transcendental unity, the Divinity must do without any actuality whatever, for actuality can only be found expressed in determinate individuals. This, *i.e. the actuality*, and its concept rest therefore on the *natura naturata* (the Son from all eternity); just as the other (*the possibility, the substantiality of the infinite*) and its concept rest on the *natura naturans* (the Father).^{*12}

What I have said earlier about the spirit of Spinozism allows me to [43] dispense with further elaborations here.

You know as well as I how common these same representations have been among men from the mistiest past, more or less confusedly, under many a different pictorial shape.—“Language is undoubtedly subordinated to the concepts here, just as one concept is subordinated to another.”⁵⁰

Several people can testify that Lessing often and emphatically referred to the *hen kai pan* as the sum-concept of his theology and philosophy. He spoke it and wrote it, whenever the occasion presented itself, as his definitive motto. That is why it stands in Gleim's garden house, written in Lessing's own hand,*⁵¹ under a motto of mine.

Yet many other things pertaining to this point might be learned from the Marchese Lucchesini.⁵² He visited Wolfenbüttel not long before me, [44] and Lessing had uncommon praises for him, as having a very clear mind.

*12. I beg the reader not to dwell on this overly compressed commentary, which is rendered extremely obscure by the compression. The issue will become clear enough in the third letter.

* “Written in Lessing's own hand” was dropped in the second edition. See the explanatory note immediately following.

What I have recounted is not one tenth of what I could have related, if my memory had served me well enough in point of form and expression. Just for this reason I have let Lessing speak, in what I have related, as sparingly as possible. When people talk with one another for entire days, and of so many very different things, the detail is bound to escape one. Add to this that, once I knew quite decisively that *Lessing did not believe in a cause of things distinct from the world, or that Lessing was a Spinozist*, what he said afterwards on the subject, in this way or that, did not make deeper impression on me than other things. It did not occur to me to want to preserve his words; and that Lessing was a Spinozist appeared to me quite understandable. Had he asserted the contrary, which is what I anxiously wanted to hear, then I would very [45] likely still be able to give an account of every significant word.

With this I should have absolved myself of a large part of what you, my most excellent Sir, have requested, and I now only have to make brief mention of some particular questions.

These particular questions, my most excellent Sir, rather took me aback I must confess, for they suppose an ignorance on my part (not to say something worse) that *might* perhaps be there but you had no external cause to suspect or to be so quick in making your suspicion manifest.

You ask whether Lessing has said in so many words, "I hold Spinoza's system to be true and well grounded?" and which one? Did he mean the one presented in Spinoza's *Tractatus Theologicus Politicus* or in his *Principia Philosophiae Cartesianae*, or the one that Ludovicus Mayer published after Spinoza's death in his name?

[46] Anyone who knows anything of Spinoza knows the history of Spinoza's demonstration of Descartes's doctrine as well; so he knows that this doctrine has nothing to do with Spinozism.*¹³

I know nothing of a system of Spinoza that Ludovicus Mayer is alleged to have published after his death. What you must mean by this is the *Op.*

*13. That is, inasmuch as these *Princ. Phil. Cart.* contain propositions that do not accord with the system expounded in the *Tract. Th. Pol.* and in the *Ethics*—which is the only sense in which one can be opposed to the other. See the Preface to the *Princ. Ph. Cart.*, the letter of Spinoza to Heinr. Oldenburg, *Op. Posth.*, p. 422; and the letter to W. Bleyenbergh, *ibid.*, p. 518.

Posth. itself—or perhaps only the Preface: but then Lessing would have been making fun of me in having me believe that the exposition of Spinozism contained there was his credo.—But that would be a bit too much!—Hence, it must be the *Op. Posth.* itself. But if so, [47] I cannot then understand how you could oppose the *Tract. Theo. Pol.* to it in any way. Spinoza’s posthumous writings fully agree with what the *Tract. Theo. Pol.* contains of his system. Moreover, Spinoza himself explicitly referred to it, to the end of his days, and in more than one place.

You ask further whether “Lessing had taken the system in the way that it was misunderstood by Bayle, or as others have better explained it.”

Between understanding and not misunderstanding there is a difference. Bayle did not misunderstand Spinoza’s system so far as its conclusions are concerned; all one can say is that his understanding did not go *far enough back*, that he failed to penetrate to the system’s foundations as intended by the author. If Bayle misunderstood Spinoza, as your objection implies, then, by the same standard, Leibniz misunderstood him even *worse*. Compare, if you please, Bayle’s exposition in the *first lines* of the remark N with [48] what Leibniz says about Spinoza’s doctrine in §§31, *Pref. Theod.*, 173, 374, 393, *Theod.*⁵³—But if Leibniz and Bayle did not misunderstand Spinoza’s system, then those⁵⁴ whose intention was to explain it better have actually misunderstood it, or falsified it. These last are not friends of mine, and I guarantee also that they were not Lessing’s.

Lessing did not address me with: “Dear brother, the much decried Spinoza might well . . . , etc.”

Do not take it to heart that my complaints to you are so blunt and dry, even a bit harsh, my dear and noble Mendelssohn. Towards a man whom I revere as much as you, this tone was the only proper one.

I am, etc.

[49] In spite of the somewhat too strident conclusion of the letter, the venerable man to whom it was addressed received it very kindly indeed, and even thought that he ought to ask my forgiveness. Immediately after receiving it, he conveyed these benevolent intentions to me through our common friend, together with a very flattering judgment of me and my essay.⁵⁵ He wished to reply to my letter after he had gone through it again in a more leisurely way, with all the attention that was needed; and he begged for further clarification on one thing and another in my essay before he went to work with his piece on Lessing’s character. He said

that the use he would make of the conversation recorded through me would then depend on me and my friend, and another man equally dear to all of us, who had also been Lessing's friend.⁵⁶ As for himself, his own view was that it should not be suppressed, for it was both necessary and useful to give fair warning to all lovers of speculation, and [50] to show them by striking *examples* to what danger they exposed themselves whenever they indulged in speculation without any guidance. "As for those outside philosophy," wrote our venerable friend, "let them rejoice or grieve; we stand unmoved. We shall not factionalize, we shall not recruit or proselytize, for indeed, by soliciting and trying to form a party we would be traitors to the flag to which we are sworn."

Seven months went by without my hearing anything at all from Mendelssohn.⁵⁷ Since during this time fate was dealing me some very hard blows,⁵⁸ I did not think about this matter much, and my correspondence, which I have never carried on energetically, came to a complete standstill. What occurred in the meantime is that a judgment on Spinoza by my friend Hemsterhuis enticed me to bring Spinoza into battle against the *Aristée*. I sketched a dialogue on these lines in June of the year '84; but from week to week I kept on postponing turning it into a [51] letter to send to Hemsterhuis.

This was just when a letter reached me from my friend, with the news that Mendelssohn had resolved to put aside the proposed essay on Lessing's character for the moment, in order to have a go at the Spinozists or, as he preferred to call them, the *All-Oners*,* this summer, if health and leisure allowed. My friend congratulated me for having occasioned so useful a work through my essay, for surely it was most urgently necessary that the dazzling errors of our times should be dissipated once and for all through the irresistible light of *pure reason*, held high by so firm a hand.⁵⁹

Full of joy over Mendelssohn's decision, I replied by return post; I stopped working on my letter to Hemsterhuis, and banished every thought about the whole affair from my head.

[52] At the end of August I journeyed to Hofgeismar, to restore my much weakened health, and regain my *joie de vivre* in company of two of the loveliest and greatest human beings, the Princess von Gallitzin and the Minister von Fürstenberg.⁶⁰ There I was surprised by a letter of Mendelssohn; it came with some comments directed against the philosophy contained in my letter to him.⁶¹ The packet had arrived at

* *All Einern*

Düsseldorf right after my departure; it went unopened through the hands of our common friend, who provided it with an envelope.

In this letter Mendelssohn reiterated the excuses that our friend had already conveyed to me, and revealed his plan to write against Spinozism to me in the following words: "Since for the moment I have set aside my project to write about Lessing, and wish instead to sketch out something on Spinozism first, you see how important it must be for me to grasp your thoughts correctly, and to gain proper insight into the [53] grounds with which you try to defend the system of this man of wisdom. I am taking the liberty therefore of laying out my thoughts and reservations before you in the enclosed essay.* Like a knight you have thrown down your gauntlet; I am picking it up; so let us now fight our metaphysical duel according to the rules of chivalry under the eyes of the lady whom we both revere. . . . Etc.

Here is my reply.⁶²

Hofgeismar, Sept. 5, 1784

To Herr Moses Mendelssohn in Berlin.

My bad health, which has been worsening for some months, has driven me to the waters here; and it will probably drive me farther away yet. Amid the vapours of the mineral waters that [54] oppress me both inside and out, I am quite unable to reply straight away to your esteemed letter of August the first (which reached Düsseldorf only on the twenty-seventh). A happy coincidence, however, still allows me to offer you a kind of satisfaction on the battlefield. The Princess von Gallitzin, who is also making use of the springs and the baths here, has with her the copy of a letter concerning the philosophy of Spinoza that I wrote to Hemsterhuis some time ago. I have had another copy made from that one, and I enclose it here. What I have to say to the most important points in your comments is to be found in my letter in a context that sheds more light on the whole, and will remedy many a misunderstanding. . . .

As soon as I return home and have some leisure, I shall re-read my report to you on Lessing, and compare my statements with your comments, and make up for anything that [55] the essay which is here sent to you leaves unresolved. That I chivalrously threw down my glove, of this I am not in the least aware. If I happened to drop it, and you want to con-

* Jacobi reproduces them in full in the second edition. For a translation, see pp. 350ff. below.

sider it as having been thrown and pick it up, well and good. I shall not turn my back, but shall defend myself as vigorously as I can. What I have stood and shall stand for, however, is not Spinoza and his system; it is rather the dictum of Pascal: *La nature confond les Pyrrhoniens, & la raison les Dogmatistes*.⁶³ I told you loudly and clearly what I am and who. The fact that you regard me as someone else is not due to any sand that I might have kicked in your eyes. The battle and its outcome will show that I am not availing myself of any illicit art, and that nothing could be further from my thoughts than hiding myself. I recommend myself to Heaven, our lady, and the noble disposition of my opponent.

[56]

SUPPLEMENT
TO THE PRECEDING LETTER

Copy of a Letter to M. Hemsterhuis in the Hague⁶⁴

It is two months now since I threatened you with a reply to the article "Spinoza" enclosed in your letter of April 26.⁶⁵ I shall now finally give myself satisfaction in the matter.

You say that you cannot think of this famous man without [57] reproving him for not having lived thirty years later. For then he would have seen with his own eyes, because of the advances of physics itself, that geometry lends itself for immediate application only to things physical; further, that he confused the *formula-method* of geometry with its *spirit*, and that if he had applied the latter to metaphysics he would have produced things more worthy of his stupendous genius.

Perhaps I possess too little of the [58] geometrical spirit myself to presume to defend Spinoza on this score. But even if he so far lacked that spirit as to confuse it with the formula-method of the geometers, still, it is a spirit that is at any rate an easily dispensable thing, since even without it Spinoza possessed a most correct sense, a most exquisite judgment, and an accuracy, a strength, and a depth of understanding that are not easy to surpass. These advantages have not prevented him from erring, and admittedly he erred in letting himself be enticed [59] into using the formula-method of geometry in metaphysics. But his system did not invent that method, whose origin is on the contrary very ancient, lost in the traditions from which Pythagoras, Plato, and other philosophers have al-

ready drawn. What distinguishes Spinoza's philosophy from all the other, what constitutes its soul, is that it maintains and applies with the strictest rigour the well known principle, *gigni de nihilo nihil, in nihilum nil potest reverti*.^{*} If Spinoza [60] has denied a beginning to any action whatever, and has considered the system of final causes the greatest delirium of the human understanding, he has done so only as a consequence of that principle, not because of a geometry applied immediately to non-physical reality.

Here, more or less, is how I conceive the concatenation of Spinoza's ideas. Let's suppose that he is speaking to us in person, and that he has just finished [61] reading the *Aristée*,^{*14} a circumstance that we shall however ignore. Spinoza: *Being* is not an attribute;[†] it is not anything derived from some sort of power; it is what lies at the ground of every attribute, quality,[‡] and force—it is that which we designate with the word "substance." [62] Nothing can be presupposed by it, and it must be presupposed by everything.

Of the various expressions of *being*, there are some that flow directly from its essence. Of this sort are the absolute and real *continuum* of extension, and that of thought.

Thought, which is merely an attribute, a quality of substance, cannot in any sense be the *cause* of the latter. It is dependent on that in which it has its being; it is its expression and [63] deed; it is impossible that it should at the same time be what makes substance act.

Concepts (that is, thought in so far as it is determined in a certain way) are sorted by their content; but this content, or what corresponds to it, does not produce thought.

The content of the concepts, or what corresponds to it, is what we call the "object" of the concept.

[64] In every concept therefore there is the following:

(1) Something absolute and original which constitutes thought independently of its object.

*14. *Aristée ou de la Divinité*, Paris, 1779. The other two works in what follows are by the same author, M. Hemsterhuis, *Lettre sur l'homme & ses rapports*, Paris, 1772; and *Sophyle ou de la philosophie*, Paris, 1778.

* From nothing, nothing is generated; into nothing, nothing returns.

† *Eigenschaft*: This is the term that Jacobi regularly uses for Spinoza's *attributus*. I normally translate it as "property" because this is what *Eigenschaft* means. Here I am conforming to the French text, which has *attribut*.

‡ *Beschaffenheit*; French: *qualité*

(2) Something secondary or transitory* which manifests a relation, and is the result of this relation.

These two pertain to each other necessarily, and it is just as impossible for [65] thought (considered simply and solely in its essence) to produce the concept or the representation of an object, as it is for an object, or an intermediary cause, or any alteration whatever, to set thought in motion where there is none.

The will is posterior to thought, because it presupposes self-feeling.† It is posterior to conception because it requires the feeling of a relation. Hence it is not immediately conjoined with substance, nor even with [66] thought; it is only a remote effect of relations, and can never be an original source, or a pure cause.

Let us check Spinoza's attack with a sally, and see whether we cannot fill his trenches, destroy his fortifications, and explode his mines in his own face.

Fire all together! Poor old Spinoza, you are just a dreamer! Let's cut it short, and come to the facts.

[67] "Do you agree that any action whatever must have some direction?"

Sp.: No. On the contrary, it seems to me evident that every original action can have only itself as object; and hence it has no direction, since what one calls "direction" is never anything but the result produced by certain relations.

"But is there a cause why everything [68] that is or that appears to be, whether essence, *modus*, or whatever, either is or appears to be as it does and not otherwise?"

Sp.: Undoubtedly.

"So a direction has a why, a cause. And this why is not in the direction, for otherwise it would have been before it was."

Sp.: To be sure.

[69] "It follows that the why is in the agent, and it has its ground there. But now, you cannot proceed from cause to cause *in infinitum*, for there is a determinate instant when the agent imparts direction. Hence you will find the first cause either in the efficacy of the agent, which is its ap-

* *Vorübergehendes*; French: *phénoménal*

† *Selbst-Gefühl*; French: *conscience d'être*

titude for willing,* or in a modification of the agent. But the latter has its why, and, after you have gone from cause to cause, you finally come to determinate efficacy, [70] or to the will of some agent: hence direction has will as its first cause. But we cannot conceive of any determinate efficacy, of a will that imparts direction, without an understanding that foresees, without self-feeling. The first cause of all effects is therefore the action of a rational will which is infinitely great and infinitely powerful. I say, infinitely, because from cause to cause we must necessarily come to that point.”^{*15}

Sp.: I have proven to you that the will, [71] like directed movement, is only a derived being that has its origin in relation. Just as the cause of the movement’s direction cannot be in the direction itself, (for otherwise it would have been before it was), so too, for that very reason, the cause of the will’s direction cannot be in the direction itself, for otherwise the latter would have been before it was. Your will, which determines the faculty to will, is exactly an effect that brings about its cause. You grant me (for you have [72] yourself remarked on it) that the will is not only intrinsic to thought, but to the idea as well. Considered in its essence, however, thought is nothing but the *being that feels itself*. The *idea* is being with a feeling of itself,[†] inasmuch as it is determinate, individual, and in relation with other individual singular things. The *will* is nothing but self-feeling being, inasmuch as it is determinate, and acts as an individual being. . . .

“Hold on, my dear Spinoza; you are losing yourself in your fancies again. What leads you [73] astray is your failure to distinguish two things which are quite different and even opposite in kind; efficacy and inertia.^{*16} There is as much movement in the physical world as there is rest. A part that is in movement communicates its movement to another part, that is at rest, and receives rest from it in return. Whatever their origin, action and reaction balance one another. So the sum of all effects in the world is equal to the [74] sum of all counter-effects. The one cancels out the other, and this brings us to perfect rest and genuine inertia.^{*17} Inertia (*vis inertiae*) in a thing is really just the force by which it is what

*15. *Aristée*, pp. 81–82.

*16. *Aristée*, p. 64.

*17. *Aristée*, p. 112.

* *Fähigkeit zu wollen*; French: *velléité*

† *l'idée est le sentiment de l'être*

it is; the thing reacts only through this force and in proportion to it. So reaction and inertia are the same. Whatever makes us aware of the inertia, makes us at the same time aware of a movement that either overpowers [75] the inertia or is cancelled out by it; aware, that is, of a radically different kind of force, which we call activity.*¹⁸ So the world divides into two parts. One part, being completely inert and passive, offers us the most perfect image of inactivity and rest; the other, being alive and life-giving, takes over the dead parts of nature so as to bind them together and force them to live and act, precisely through the force of their own inactivity.*¹⁹ This activity, this [76] energy, this primordial force in a being, is the faculty of being able to act upon the things that lie in one's sphere. This activity is directed in all possible directions, and this is what its freedom consists in; it is an indeterminate force that constitutes the aptitude to will, or the faculty of being able to will.*²⁰

Sp.: I have let you speak as you liked. Now here is my answer. For one thing, I have no comprehension of a primary force other than the force by which [77] something is what it is—of a faculty, or an *ability to be able* to act upon what lies within the sphere of the being thus endowed with this *ability to be able*. I do not comprehend an activity directed in all possible directions; or “an indeterminate force that exhales its force and its energy in all directions, just as a spice seems to exhale its odour.”⁶⁶ In my opinion this talk offers shadow figures instead of concepts, and does not say anything [78] intelligible. What sort of thing is passivity, or a being that only has force to suffer? And what is an activity that communicates itself to this passivity, and becomes an entirely foreign cause of action in it—an activity that even contradicts the very being of this passive thing which reacts through its inactivity? Can a force sunder itself from its origin? can it give up a portion of itself, and can this portion exist apart, or, stronger still, become the quality of some other thing, even of an entirely heterogeneous one?—“But we see this [79] happening!” you will say.—And I reply: We also see that the sun turns around the earth. Let us leave the appearances aside, and strive to cognize things as they are instead.*²¹ Truth cannot come from the outside; it is in us.*²²

*18. *Aristée*, pp. 74, 115.

*19. *Aristée*, p. 81.

*20. *Aristée*, p. 123.

*21. *Aristée*, p. 52.

*22. *Lettre s. l'homme & c.*, p. 51.¹¹

But few heads are made for perfect abstraction, that is, for an attention directed solely upon the inner being. We don't want to tax our own too much this time. Let us leave your theory of a particular world aside, and [80] take only a brief look at your explication of it. Here are your results in a nut-shell. The efficient cause determines the course of things from its own self; hence this cause is intelligent, and its activity* lies in its will. I ask you then: is this cause intelligent because it has *willed* to be intelligent, or is it so independently of its will? You must of course reply that it is intelligent independently of its will. But indeterminate thought is empty, and every thought or representation is indeterminate. [81] So I ask you again: What has brought *representation* into the thought of your creator who is one and only, with no externality, or whose externality, if it is not pure nothingness, is his own creation—what has made the thought of this creator *represent* objects—that is to say, individual, determinate, and temporally successive beings? Has he created his concepts, has he determined them, before they were, through his faculty of being able to have concepts? And the aptitude to will, this creator's will that is neither the origin nor the result of [82] his understanding but is none the less intelligent for all that—the will that comes I know not whence, and goes I know not whither—what is it, pray? *how* is it? and what does it *want*? In brief, to sum up everything in one question: Does your creator owe its being to thinking and willing, or its thinking and willing to its being? Perhaps you'll reply that this question is laughable, and that in God thought, will, and being, are one and the same thing. I quite agree with you, with only this difference, that [83] what you call "will" is in my terms the "ever efficient power," and I hold it to be that and nothing else. So we agree. But in that case, don't keep on talking about a will that directs action, or an understanding that foresees all, and to which the first cause is subject too—for to talk of these things is the height of absurdity in any case.

"Don't get excited, dear Spinoza; instead [84] let us quickly see where all this has led us. I want to deal with your propositions the way you have dealt with mine, and simply ask you: How do you begin to act in accordance with your will, if your will is nothing but a consequence of your activity and a mediated activity to boot, as you tell me. I presuppose that you grant me the fact without any demonstration. For to request a demonstration of man's faculty to will is to request [85] a demonstration of

* French: *énergie*

his existence. One who does not feel his being whenever he receives representations from outside things, and does not have an awareness of his faculty to will* whenever he acts or desires, is something other than a man, and it is impossible to decide anything about his being.”*²³

Sp.: As for my being, decide what you will about it. But this much I definitely know, namely that I possess no faculty to will, even though I do have my particular volitions and [86] my individual desires, as much as anyone else. Your faculty to will is a mere *ens rationis* that relates to this or that particular volition in the same way as “animality” relates to your dog or horse, or “humanity” to you and me. It is because of these metaphysical and imaginary beings that you fall into all your errors. You dream up aptitudes to act or not to act according to a certain I know not what, which is a *nothing* at all. Through these aptitudes that you [87] call capacities to be capable, etc., you contrive to conjure up something out of nothingness, without our even being aware of it, and while you cleverly avoid the scandalous word, you excite the admiration of the sophists, and only irritate the true researcher. Of all these capacities and capacities to be capable, there is not one that is not repugnant to existence. The being that is determinate being is determined in the same way in all its effects. There is no force that does not work, and that is not effective at every instant. [88] Forces act according to the degree of their reality, without any interruption ever.

“I pray you, Spinoza, answer my question!”

Sp.: Do you think that I am going to beg it? Here’s my reply. I only act *according* to my will whenever it so happens that my actions correspond to it; but it is not my will that makes me act. Our opinion to the contrary derives from the fact that we know very well what we want and [89] desire, but we do not know what makes us want and desire that. Because of this ignorance we believe that we produce our volition through the will itself, and we often go so far as to attribute even our *desires* to it.

“I don’t quite understand you. You know that there are three systems concerning what determines the will: one, which is called the ‘indifference or equilibrium system’ but one should rather call the ‘system of freedom’; another, the ‘choice of the best or moral necessity system’; and [90] the third, the ‘physical necessity or fatalism system’. For which do you declare yourself?”

*²³. *Lettre s. l’homme & c.*, p. 60.¹²

* “Faculty to will” (*Vermögen zu wollen*) is the French *velléité*.

Sp.: For none of the three. The second, however, seems to me the worst.

"I am for the first. But why do you hold the second to be the worst?"

Sp.: Because it presupposes final causes, and this doctrine is sheer nonsense.

[91] "I will abandon the 'choice of the best' or 'moral necessity' to your mercy, since it does away with freedom. But so far as final causes are concerned, I claim for my part that it is sheer nonsense to reject them."

Sp.: You cannot leave the one at my mercy without the other as well. You concede that the nature of every individual thing has the preservation of that same individual thing for its object; that every thing strives to preserve its being; and that this very striving is [92] what we call its "nature." You will further concede that the individual does not seek to preserve itself for any reason that it knows, or for any particular purpose, but that it seeks to preserve itself *only in order to preserve itself*, and because its nature, or the force that makes it what it is, so requires. We call this striving "natural impulse" and, so far it is accompanied by feeling, "desire"; so that desire is nothing but the striving of the individual thing after what [93] can serve for the preservation of its being, accompanied by the feeling of this striving. What *corresponds* to the desire of the individual thing, it calls "good"; and what is *opposed* to it, "evil." So our awareness of good and evil originates from desire, or from impulse conjoined to consciousness, and it is a palpable absurdity to suppose the opposite, and derive the cause from its effect. As for the *will*, it too is nothing but impulse or desire, but only so far as they concern the soul alone; or in other words, so far as they [94] are simply *representations*, or are located in the *thinking being*. The will is nothing but the understanding applied to desire. In observing the various modifications in the tendency or desire of an individual thing due to the composition of the thing's being and its relations to other individuals, the understanding (which is nothing but the *soul itself*, so far as the latter has clear and distinct concepts) decides on whether the said modifications are in harmony or not with the particular nature of the individual thing, so far as the understanding itself is in a position to perceive it. But the understanding's activity, which [95] consists only in affirmation or negation, does not determine the action of the individual thing any more than its other decisions or judgments, be they what they may, determine the nature of things.

"What you say is not altogether free of obscurity. But this much is clear at any rate: you deny all freedom; you are a fatalist, even though you have earlier denied this."

[96] Sp.: I am far from denying all freedom, and I know that man has received his share of it. But this freedom does not consist in a chimerical faculty of being able to will, for willing cannot occur except in an actually present, determinate, will. To ascribe any such faculty to a being is the same as ascribing to it a faculty of being able to be, in virtue of which it is then up to it to procure actual existence for itself. Man's freedom is the [97] very essence of man; that is, it is the degree of his actual power or of the force with which man is what he is. In so far as he acts solely according to the laws of his being, he acts with complete freedom. Hence God, who acts and can act only on the basis of what he is, and is only through Himself, possesses absolute freedom. That is truly my view about this subject. As regards fatalism, I disavow it only to the extent that it has been made to rest on materialism, or on the absurd [98] opinion that thought is only a modification of extension, like fire, and light, etc.; whereas it is just as impossible for thought to derive from extension, as for extension, from thought. The two are entirely different beings, even though together they constitute only one thing, of which they are the properties. Thought, as I have already said, is being that feels itself: hence whatever comes to pass in extension must equally come to pass in thought; and every *genuine individual* is animated *in proportion to its manifold* [99] *and unity*, or according to the degree of force by which it is what it is. In the individual thing thought is necessarily conjoined with representations, since it is impossible that the individual should feel its being if it does not have the feeling of its relations.

"What you accept in fatalism is sufficient for me, for no more is needed to establish that St. Peter's Church in Rome built itself; that [100] Newton's discoveries were made by his body; and that the soul only had to look on through it all. It follows, moreover, that each and every thing can only be produced by another individual thing, and this in turn by another, and so on to infinity. Yet you need at the same time a first cause and a determinate instant at which it acts. Remember now my arguments of a little while ago. Will you please respond finally to the crucial point that I made?"

Sp.: I will do that as soon as [101] I have explained my view about St. Peter's Church, and the discoveries of Newton. The Church of St. Peter in Rome did not build itself; everything that is contained in the entire universe of bodily extension has contributed to it. And as for Newton's discoveries, they concern only the power of *thought*. . . .

"Good! But the modified thought that you call soul is nothing but the idea or the concept of body, or nothing but the [102] body itself seen

from the side of thought. Newton's soul has its character from Newton's body. Hence it is his body, though it had no thought, that did the discoveries that are observed, conceived, sensed or thought, by Newton's soul." Sp.: Though you give the matter a somewhat distorted look, I shall let you have your conclusions, provided you are willing to keep in mind that nothing less than the whole [103] universe comes into play in order to give Newton's body its *character* at every moment, and that the soul attains the concept of its body only through the concept of what gives the body its character. This important comment will not prevent the imagination from rebelling against the truth that I am claiming. Tell a man who is not a geometer that a bounded square is equal to an infinite space. After you have given your proof, he will remain perplexed, but will eventually shake himself [104] free of bewilderment through deep reflection.*²⁴ It would not be impossible to reconcile even the imagination in some degree with my doctrine, provided that one approaches the task in the right way, and shows the gradual advance that leads from the savage's impulse, harking back to the tree or the cave that once sheltered him, to the construction of a St. Peter's Church. Reflect upon the organization of political bodies, complicated as they are, and discover what made them a totality. The more one reflects upon this and delves into it more and more deeply, [105] the more will one perceive only blind impulses, and the whole manner of operation of a machine—but of course a machine in which, as in first order* mechanisms, the forces arrange themselves according to their needs and the degree of their energy—where all the springs have the feeling of their action and communicate it to each other through reciprocal striving, in a necessarily infinite progression. The same goes for languages: the totality of their structure seems a miracle, yet [106] none of them came to be through the help of grammar. When we look carefully, we find that in all things action precedes reflection, and that *reflection is only the continuation of action*. In brief, we know what we do, and no more.

Now for your main proposition. You claim that one cannot proceed from cause to cause in infinity, but that there must, at some determinate point, be a beginning of action on the side of a first and pure cause. [107] I maintain, on the contrary, that one cannot proceed from cause to cause otherwise than to infinity; that is to say, that one cannot suppose

*24. *Sophyle*, p. 68.

* *von der ersten Hand* = *de la première main*: literally, "first hand"

an absolute, and pure, *beginning* of an action, without supposing that nothingness produces something. This truth, which only needs to be displayed in order to be grasped, is at the same time capable of the strictest demonstration. Hence the first cause is not a cause to which one can climb through the so-called intermediary causes: it is totally immanent, and equally effective at every [108] point of extension and duration. This first cause, that we call "God" or "nature," acts in virtue of the same ground in virtue of which it is; and since it is impossible that there should be a ground or a purpose to its being, so it is equally impossible that there should be a ground or a purpose to its actions.

At this point I leave Spinoza, impatient to throw myself into the arms of that sublime genius [109] who said that the occasional occurrence in the soul of even one aspiration for the better, for the future and the perfect, is a better proof of the Divinity than any geometric proof.*²⁵ For some time my attention has been directed with full force in this direction, which can be called the standpoint of faith. You know what Plato wrote to Dion's friends: "For regarding divine things, there is no way of putting the subject into words [110] like other studies. Acquaintance with it must come rather after a long period of attendance to instruction in the subject itself and of close companionship with it, when, suddenly, like a blaze kindled by a leaping spark, it is generated in the soul and at once becomes self-sustaining."⁶⁷ You say almost the same in the *Aristée*,*²⁶ namely, "that the conviction of the feeling from which all other convictions are derived, is born within the very essence, and cannot be communicated." But must not the feeling that lies at the ground of this conviction [111] be found in all men, and should it not be possible to liberate it to some extent in those who appear to be destitute of it, by working to remove the hindrances that inhibit its effective action? It occurred to me, as I reflected upon this subject, that the issue of a certainty that yet lacks sufficient foundation may be so dealt with as to lead us to new principles. I don't want to [112] abuse your patience by detailing my reflections on the subject. It was not in order to instruct you, but rather to receive instruction from you, that I took up my pen. Grant me, I beg, the teaching that I desire, and supply me with grounds that are

*25. *Aristée*, p. 168.

*26. *Aristée*, pp. 167, 170.

sound enough to counter Spinoza's arguments against the personality and understanding of a first cause, against free will and final causes. I have never been able to gain the advantage over them through pure metaphysics. Yet it is necessary to uncover their weakness, and to be able to demonstrate it. Without that [113] it would be useless to bring down Spinoza's theory, so far as there is anything positive in it. His disciples would not surrender; instead they would entrench themselves in the remaining ruins of the collapsed system, and answer us by saying that we rather accept patent absurdity than the merely inconceivable, and that that is not the way to do philosophy.

I sent the letter with the supplement to our lady unsealed, for her further disposition.⁶⁸

In his memoranda Mendelssohn had complained that here and there I [114] had upset *the idea of Spinozism that he had formed in his mind*; that many passages in my letter were simply unintelligible to him; that he failed to see how others fitted into my system; that he could see himself being led around in a circle, and that he doubted equally whether, at the bottom of my heart, I was committed to atheism, or to Christianity.

In my judgment all the other complaints followed from the first one; and so long as we did not agree about what Spinozism was, we could not do battle on the real issue, whether for or against it. I believed for my part that I had made an important contribution to the determination of the issue by sending him my letter to Hemsterhuis. Nevertheless, I firmly intended to explain myself to Mendelssohn even further, had not a coincidence of obstacles delayed the execution of my resolve.

After [115] I had heard not a word from Mendelssohn all winter long, my friend sent me in February the copy of a letter that she had received from him in which he said that he did not actually know whether it was he who owed a letter to me, or I who owed him one.⁶⁹ When I sent him my letter to Hemsterhuis, I had promised a reply specially for him as well. Had I forgotten him since then? Since he had not forgotten me, but always held me vividly in remembrance, he was hoping to oblige me with a *manuscript* of perhaps twenty sheets or more. . . . He could not say how soon this *manuscript* would be in a fit condition to be laid before me. . . . But in the meantime he wished to know whether I would permit him to make public use of my philosophical letters at some point. "At the moment," Mendelssohn wrote, "my work is indeed not *concerned with*

Spinozism alone, but is rather a kind of revision of the common proofs of God's existence. But subsequently I shall also go into the particular grounds of the Spinozistic system, and it [116] would be highly convenient to me then, and of great use to many readers, if I could avail myself of Herr Jacobi's lively exposition, and have him speak for Spinoza. I wish I could have an answer on this as soon as possible, since I must plan my exposition accordingly."

I wrote that very instant to Mendelssohn granting him the free use of my letters, and promised to send the special reply for which he was still waiting the following month without fail.

Immediately thereafter I was afflicted by a severe illness, from which I only began to recover at the very end of March. I reported the delay to my friend, so that she might pass the news on to Mendelssohn, and at the same time assure him that I was now actually at work.

I completed my essay on the twenty-first of April.⁷⁰ It is printed here without the introduction, since [117] that just gives the reasons why I found it expedient to respond to Mendelssohn's comments only with a new exposition of Spinoza's system, and so make *the justification of my concept of this system* the main point.*²⁷

To
Herr Moses Mendelssohn
concerning
His Memoranda Sent to Me⁷¹

[. . .] So the longer and the more deeply I ponder about it, the more I realize that if we are to get anywhere, or [117] at least to make contact instead of moving further apart, we must above all else be clear about the principal issue, the doctrine of Spinoza itself. That is what I thought after my first reading of your comments, and for this reason I regarded a copy of my letter to Hemsterhuis as the best reply for the time being. That is what I still think, so I shall now again try an exposition of Spinoza's doctrine.

*27. For the most part the citations to be found at the bottom of the text are there because of this justification. If explanation had been my object, I would have had to choose quite different texts.

I. At the ground of every becoming there must lie a being that has not itself become; at the ground of every coming-to-be, something that has not come-to-be; at the ground of anything alterable, an unalterable and eternal thing.

II. *Becoming* can as little have come-to-be or begun as *Being*; or, if that which subsists in itself (the eternally unalterable, that which persists in the impermanent) had ever been by itself, without the impermanent, it would never have produced a becoming, either within itself or outside, for these would both [119] presuppose a coming-to-be from nothingness.

III. From all eternity, therefore, the impermanent has been with the permanent, the temporal with the eternal, the finite with the infinite, and whosoever assumes a beginning of the finite, also assumes a coming-to-be from nothingness.*²⁸

IV. If the finite was with the eternal from all eternity, it cannot be outside it, for if it were outside [120] it, it would either be another being that subsists on its own, or be produced by the subsisting thing from nothing.

V. If it were produced by the subsisting thing from nothing, so too would the force or determination, in virtue of which it was produced by the infinite thing from nothingness, *have come* from nothingness; for in the infinite, eternal, permanent thing, everything is infinitely, permanently, and eternally actual. An action first initiated by the infinite being could not have begun otherwise than from all eternity, and its determination could not have derived from anywhere except from nothingness.*²⁹

[121] VI. Hence the finite is in the infinite, so that the sum of all finite things, equally containing within itself the whole of eternity at every moment, past and future, [123] is one and the same as the infinite thing itself.

*28. "Anyone wishing to determine all the motions of matter up to the present by reducing them and their duration to a certain number and time, would be doing the same as trying to deprive corporeal substance, which we cannot conceive except as existent, of its modifications (movement and rest, which are the equally eternal and essential *modi* of extension, and the *a priori* of all individual corporeal configurations),¹³ and to bring about that it should not have the nature that it has." Ep. xxix; *Op. Posth.*, p. 469.

*29. *Ethics*, I, p. 28. . . .† *Op. Posth.*, pp. 25 & 26.¹⁴

† Here Jacobi cites the demonstration and scholion in full.

VII. This sum is not an absurd combination of finite things, together constituting an infinite, but a whole in the strictest sense, whose parts can only be thought within it and according to it.*³⁰

[124] VIII. What is prior in a thing by nature, is not on that account prior in the order of time. [125] According to nature, corporeal extension is prior to any of its modes, although it can never exist without this determinate mode or that, that is, it cannot be prior to them in the order

*30. The following passages from Kant, which are entirely in the spirit of Spinoza, might serve for explanation: “. . . We can represent to ourselves only one space; and if we speak of diverse spaces, we mean thereby only parts of one and the same unique space. Secondly, these parts cannot precede the one all-embracing space, as being, as it were, constituents out of which it can be composed; on the contrary, they can be thought only as *in* it. Space is essentially one; the manifold in it, and therefore the general concept of spaces, depends solely on [the introduction of] limitations. . . .” *Critique of Pure R.*, [A] 25; “The infinitude of time signifies nothing more than that every determinate magnitude of time is possible only through limitations of one single time that underlies it. The original representation, *time*, must therefore be given as unlimited. But when an object is so given that its parts, and every quantity of it, can be determinately represented only through limitation, the whole representation cannot be given through concepts, since they contain only partial representations (since in their case the partial representations come first); on the contrary, such concepts must themselves rest on immediate intuition.” *Critique of Pure R.*, [A] 32.

I want to give the following propositions of Spinoza as accompaniment to these words of Kant. . . .*¹⁵

I will also surrender to the temptation of copying still another passage from Spinoza’s *Cogitata Metaphysica*, [126] which contributes a lot to the elucidation of what just preceded, especially the last two sentences, and also throws a new light on the whole subject.† “[. . .] For it is one thing to inquire into the nature of things, and another to inquire into the modes by which things are perceived by us. Indeed, if these things are confounded, we shall be able to understand neither the modes of perceiving, nor nature itself.”¹⁶

Later on I shall refer to Spinoza’s own proofs that his infinite substance is not composed of parts, but is absolutely indivisible, and “one” in the strictest sense.

* Here Jacobi cites extensively from *De Intell. Emend., Opp. Posth.*, pp. 390–91.

† Here Jacobi cites extensively from Spinoza’s *Renati Des Cartes Principiorum Philosophiæ Pars I et II. More Geometrico demonstratæ . . . Accesserunt Ejusdem Cogitata Metaphysica* etc. (Amsterdam: Johannes Riewertsz, 1663), pp. 94–96.

of time outside the understanding. [126] So too thought is prior to any of its representations according to nature; [127] yet it cannot be actual except in some determinate mode or other, that is, in the order of time, with this representation or that.

ix. The following example may [128] explain the matter better, and lead us to a clear conception of it.

Let us assume that all modes of extension can be exhaustively reduced to the so called four elements, water, earth, air, and fire. Now corporeal extension can be thought in conjunction with water, without extension being fire; in conjunction with fire, without being earth; in conjunction with earth, without being air, etc. But none of these modes can be thought for itself without the *presupposition* of corporeal extension, which is accordingly the first by nature in each of these elements, the truly *real*, the substantial, the *natura naturans*.

x. The first—not in things extended alone, not in things of thought alone, but what is first in these as well as in those, and likewise in all things—the *primal being*,* the actuality that is unalterably present everywhere and cannot itself be a property, [129] but in which, on the contrary, everything else is only a property it possesses—this unique and infinite being of all beings Spinoza calls “God,” or *substance*.

xi. This God therefore does not belong to any species of things; it is not a separate, individual, different, thing.*³¹ Nor can any of the determinations that [131] distinguish individual things pertain to it—not a particular thought or consciousness of its own, any more than a particular extension, figure, or colour of its own, or anything we may care to mention which is not just primal material, *pure matter*, *universal substance*.

xii. *Determinatio est negatio, seu determinatio ad rem juxta suum esse non*

*31. † “[. . .] All that needed be noted here is that God can be called one in so far as we separate him from other beings. But in so far as we conceive that there cannot be more than one of the same nature, he is called unique. Indeed, if we wished to examine the matter more accurately, we could perhaps show that God is only very improperly called one and unique. . . .”[†] (Ep. I, *Op. Posth.*, p. 557[ff.])

* *Ursein*

† Here Jacobi cites extensively from *Cogitata Metaphysica*, Part I, ch. 6, Curley’s tr., Vol. I, pp. 311–12. I am only entering the key sentences.

‡ Jacobi then cites most of Spinoza’s letter to Jarig Jellis, 2 June 1674; Elwes’s tr., Vol. II, pp. 369–70.

pertinet.^{* 32} Individual things therefore, so far as they only exist in a certain determinate mode, are *non-entia*; the indeterminate infinite being is the one single true *ens reale, hoc est, est omne esse, & præter quod nullum datur esse*.^{† 33}

XIII. To clarify the matter further, [132] and allow the impending difficult issue of God's understanding to display itself for us in its full light and cast off every ambiguity, let us try to seize by some hanging tail the veil of terminology in which Spinoza saw fit to wrap his system, and lift it right off.

XIV. According to Spinoza, an infinite extension and an infinite thought are properties of God. The two infinities together make up just one indivisible essence,^{*34} so that it makes no difference under which of the two we consider God; for the order and connection of concepts is one and the same as the order and connection of things, and everything that results from the infinite nature of God *formaliter*, must also result from it *objective*, and vice versa.^{*35}

[133] XV. Individual, alterable, corporeal, things are *modi* of movement and rest *in the infinite extension*.^{*36}

XVI. Movement and rest are also immediate *modi* of infinite [134] extension,^{*37} and are just as infinite, unalterable, and eternal as extension is.^{*38} These two *modi* together constitute the essential form of all possible corporeal configurations and forces; they are the *a priori* of these.

*32. Ep. I, *Op. Posth.*, p. 558.¹⁷

*33. *De Intell. Emend.*, *Op. Posth.*, p. 381.¹⁸

*34. *Eth.*, Part I, p. 10.

*35. *Eth.*, Part II, p. 7: "The order and connection of ideas is the same as the order and connection of things."[†] *Op. Posth.*, p. 46.

*36. "Bodies are distinguished from one another by reason of motion and rest, quickness and slowness, not by reason of substance." *Eth.*, Part II, Lemma I.¹⁹

*37. Ep. LXVI, *Op. Posth.*, p. 593.

*38. *Eth.*, Part I, Props 21, 22, 23. Rest and movement are opposed to one another, and neither of these determinations can have been produced by the

* "Determination is negation, i.e. determination does not pertain to a thing according to its being."

† "This is the real being; it is the all of being, and apart from it there is no being."

‡ Jacobi proceeds to quote the text of the corollary in full; Elwes's tr., Vol. II, p. 86.

XVII. Connected with these two immediate *modi* of infinite extension are two immediate *modi* of the infinite and absolute thought: will and understanding.*³⁹ These modes of thought [135] contain objectively what the modes of extension contain formally; and they are, in each case, prior to all individual things, in the order of extended as well as thinking nature.

XVIII. Infinite, absolute, thought is prior to infinite will and understanding, and only this thought pertains to *natura naturans*, just as the infinite will and understanding pertain to *natura naturata*.^{*40}

XIX. *Natura naturans*, i.e. God [136] considered as free cause, or the infinite substance, apart from its affects and considered in itself, that is, considered in its truth, does not therefore have either will or understanding, whether infinite or finite.*⁴¹

[137] XX. How these things can have being in one another simultaneously, yet can be prior to or after one another according to nature, needs no further explanation in the light of what has been said about this already.

XXI. It has been shown clearly enough by now that outside individual corporeal things there cannot be yet another particular infinite movement and rest, together with a particular infinite extension; any more

other. God must therefore be the immediate cause of them, just as he is the immediate cause of extension and of himself. Ep. LXX., *Op. Posth.*, p. 596. Ep., LXXIII, *Op. Posth.*, p. 598.

*39. *Eth.*, Part I, Coroll. 2, p. 30. "Hence it follows, secondly, that will and intellect stand in the same relation to the nature of God as do motion and rest. . . ." ²⁰

*40. *Eth.*, Part I, p. 29, Schol.: "By *natura naturans* we should understand that which is in itself, and is conceived through itself, or such attributes of substance as express the eternal and infinite essence, that is, God, inasmuch as he is considered as free cause. . . . By *natura naturata* I understand all that which follows from the necessity of God's nature, that is, all the modes of God's attributes, inasmuch as they are considered as things which are in God, and without which God can neither be nor be conceived." *Op. Posth.*, p. 27.²¹

*41. *Eth.*, Part I, p. 31: "Intellect in act, whether finite or infinite, as also will, desire, love etc., should be referred to *natura naturata* and not to *natura naturans*."* *Op. Posth.*, pp. 27-28.

* Jacobi cites the proof and the scholion in full; Elwes's tr., Vol. II, pp. 107-08.

than, according to Spinoza's principles, there can be outside thinking finite things yet another particular infinite will and understanding, together with a particular infinite absolute thought.

XXII. But that not the shadow of a [138] doubt, not the possibility of a further recourse, be left lingering, let us also take a look at Spinoza's doctrine concerning finite understanding. I presuppose my letter to Hemsterhuis throughout, but here in particular. In that letter I was able to be a lot clearer on several issues, since I only had to present the content of the doctrine.

XXIII. Finite understanding, or the *modificatum modificatione** of the infinite absolute thought, originates from the concept of an actually present individual thing.*⁴²

[139] XXIV. The individual thing can no more be the cause of its concept than the [140] concept can be the cause of the individual thing; or

*₄₂. *Eth.*, Part II, Props. 11 & 13.²²

What Spinoza demonstrates about the human understanding must also hold, according to his doctrine, about any other finite understanding. On this topic one should consult the *scholion* of the just cited 13th Proposition of the second part of the *Ethics* (which is important in more than one respect).

It is apparent that the different nature of the objects of the concepts does not cause any essential change with respect to the understanding itself; and [139] among the infinite properties ascribed by Spinoza to infinite substance, none belong to thinking nature, apart from the infinite thought itself and its *modes*. They must all be so related to thinking nature, therefore, exactly as corporeal extension relates to it, that is, when considered on their own, they must be seen as *mera ideata*, and their individual things can only be objects of concepts—and if it is a case of immediate concepts, then the objects are only the *bodies* of concepts. Therefore I shall not further concern myself with those other properties about which we know nothing at all, except that there must be something of the sort; instead I shall stick to the one and only object of the soul, the body. For that matter, the soul-body relation can be a very important topic for discussion, but instead of embarking on it, I shall only remark here that Spinoza's doctrine of the infinite properties of God, together with the fact that we know absolutely [140] nothing apart from our body and what can be derived from the concept of it, is an excellent indication of the true meaning of Spinoza's system. (See Ep. LXVI and the passages cited in it).²³

* i.e. a second-order modification, or a mode conditioned by another mode

thought can no more derive from extension, than extension from thought. The two of them, extension and thought, are totally different beings, yet are only in one thing; that is, they are one and the same thing, *unum & idem*, simply seen under different properties.

xxv. Absolute thought is the pure, immediate, absolute consciousness in universal being, being *kat'exokhen*, or substance.*⁴³

[141] xxvi. Since among the properties of substance we have, apart from thought, only the single representation of corporeal extension, we shall stick with just these two, and say that, since consciousness is indivisibly conjoined with extension, whatever occurs in extension must also occur in consciousness.

[142] xxvii. We call consciousness of a thing the "concept" of it, and this concept can only be an immediate one.

xxviii. An immediate concept, considered in and for itself alone, is without representation.*

xxix. Representations arise from mediated concepts, and require mediated objects, that is, where there are representations, there must also be several individual things that refer to one another; with something "inner" there must also be something "outer."

xxx. The immediate or direct concept of an actually present individual thing is called the spirit, the soul, (*mens*), of that thing; the individual

*43. The expression, *le sentiment de l'être*, which the French language put at my disposal in the Letter to Hemsterhuis, was purer and better; for the word "consciousness" appears to imply something of "representation" and "reflection," and this has no place here. The following passage from Kant might clarify the matter a bit more.

[141] "There can be in us no modes of knowledge, no connection or unity of one mode of knowledge with another, without that unity of consciousness which precedes all data of intuitions, and by relation to which representations of objects is alone possible. This pure original unchangeable consciousness I shall name *transcendental apperception*. That it deserves this name is clear from the fact that even the purest objective unity, namely, that of the *a priori* concepts (space and time), is only possible through relation of the intuitions to such unity of consciousness. The numerical unity of this apperception is thus the *a priori* ground of all concepts, just as the manifold of space and time is the *a priori* ground of the intuitions of sensibility." *Critique of Pure R.*, [A] 107.

* In the second edition Jacobi adds: "—is a feeling!"

thing itself, as the immediate or direct object of such a concept, is called the "body."^{*44}

[143] XXXI. The soul feels anything else of which it is aware of outside the body within this body itself, and the soul becomes aware of all that only through the concept of the modifications which the body receives from outside (and in no other way). Hence, that from which the body cannot receive modifications, of that the soul cannot have the least awareness.^{*45}

XXXII. On the other hand, the soul cannot become aware of its body either—it does not know that the body is there, nor is it cognizant of itself in any way—[144] except through the modifications which the body receives from the things outside it, and through the concepts of these.^{*46} For the body is an individual thing determined in such a way that it attains to being only after, with, and among other individual things, and it remains in being only after, with, and among them; its inwardness cannot subsist therefore without its outwardness, that is, without a manifold relation to other outside things, and without a manifold relation of these things to it. Without a perpetual alteration of modifications, the body can neither exist, nor be thought as being actually there.

[145] XXXIII. The immediate concept of the immediate concept of the body constitutes the consciousness of the soul, and this consciousness is united with the soul in the same way as the soul is united with the body. To wit: consciousness of the soul expresses a certain determinate form

^{*44.} "The object of the idea [143] constituting the human mind is the body, or a certain mode of extension actually existing, & nothing else." *Eth.*, Part II, P. 13.²⁴—On the distinction between a direct and an indirect concept, or a mediated and immediate one, we should consult the *scholion* of prop. 17, in the second part of the *Ethics*.²⁵

^{*45.} ". . . the images of things are affects of the human body, or modes in which the human body is affected by external causes." Schol. P. 32, *Eth.*, Part III.²⁶ Here too the *scholium* of the 17th prop. (cited above) should be consulted (with the 2nd corollary of the 16th prop.)

^{*46.} "The human mind does not know the human body, nor does it know that it exists, except through the ideas of the modes by which the body is affected." *Eth.*, Part II, P. 19.²⁷

"The mind does not know itself, except in so far as it perceives the ideas of the affects of the body." [Ibid.] P. 33.²⁸

of a concept, just as the concept itself expresses a certain determinate form of an individual thing. (*Eth.*, Part II, prop. XXI, and its *schol.*) But the individual thing, its concept, and the concept of this concept, are entirely one and the same thing (*unum & idem*), which is only being viewed under different attributes and modifications. (*Ibid.*, prop. XXI, *schol.*). XXXIV. Since the soul is nothing but the immediate concept of the body, and is one and the same thing as the body, the excellence of the soul also cannot be anything but the excellence of its body.*⁴⁷ The [146] capacities of the understanding are nothing but the capacities of the body in the order of [147] representation, or objectively; likewise the decisions of the will are only the determinations of the body.*⁴⁸ So the essence of the soul is nothing but the essence of its body *objective* (in objective representation).*⁴⁹

XXXV. Every individual thing presupposes other individual things, *ad infinitum*, and [148] none of them can originate from the infinite directly. (*Eth.*, Part I, prop. XXVIII). But since the order and the combination of the concepts is the same as the order and the combination of things, so too the *concept* of an individual thing cannot originate from God di-

*47. There is no point that Spinoza makes in more ways or more exhaustively than this one. [146] I will only refer to the *scholion* of Prop. 13, and Prop. 14 in the 2nd Part of the *Ethics*; and to the most remarkable *schol.* of the 2nd prop., in the 3rd Part, and to Prop. 11 together with its *scholion*; then in the demonstration of Prop. 28, notice the words: "But the mind's striving, or its power of thought, is equal to, and simultaneous with, the striving of the body, or its power of action . . ." And then also the following words in the explication of the general definition of "affects": [. . .].* *Op. Posth.*, p. 160.²⁹

*48. In the *scholion* of Prop. 2 of Part III of the *Ethics* (cited previously), we read: "All these considerations clearly show that a mind's decision, just like an appetite of the mind, and a determination of the body, are simultaneous, or rather, are one and the same thing, which we call *decision* when considered under and explained through the attribute of thought, and *determination* when considered under the attribute of extension, and deduced from the laws of motion and rest. This will appear more clearly in what follows." *Op. Posth.*, p. 100.

*49. "The mind does not conceive anything under the form of eternity, except in so far as it conceives its own body under the form of eternity." *Eth.*, Part V, p. 31, demonstr.³⁰

* Here Jacobi cites Spinoza's text in full.

rectly,^{*50} but [149] must attain existence in the same way as any individual corporeal thing, and cannot exist in any way except together with a determinate corporeal thing.

xxxvi. Individual things originate from the infinite mediately; that is, they are produced by God in virtue of the immediate affections, or modes, of his being. These, however, are just as eternal and infinite as God: He is their cause in the same way as He is the cause of himself. Individual things therefore originate (*immediately*) from God *only eternally and infinitely*, not in a transitive, finite, and transitory way; that is only how they originate from one another, by mutual generation and destruction, without thereby any the less persisting in their eternal being.

xxxvii. The same applies to the *concepts* of individual things; that is to say, they are [150] not produced by God, nor do they exist in the infinite understanding in any way other than as corporeal configurations are present in the infinite extension *all at once, and always equally actual*, through the intermediary of infinite motion and rest.^{*51}

[151] xxxviii. In so far as God is infinite, therefore, there cannot be in him the concept of any actually present, individual, and thoroughly determinate thing; there is such a concept in him, however, (and he produces it) in that [152] an individual thing comes-to-be in him, and its concept with it; that is to say, this concept exists at the same time as the

*50. Once more I must insist, since it is of the utmost importance in Spinoza's system, that outside absolute thought, which has absolute priority in the concept and is without any representation, every other thought must refer to the immediate concept of an actually present individual thing and its constituent parts, and can only be given in it, so that it is absolutely impossible that there can be any sort of concept of individual things before they are actually present. Individual things have however existed from all eternity, and God has never existed prior to them in any other way save that in which he still exists prior to them now, and will exist prior to them in that way for all eternity, namely simply by nature.

*51. *Eth.*, Part II, P. 8: "The ideas of particular things, or of non-existent modes, must be comprehended within the infinite idea of God, in the same way as the formal essences of particular things or modes are contained in the attributes of God."* *Op. Posth.*, p. 47.³¹

* Jacobi then cites in full the demonstration, corollary, and scholion.

individual thing only *once*, and outside this one time it is not in God, either together with the individual thing, or before it, or after.*⁵²

[153] XXXIX. All individual things mutually presuppose one another, and refer to one another, so that none of them can either be or be thought of without the rest, or the rest without it; that is to say, together they constitute an indestructible whole; or more correctly, and *properly* speaking: *they exist together in one absolutely indivisible and infinite thing, and in no other way.*⁵³

[154] XL. The absolutely indivisible essence, in which the bodies exist together, is the infinite and absolute extension.

[155] XLI. The absolutely indivisible essence, in which all concepts exist together, is the infinite and absolute thought.

*⁵² *Eth.*, Part II, P. 9: "The idea of an actually existing singular thing is caused by God, not in so far as he is infinite, but in so far as he is considered as affected by another idea of an actually existing thing, of which he is the cause, in so far as he is affected by a third idea, and so on to infinity."* *Op. Posth.*, pp. 47ff.³²

*⁵³ "If one part of matter were to be annihilated, the whole of extension would disappear at the same time." *Op. Posth.*, p. 404.³³

[154] Concerning this important point one must consult the 12th and 13th proposition in the 1st Part of the *Ethics*, but especially the *scholion* of the 15th proposition. Also, the remarkable letter *de infinito* to L. Mayer, *Op. Posth.*, p. 465; the no less remarkable one to Oldenburg *de toto & parte*, *ibid.*, p. 439. And so too the 39th, 40th, and 41st Letter to an Unknown, *Op. Posth.*, pp. 519–27.

It is hard to understand how anyone could have objected to Spinoza that he had produced the unrestricted out of the sum of restricted things, and that his infinite substance is only an absurd aggregate of finite things, so that the empty unity of substance is a mere abstraction.³⁴ I say that it is hard to understand how anyone could have accused him of anything of this kind, since his system proceeds from the very opposite position, and this opposite position is its true moving principle. Among philosophers, moreover, no one has taken as much care as he did [155] not to take or give for real what is in fact only a *modus cogitandi*, or a mere *ens rationis*. "*Totum parte prius esse necesse est*"† was already a universal principle of Aristotle which this king of thinkers certainly knew how to apply to the figurative whole of a communal entity (*Politics*, Lib. I, cap. 2 [1253a.20]). Spinoza adheres to this sublime and fruitful principle throughout.

* Jacobi then cites in full the demonstration, corollary, and demonstration of the corollary.

† It is necessary that the whole be prior to the part.

XLII. Both of these belong to the essence of God, and are comprehended in it. Hence God can no more be called an extended corporeal thing in a distinctive sense, than He can be called a thinking one. Rather He is the same substance, extended and thinking at the same time. Or in other words again, none of God's attributes has some particular differentiated *reale* as its foundation, so that they could be considered things existing outside one another, each with its own [156] being. Rather, they all are only reifications,* or substantial, essential, expressions of one and the same real thing—namely that transcendental being which can only be simply and uniquely *one*, and in which all things *must necessarily compenetrates and become absolutely One*.

XLIII. The infinite concept of God, therefore, of his essence as well as of all that necessarily follows from his essence, is only one single, indivisible, concept.*⁵⁴

XLIV. This concept, since it is one and indivisible, must be found in the whole just as much as it is in each part; or, the concept of each and every body, or of an individual thing, whatever it may be, must [157] contain the infinite essence of God within itself, *completely and perfectly*.*⁵⁵

With this my exposition is at an end. I believe that with it, and with my letter to Hemsterhuis, I have adequately replied to all the essential points in your essay, and in conclusion I want now to take up a couple of places that concern me personally, and [158] which I cannot pass over in silence like so many other ones.

You say: "I pass over the many witty notions with which our friend

*⁵⁴. *Eth.*, Part II, Props. 3 & 4, to be compared with the 45th, 46th, and 47th proposition of this same Part II, and with the 30th and 31st of Part I.

*⁵⁵. *Eth.*, Part II, 45, 46, 47, and the respective *scholions*; to be compared with the 3rd and 4th prop. of this same Part, with the 30th and 31st of the first part.

It is necessary to recall here the proof, which Spinoza so often reiterates, that the essence of a thing does not include number, and that a plurality of things, inasmuch as they have something in common with one another, cannot be considered as plurality, but only as parts of one single thing.

He built his inspired and truly sublime theory of true representations, of universal and complete concepts, of certainty, and of human understanding in general, upon precisely this basis.

* *Realitäten*

Lessing entertained you in what follows, and of which it is difficult to say whether they were intended as play or philosophy. . . . Everything that you have him say on p. 24, 25 of your manuscript^{*56} is of this sort: his ideas about the economy of the world-soul, or about Leibniz's entelechies which are supposedly a mere effect of the body; his dabbling in weather making, his infinite boredom, and similar thoughts which, like fireworks, crackle and then fizzle out.

My letter states: Lessing said about the world-soul that, granted that there was one, "the soul of this Whole would be only an effect, like any other soul in all conceivable systems."⁷² I added at the bottom, as a note from me, not as words [159] of Lessing: "According to Leibniz's system too.—The entelechy only becomes spirit through the body (or the concept of body)"—which is something quite different from saying that *Leibniz's entelechies are merely the effect of the body.*

To accompany this note I wrote the following words of Leibniz in my writing pad:

[2.] A monad, in itself and at any given moment, could not be distinguished from another except by its internal qualities and actions, and these cannot be anything else than its perceptions (*which is to say, the representations within the simple of a composition, or of what is external to it*), and its appetitions (which is to say, its tendencies to pass from one perception to another) which are the principles of change. For the simplicity of substance does not at all prevent multiplicity of modifications, which must be found together in this same simple substance, and *must consist in the variety of relations to things that are external.*

And then also:

[4.] Each monad with a [160] particular body makes up a living substance. Thus there is not only life everywhere, accompanying members and organs, but there is also an infinity of degrees among monads, some dominating more or less over others. But when the monad has organs so adjusted that by their means there is depth and distinctness in the impressions that it receives, *and hence in the perceptions that represent these impressions* (as, for example, when by means of the shape of the humours of the eyes, the rays of light are concentrated and act with more force), *this may lead to feeling,** which is to say, to a perception accompanied by memory, *namely, one that echoes for a long time so as to make itself heard upon occasion. And such a living being is called "animal," as its monad is called a "soul." And when this*

*56. P. 33 of this writing.

* *sentiment*

soul is elevated to reason, it is something more sublime and is reckoned among spirits, as will soon be explained. (*Principes de la nature & de la grace fondés en Raison*, Nos. [161] 2 & 4.⁷³

And next to that I put a reference to the *Theodicy*, §124, and to the Letter to Wagner, *de vi activa corporis, de animâ, de animâ brutorum*.⁷⁴

Afterwards I struck out the entire quotation as being superfluous. For it occurred to me that the foundation of my claim was all too obvious everywhere in Leibniz, and also that the simple incisive form that I had given to it could, after some reflection at least, hinder the recognition of the fact.

And you go on pontificating:

I shall pass over too the noble retreat under the banner of faith which you propose for your own part. It is totally in the spirit of your religion, which imposes upon you the duty to suppress doubt through faith. The Christian philosopher can afford the pastime of teasing the student of nature; of confronting him with puzzles which, like will-o'-the-wisps, lure him now to one corner, and now to the other, [162] but always slip away even from his most secure grasp. My religion knows no duty to resolve doubts of this kind otherwise than through reason; it commands no faith in eternal truths. I have one more ground, therefore, to seek conviction.

My dear Mendelssohn, we are all born in the faith, and we must remain in the faith, just as we are all born in society, and must remain in society:⁷⁵ *Totum parte prius esse necesse est*.^{* 76}—How can we strive for certainty unless we are already acquainted with certainty in advance, and how can we be acquainted with it except through something that we already discern with certainty? This leads to the concept of an immediate certainty, which not only needs no proof, but excludes all proofs absolutely, and is simply and solely *the representation itself agreeing with the thing being represented*.[†] Conviction by proofs is certainty at second hand. Proofs are only indications of similarity to a thing [163] of which we are certain. The conviction that they generate originates in comparison, and can never be quite secure and perfect.⁷⁷ But if every *assent to truth* not derived from rational grounds is faith, then conviction based on rational grounds must itself derive from faith, and must receive its force from faith alone.[‡]

* Latin quote dropped in 1819.

† 1819 ed. adds: "(hence has its ground within itself)."

‡ Footnote of 1819: "On the simple authority of reason, of which faith is the principle."

Through faith we know that we have a body, and that there are other bodies and other thinking beings outside us. A veritable and wondrous revelation! For in fact we only sense our body, as constituted in this way or that; but in thus feeling it, we become aware not only of its alterations, but of something else as well, totally different from it, which is neither mere sensation nor thought; we become aware of *other actual things*, and, of that with the very same certainty with which we become aware of ourselves, for without the *Thou*, the *I* is impossible. We obtain all [164] representations, therefore, *simply through modifications that we acquire*; there is no other way to real cognition, for whenever reason gives birth to objects, they are all just chimeras.

Thus we have a revelation of nature that not only commands, but impels, each and every man *to believe*, and to accept eternal truths through faith.* 78

The religion of the Christians teaches another faith—but does not command it. It is a faith that has as its object, not eternal truths, but the finite, accidental nature of man. The religion of the Christians instructs man how to take on qualities through which he can make progress in his existence and propel himself to a higher life—and with this life to a higher consciousness, in this consciousness to a higher cognition. Whoever accepts this promise and faithfully walks the way to its fulfilment, he has the faith that brings blessedness. Therefore the sublime teacher of this faith, in whom all its promises [165] were already fulfilled, could with truth say: I am the way, the truth and the life: whoever accepts the will which is in me, he will experience that my faith is true, that it is from God.⁷⁹

This therefore is the spirit of my religion: Man becomes aware of God through a godly life, and there is a peace of God which is higher than all reason; in this peace there is the enjoyment and the intuition of an inconceivable love.

Love is life; *it is life itself*; and only the type of love differentiates between the types of living natures. *He, the Living One*, can only manifest Himself in one who is alive; and only through quickened love can He give Himself in knowledge to one who is alive. This is how the voice of one preaching in the wilderness cries out, too: "In order to do away with the infinite *disproportion* between man and God, man must [166] partake of a divine nature, and the Divinity take on flesh and blood."⁸⁰

* The second edition refers here to Wizenmann's *Resultate*, pp. 173–77.

Reason that has fallen into poverty and has become speculative,* or in other words, *degenerate* reason, can neither commend nor tolerate this practical path. It has neither hand nor foot for digging, yet it is too proud to beg.⁸¹ Hence it must drag itself here and there, looking for a truth that left when the contemplative understanding left, for religion and its goods—just as morality must do, looking for virtuous inclinations that have disappeared; and laws must also, looking for the fallen public spirit and the better customs; pedagogy. . . . Let me interrupt here, that I be not swept off my feet by the flood coming my way.

The spirit of truth be with you and with me.

Düsseldorf, April 21, 1785.

Since I had already made Mendelssohn wait so long, I sent my parcel [167] directly to Berlin this time. That same evening I set out on a journey, and so my friend (who already owed me two letters) was left uninformed.

On the twenty-sixth of May I received a letter from her, in which she passed on to me the following comments from Mendelssohn's response to the news that I had been confined to bed the whole of March: "I was just on the point of conveying to our mutual friend the request that he should not hurry to reply to my comments. I have decided to have the first part of my pamphlet printed after the Leipzig Fair.⁸² In it I deal *principally with pantheism*, but still make no mention of our correspondence. I am holding that back until the second part, and that will be delayed for a long time yet. Jacobi should read this first part of my essay before he makes any response to my comments. Please extend my greetings to my amiable adversary for me."⁸³

[168] It was now exactly a month since I had sent my latest essay—and more than three months since I had promised to deliver it to him without delay. Thus the news, which should have spared me my effort, came somewhat too late, although I myself had not been too quick.

In the enclosure, in a letter addressed particularly to Mendelssohn,⁸⁴ I had expressed the opinion that it would be most useful at the present juncture if Spinoza's system were openly displayed in its true form, *according to the necessity that held its parts together*. I wrote: "A spectre of this system has been making the rounds in Germany for quite some time un-

* The third edition has: "which has become *mere understanding*."

der all sort of shapes, and it is treated by both the superstitious and the infidel with equal reverence. . . . Perhaps we shall live to see a battle over the corpse of Spinoza, just like the one between the Archangel and Satan over the corpse of Moses. . . .⁸⁵ More about all this when I [169] have your reply, and shall know whether you can be reconciled with me over the doctrine of Spinoza.”

I was still hoping for an answer from Mendelssohn. After waiting for three months in vain, I was gradually moved to take the matter into my own hands; I became ever more inclined to publish, through the letters here printed, the kind of exposition of Spinozism which, in my opinion, was needed at this present juncture.

I looked forward to the forthcoming work on pantheism by our esteemed Mendelssohn with all the more eagerness, since I knew the immediate occasion of its writing; and I felt that this knowledge would cause me to read it with more single-minded attention, and likely allow me to grasp its whole content more quickly and with greater profundity. I had, therefore, reason to hope that, by sharing my knowledge of the occasion, I should [170] make the same advantage available to a wider readership.

But of course, *my* own essay would have won extra attention if it had appeared at the same time as Mendelssohn's, to which it bore such a close relation. I might therefore even succeed in stirring the serious heads of my fatherland into a motion which, for my own instruction, I dearly wished to witness soon.⁸⁶

So I set about reviewing my papers, and extracted the following brief propositions from them, in order to present a final summary statement of my positions in the clearest terms.

I.

Spinozism is atheism.*⁵⁷

[171]

II.

The *philosophy* of the cabbala, or so much of it as is available to research, and *in accordance with its best commentators, von Helmont the youn-*

*57. I am far from charging all Spinozists with denying God. But precisely for this reason the demonstration that, when properly understood, Spinoza's doctrine does not admit any kind of [171] religion does not seem superfluous to me. A certain Spinozistic froth is on the contrary quite compatible with all species of superstition and enthusiasm; one can blow the most beautiful bubbles with it. The committed atheist should not hide behind this froth; the rest must not be deceived by it.

ger^{*58} and Wachter,^{*59} is, as *philosophy*, nothing but undeveloped or newly confused Spinozism.

III.

The Leibnizian-Wolffian philosophy is no less fatalistic than the Spinozist philosophy and leads the persistent researcher back to the principles of the latter.

[172]

IV.

Every avenue of demonstration ends up in fatalism.

V.

We can only demonstrate similarities. Every proof presupposes something already proven, the principle of which is *Revelation*.

VI.

Faith is the element of all human cognition and activity.^{*60}

[173] A friend of mine had written to me at the beginning of June of the work which Mendelssohn was busying himself about.⁸⁷ According to reports coming to him from Berlin, it would carry the title, *Matutine*

*58. The younger [Franciscus Mercurius] von Helmont is at least the editor of the work published in Amsterdam in the year 1690 under the title of *Opuscula Philosophica, quibus continentur Principia Philosophiæ Antiquissimæ & Recentissimæ; Ac Philosophia Vulgaris Refutata [auctore J. Gironnet] & c.* [(Amstelodami, 1690)].³⁵

*59. *Elucidarius Cabalisticus, sive Reconditæ Hebræorum Philosophiæ Brevis & Succincta Recensio*. Epitomatore Joh. Georgio Wachtero. Romæ [in fact, Halle], 1706.

*60. "Who can *prove* that this line here or that line there in a historical or poetic portrayal belongs to the author who affixed his name to the portrayal, or whose authorship is stylistically undeniable? Who can prove that a letter received from a known or unknown hand was written by a single one?—But this will be [173] confirmed to you by your feeling, your intuitive sense, or something in you that still has no name in our philosophies or theologies. It is nameless, but is at every moment and in all men, it is a thousand times more effective and quick than all the philosophies and theologies in the world—And this something, that directs you at every instant, drives you on or pulls you back, warns and cautions, and determines you in the most delicate yet most powerful of ways —. . . This nameless, all-effective something is" (the sense of truth, the element and principle of faith). Lavater.³⁶

*Thoughts on God and Creation, or, Concerning the Being and Attributes of God.*⁸⁸

From the same friend I now received news that Mendelssohn's *Matutine Thoughts* had already left the presses.⁸⁹

[174] Upon hearing this I put my papers aside again, until I could see the essay of my illustrious opponent, since mine could now no longer be published simultaneously with it. I made arrangements to obtain it as quickly as possible.

Meanwhile a letter came from Mendelssohn, unsealed under an empty cover of our mutual friend.⁹⁰—It was not the reply that I had so long looked forward to; not a syllable relating to that, but only a request that I would forgive him for leaving both of my two important essays, the French one for Hemsterhuis and the German one for him, still unanswered. Our common friend, and a third friend besides,⁹¹ were witnesses to the fact that he had not been idle in our *controversy*, given his present debility, and if a certain ****⁹² did not totally reject his work, *the catalogue of the next book-fair would corroborate their witness*. He did not count on winning me over to his opinion with his essay. [175] He could still less flatter himself with any hope of doing so, since he had to admit that so many passages in my essays, as well as in the writings of Spinoza himself, were totally unintelligible to him. *He hoped however to define the status controversiæ in the essay that would soon be submitted to my judgment, and thereby to inaugurate the controversy in due form. It would at least come to public attention why so many things struck him as totally unintelligible, and escaped his grasp all the more, the more I endeavoured to give him explanations.*

The real motive for Mendelssohn's letter was to ask me for a copy of his comments in reply to my first letter, since he had misplaced his own transcript. Fortunately a copy was available, and I had the satisfaction of sending it on to Mendelssohn the very hour in which I had received his letter.

There was no need now to ponder [176] at length what I had to do. Since Mendelssohn had altered his plan to convey his work to me in manuscript form, and had suddenly given it to the printers⁹³—since even the title of the work had only been made known to me by hearsay, and I was to have confirmation of it only from the *Fair Catalogue*—and since Mendelssohn had *now* decided to define a *status controversiæ* in this very essay—however great my trust in the probity and noble character of my great opponent was and will continue to be, I could not leave it up to him alone, quite one-sidedly, to “inaugurate the controversy, and to bring to the public attention why was it that so many things (in my

essays) were totally unintelligible to him, and escaped his grasp all the more the more I endeavoured to give him explanations."⁹⁴

Even less could I permit the definition of a *status controversiæ* in which the role of *advocatum diaboli* somehow fell [177] to me, if the full occasion of the controversy that was to be inaugurated was not being made known at the same time. It was of the highest importance to me that the spirit in which I had taken up the cause of Spinoza should be accurately perceived, and that the issue was purely and solely one of speculative philosophy against speculative philosophy, or more correctly, *pure metaphysics against pure metaphysics*. And this in the authentic, not just the proverbial, sense of *in fugam vacui*.^{* 95}

I return now to the propositions set out above, about which I still have to remark that I do not in any way intend to advance them as theses, or to defend them against every possible attack. Seldom too in the kingdom of truth is much gained through battle. Here too, diligence in the things that are one's own, and a freehearted, honourable exchange, are the most productive and best. What's the point of malign zeal against a failure of knowledge?—Instead of just exposing it, [178] this lack that annoys you, and punishing it with contempt, help to remedy it with your gift! By giving, you will show yourself to be the one who has more, and prove yourself to the one who lacks. Truth is clarity; it refers everywhere to actuality, to *facta*. Just as it is impossible to make objects somehow visible to a blind man through art, as long as the man is blind; so too it is impossible for a seeing man not to see them, when there is light, and to distinguish them from himself. But we expect of error that it see itself, that it know itself, as if it were the truth; and we stand in fear of it, as if it were also as strong as the truth. Can the darkness possibly penetrate the light and extinguish its rays? It is the light that on the contrary penetrates the darkness and shows it for what it is by partly illuminating it. And just as day dawns only with the sun, so too night falls only with the sun's demise.

Everyone can of course make his abode as dark as the night even at midday, and then bring light again into the narrow confines of his darkness. But this light is nothing [179] like that of heaven. An accident, perhaps even the hand that wants to cradle it, will kill the fragile flame. And

* in flight before a void

even if this flame were to survive in spite of its faltering, it will undoubtedly make the eye sick in the long run.

Wherever a putrid soil extends over vast regions, the heavy and cold vapours that emanate from it obscure the sun. And the soil degenerates even more, therefore, and becomes an ever more intimate part of the gloomy poisonous atmosphere. Here and there a rocket or some heavy projectile may perhaps break up the heavy cloud for a while, disperse the mist, and alter its form. But it cannot clear it away; it cannot destroy it. If there is an improvement of the soil first, however, the cloud will disappear by itself.

This present essay will be followed by dialogues⁹⁶ in which I shall further explore many points that here remain unexplored. But above all, I shall develop my own principles more extensively, and [180] confront them from several sides. I shall retain as my leading theme those words of Pascal, "*La nature confond les pyrrhoniens, & la raison confond les dogmatistes.—Nous avons impuissance à prouver, invincible à tout les Dogmatistes.—Nous avons une idée de la vérité, invincible à tout le pyrrhonisme.*"* ^{*61} Thus I claim and shall further claim: We do not create or instruct ourselves; we are in no way *a priori*, nor can we know or do anything *a priori*, or experience anything without. . . . *experience*. We find ourselves situated on this earth, and as our actions become there, so too becomes our cognition; as our moral character turns out to be, so too does our insight into all things related to it. As the heart, so too the mind; and as the mind, so too the heart.⁹⁷ Man cannot artificially contrive through reason to be wise, virtuous, or pious: he must be *moved* to it, and yet *move* himself; he must be organically disposed for it, yet *so dispose* himself. [181] So far no philosophy has been capable of altering this powerful economy. It is high time that we started to adapt ourselves to it obligingly, and gave up wanting to invent spectacles that enable us to see without eyes—and *even better!*

*61. *Pensées de Pascal*, Art. XXI.³⁷

* Nature confounds the Pyrrhonists, and reason the dogmatists.—We have an incapacity of proof that no dogmatism can overcome. We have an idea of truth that no Pyrrhonism can overcome.

As Sperchis and Bulis were going from Sparta to Susa voluntarily, wittingly to their death, they came to Hydarnes, a Persian and the prefect over the peoples that lived in the coastal regions of Asia. He offered them gifts, and gave them hospitality, and tried to persuade them to become friends of his King and be just as grand and happy as he. "Your counsel," the two men said, "befits your *experience*, but not *ours*. Had you tasted the happiness that we have enjoyed, you would advise us to sacrifice our possessions and our life for it."^{*62}

No doubt Hydarnes laughed at these fanatics, and who, among our contemporaries, would not laugh with him? But suppose [182] that we and Hydarnes are wrong, and that those men from Sparta were not fanatics, would they not have to be in possession of a truth that we lack? And would we not stop laughing at them, were we to find this very truth within us?

Sperchis and Bulis did not say to Hydarnis, "You are a fool, a man of weak spirit"; they admitted rather that he was wise in his measure, understanding, and good. Also they did not try to teach them their truth; on the contrary, they explained why this could not be done.

Nor did they become much more intelligible when they stood before Xerxes, in whose presence they refused to prostrate themselves, but who did not want to have them put to death but would rather have persuaded them to become his friends, just as happy as himself. "How could we live here," the two men said, "and forsake our land, our laws, and *such* men as we voluntarily undertook this long journey in order to die for?"^{*63}

[183] Sperchis and Bulis probably had less facility in thought and reasoning than the Persian prefect. They did not appeal to their understanding, to their fine judgment, but only to *things*, and their desire for them. Nor did they boast of any virtue; they only professed their heart's sentiment,^{*} their affection.[†] They had no philosophy, or rather, their philosophy was just history.

^{*62.} Herodotus, Book v11, chapter 129.³⁸

^{*63.} "Comment pourrions nous vivre icy, en [183] abandonnant nostre païs, noz loix; & de les hommes, que pour eulx nous auons volontairement entrepris un si lointain voyage?" *Plutarque*, in the *Dicts Notables des Lacedæmoniens*, tr. d'Amiot, Paris, 1574.

^{*} *Sinn*

[†] *Affect*

And can living philosophy ever be anything but history? As are the objects, so too are the representations; as the representations, so the desires and passions; as the desires and passions, so too the actions; as the actions, so the principles and the whole of knowledge. What caused the swift and universal reception of the doctrine of a Helvetius, or a Diderot?⁹⁸ [184] Nothing but the fact that the doctrine really captured within itself the truth of the century. What it said proceeded from the heart, and had to return to the heart.—“Why is it,” Epictetus asked, “that the fools have you in their power, and push you around any way they want to? Why are they stronger than you? Because, however dismal and unworthy their prattle may be, they always speak from their actual concepts and principles; whereas, the beautiful things that *you* have to offer always come from the lips only: so your speeches have neither force nor life, and it is only with a yawn that one listens to your exhortations, and the same applies to the small-minded virtue that you are constantly prattling about at every cross-road. That is why it comes to pass that the fools are your masters. For what proceeds from the heart, and what one attends to as a principle, that has a force that is unconquerable. . . . Whereas what you manage to concoct in the schools will melt away again each day like wax in the sun.”^{*64}

[185] Philosophy cannot create its matter; the latter is always there, in contemporary history, or the history of the past. Our philosophizing from past history will be but incompetent, if this history contains experiences which we cannot repeat. Our judgment is reliable only when it is directed to things that lie before us. Every age can observe what lies before it; it can analyze it, compare its parts, order them, bring them back to the simplest principles, render the correctness of these ever clearer and more relevant, and their strength more effective. And just as every age has its own truth, the content of which is like the content of experience, so too it has its own living philosophy that displays *in progress* the age’s dominant pattern of conduct.

It follows therefore that one ought not to derive the actions of men from their philosophy, but rather their philosophy from their actions; that their history does not [186] originate from their way of thinking, but rather, their way of thinking from their history. It would be wrong, for instance, to explain the corruption of the mores of the Romans at the time of the fall of the Republic by appeal to the encroaching irreligiosity

*64. Epictetus, *The Discourses*, tr. J. G. Schultheß, vol. III, Speech 16.

of the time; for, on the contrary, the origin of the corruption ought to be sought in the encroaching irreligiosity instead. In exactly the same way, the sexual lassitude and orgiastic feasting of the contemporaries of an Ovid or a Petronius, a Catullus or a Martial, is not to be charged to these poets, but rather these poets ought to be charged to that general lassitude. In saying this, I do not mean to deny that poets and philosophers powerfully reinforce the spirit of their time, if they are permeated by it. Human history comes to be through men, and then some of them contribute to its advance more, some less.

So if the philosophy of an age, its *thought style*, is to be improved upon, its history, its ways of acting, its *life style*, must be improved on first, and [187] this cannot happen *at will*. This much seems to have been clear to many, and to have led some worthy men to the thought that, since nothing could be done with the old, they should take our children in hand, and build a better race from them. This was not at all an easy matter, and had this special difficulty besides, that we fathers could not countenance our children being directed along another path than the one we held as the best. The *more sophisticated* among those worthy men were therefore forced to entice us by the promise (which they came to believe earnestly) that our children ought indeed to be brought up in the right practical way, i.e. for *the need of the age*. And this *really* meant, *according to the sentiment and taste of the age*. But if the sentiment and taste of an age are exclusively directed to the comfortable life and the means thereto (riches, preeminence, and power), and if it is not possible to go after these objects with the whole of one's soul without thereby [188] cramping the best properties of human nature to such an extent that one ceases to be aware of them, then, if pursued in a truly rational way, this practical education comes down to this: that our progeny become duly skilled and ready in becoming ever worse.*⁶⁵ [189] Thus, instead of the peace of

*65. "The day's outcome is decided. Pull out the arrow from my wound, and let me bleed!" Epaminondas said.³⁹

"In what situation, or by what instruction, is this wonderful character to be formed? Is it found in the nurseries of affectation, pertness, and vanity, from which fashion is propagated, and the genteel is announced? in great and opulent cities, where men vie with one another in equipage, dress, and the reputation of fortune? Is it within the admired precincts of a court, where we may learn to smile without being pleased, to caress without affection, to wound with the secret weapons of envy and jealousy, and to rest our personal importance on circumstances which we cannot always with honour command? No: but in a situation

God, which is only a chimera, [190] *a real peace of the devil*, or at least the preconditions for it, would descend upon earth.

But these are words that still dismay us. We want rectitude, patriotism, love of mankind, fear of the Lord—and what not else? Above all things, however, we want the *comfortable life*, and *perfect skill* in the service of vanity; we want. . . . to become rich without falling into temptation, in brief, to give the lie to the saying: *No man can* [191] *serve two masters*; and, *Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also*.⁹⁹

But this saying won't let the lie be given to it. And since I feel this in the innermost recesses of my heart, I am crushed as I witness nowadays a total lack of direction in the ways of the good; the refusal to give countenance to the noble and great, to give encouragement and sensuous attraction to it, whereas whatever is attractive and chaste in it is being actively debased. . . . And just then my children come frolicking before me. . . . I am so moved, that I could often cry out: What is to become of you, you poor things!

"Muse, evoke before me the youth to whom the *vengeful* camels give their pelts for clothing;¹⁰⁰ who dips his quill in wild honey, so that his eyes may become more alert; whose demonstrations are more akin to the flight of the *grasshopper* than to the slow track of the blindworm down the road; who prefers the baptism

where the great sentiments of the heart are awakened; where the characters of men, not their situations and fortunes, are the principal distinction; where the anxieties of interest, or vanity, perish in the blaze of more vigorous emotions; and where the human soul, having felt and recognized its objects, like an animal who has tasted the blood of its prey, cannot descend to pursuits that leave its talents and its force unemployed.

"Proper occasions alone operating on a raised and a happy disposition, may produce this admirable effect, whilst mere instruction may always find mankind at a loss to comprehend its meaning, or insensible to its dictates. The case, however, is not desperate, till we have formed our system of politics, as well as manners; till we have sold our freedom for titles, equipage, and distinctions; till we see no merit but prosperity and power, no disgrace but poverty and neglect. What charm of instruction can cure the mind that is tainted with this disorder? What syren voice can awaken a desire of freedom, that is held to be meanness, and a want of ambition? or what persuasion can turn the grimace of politeness into real sentiments of humanity and candour?" Ferguson's *History of Civil Society*, P. I. Sect. 6.⁴⁰

of the proselyte to the service of the Levite. . . . Evoke before me the youth who can [192] afford to chide our *scribes* who have the *key to knowledge*, but are unable to enter into it and stand in the way of those want to get in; the youth who *hisses* at those doctors of secular wisdom who whisper in the ear: there is no *palingenesis*,¹⁰¹ nor is there *genius*, or *spirit* (as your Helvétius has written in large *octavo*)¹⁰²—yes, the youth whose boldness strives to equal that of the King in Judea who crushed the *serpent of iron* that Moses had yet elevated on orders from the highest.¹⁰³

“Behold! . . . And then a voice:

“*The salt of erudition is a good thing; but if the salt has lost its savour, wherewith shall it be salted . . . ?*”¹⁰⁴

“*Reason is holy, right, and good; we gain nothing from it, however, save the recognition of sinful non-knowledge. And when this non-knowledge reaches an epidemic state, then it takes upon itself the rights of worldly wisdom. As one among them, the very prophet of this wisdom, [193] has said: Les sages d’une nation sont fous de la folie commune.*”¹⁰⁵

“*But the Lord is the Spirit; and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there too is freedom.*”¹⁰⁶

Providence will justify to each its ways. It will let the knowledge (now almost extinct under delusion and obscurantism) that *God’s image in man* is the only source of any insight into the truth, and so too of all love of the good—it will let that knowledge shine forth once more in all its brightness. And after the wreckage of so many human forms, it will display the last and best form, the one that is beyond destruction.

The Spirit is in Men,
And the breath of the Almighty makes them wise.

If from time immemorial all the nations have been pervaded by the conviction that *religion is the one and only means by which [194] to help the ailing nature of man*; and if all the men of wisdom since the most remote of times, when there was yet no rational wisdom but only traditional positive teaching out of which all philosophy has apparently originated, according to its own testimony; if all men of wisdom, I say, have taught with one voice that the *knowledge which only has earthly things for objects is not worthy of its name*; if all have said that *man can only come to the knowledge that is above this world through a disposition that is above this world, that God announces himself to our hearts but hides himself from those who seek him by the understanding alone, that for the soul God’s laws are like wings with which to propel itself above its present situation*; if this is so, is it then a wonder that wherever human nature sinks low, the knowledge of God sinks low likewise, and

in the animal it finally disappears entirely, whereas, wherever this very nature rises higher, the *love of the creator* becomes all the more perceptible to the feeling, until it becomes totally impossible for man to doubt the pervasive presence in him of his God—[195] more impossible by far than for an earthly subject to doubt the reality of his lord, though he might never have seen him or come close to his distant residence?

God's wisdom does not descend upon an evil soul, nor does it dwell in the enslaved body of one who is subject to vice. The spirit of discipline flees from deceit, and shuns evil thoughts; it will be found by those who do not tempt it; it appears to those who seek after it in simplicity of heart. In God's wisdom there is an intelligible spirit, holy, innate, manifold, nimble, honest, untarnished, open, inviolable, penetrating, quick, benevolent, human, firm, steadfast, sure: it can do all, and it oversees all, it encompasses all pure and intelligible spirits, and is the finest of all. Wisdom is nimbler than any movement; it reaches out to all things and encompasses them all because of its [196] purity: for it is the breath of God's power, a pure emanation of the splendour of the Almighty, the resplendence of eternal light, an untarnished mirror of divine action and reflection of his goodness. This wisdom is capable of all things all by itself, it remains within itself yet makes all things anew, it rises up here and there in holy souls, and raises the friends of God and his prophets.

The idea of a virtuous being originates in the enjoyment of virtue; the idea of a free being, in the enjoyment of freedom; the idea of a living being, in the enjoyment of life; the idea of one like unto God, and of God himself, in the enjoyment of what is divine.*⁶⁶

[197]* Try to grow in a virtue perfectly, that is, to exercise it *purely* and *incessantly*. Either you desist in the attempt, or you'll become aware of God in yourself, just as you are aware of yourself. The first will happen if your resolve is all that you bring to the task. For man is so imperfect and weak that he can neither find his law nor keep it. His law of the day

*66. † "I cannot blame Saunderson if he does not have a visual concept of the sun, since he cannot see it; but if he wants to deny the sun for this reason, or to establish how far the relation to the sun of one who has sight is true or false, would he not be going too far? As a spokesman of those who have sight he would perhaps be the least reliable precisely when he is engaged in the subtlest reasoning." *Letters concerning the Study of Theology*, No. 13.⁴¹

* This paragraph and the one immediately following are omitted in the second edition.

† This note is omitted in the second edition.

is his resolve of the day, and his resolve of the day is his day's desire which can neither arouse his will nor secure it.

He must obey and trust, keep to the word and to the faith. He must not aggrandize his conceit, and put it on a throne: this is his first virtue, and must also be his last.

Just as living philosophy, or a people's mode of thinking, proceeds from a people's history or mode of life, so too this history or mode of life arises from a people's origin, from preceding institutions and laws. All history leads up to instruction and [198] laws, and the history of all human culture begins from them.

Not from *laws of reason* or moving exhortations, but from *instructions, exposition, model, discipline, aid; from counsel and deed, service and command.*

If the first men were produced like mushrooms from the earth, or like worms from slime—without *foramen ovale*, and without umbilical cord—not much more perfect than they are now born from their mother's body, then *something* must have looked after them. Was it *chance*? if not chance, then *what*?

All men say with one accord that one God looked after them, even before they existed.

All constitutions derive from a higher Being; they were all theocratic in origin. The first indispensable need, both for the individual men and for society too, *is a God.*

[199] Complete submission to a superior authority; strict, holy, obedience—this has been the spirit of every age that has brought forth an abundance of great deeds, great sentiments, great men. The holiest *temple* of the Spartans was dedicated to Fear.

Where firm faith in a higher authority gave way, and personal conceit got the upper hand, there every virtue sank low, vice broke through, *sense, culture, and understanding were corrupted.*

And in no people did this faith give way until they let themselves be seduced by passion which has no law, and binds the spirit in chains. And thus each partook of the tree of knowledge, *and knew what was good, and what evil.*^{*67}

*67. * In Sophocles's tragedy, *Oedipus the King*, the chorus sings at the end of the second act:

"May my portion still and always be to win that [prize, namely] reverent purity from all words and deeds concerning which laws are established for us, / [laws]

* This note is omitted in the second edition.

“*Be not like the horse and the mule that lack understanding,*” the old Luther says. “They are like animals governed by the senses that only follow what they feel: where they don’t feel or touch, they don’t go. Horse and mule are not made to [201] comprehend things inaccessible to the senses; hence they are also not moved by them to love or sorrow. So too those men who won’t do, or allow, or suffer, anything beyond what they can measure or conceive: they have no mastery of God’s understanding. They do with reason what the horses do with the senses: *both do not venture past what they can sense.*”

And Herder glosses: “. . . Laudable commands of reason—where to every scoundrel is afterwards given to do with them what he wills, *and, like an earth worm, to follow the wetness of its own slime:* and there’s what all the heroics of selfishness amount to.”*68

Look at your children, or the children of your friend. They obey authority, without comprehending the father’s mind. If they are obstinate and do not obey, they will never interiorize it; they will never truly know the father himself. If they are docile, [202] the father’s mind, his inner life, will gradually be transferred to them; their understanding will awaken, and they will know the father. No pedagogical art, no instruction, would have been capable of bringing them to that point, *if their living knowledge had not grown first out of their very life.* In all things man’s understanding comes only at second hand. Discipline must prepare instruction, obedience knowledge.

The more comprehensive, penetrating, and sublime a command is, the more it relates to the inner nature of man and his improvement, to understanding and will, virtue and knowledge. The less can man discern

lofty-footed, begotten in the heavenly regions of the sky, whose father is Olympus alone, nor did any mortal nature of men engender them, nor shall oblivion ever lay them to sleep;/ divinity is great in them, and does not grow old.

“Arrogance begets the tyrant. Arrogance, if it be surfeited to no good end with many things neither proper nor profitable,/ after climbing the topmost ramparts plunges to the most miserable straits, where no service of the foot can serve. But that struggle which is advantageous for the city, I pray the god never to end./ The god I will not cease to hold as our defender.

“But if a man walks haughtily in deed or in word, with no fear of judgment, and not/ reverencing statues of gods, may an evil portion destroy him, because of his ill-fated self-indulgence, etc. . . .” 42

*68. *The Oldest Document [of the Human Race]*, Vol. 2, pp. 26–27.⁴³

the command's inner good before obeying it, the less capable is his reason to accept it, the more does he need authority and faith.

The command of the Lord gives wisdom,
His mouth Knowledge and Understanding.

¹⁰⁷ Surely there is a vein for the silver,
and a place for gold where they fine it.

Iron is taken out of the earth,
and brass is molten out of the stone. [. . .]

[203] But where shall wisdom be found?
and where is the place of understanding? [. . .]

Seeing it is hid from the eyes of all living,
and kept close from the fowls of the air.

Destruction and death say,

We have heard the fame thereof with our ears.

God understandeth the way thereof,
and he knoweth the place thereof.

For he looketh to the ends of the earth,
and seeth under the whole heaven;

To make the weight for the winds;
and he weigheth the waters by measure.

When he made a decree for the rain,
and a way for the lighting of the thunder:

Then did he see it, and declare it;
he prepared it, yea, and searched it out.

And unto man he said, *Behold the fear of the Lord,*
that is wisdom;

and to depart from evil is understanding.

[204] But who is the Lord, the fear of whom is wisdom, and from whose commands come light and life?

Is he the first, the best, and can we only grope after him blindly?

Blindly, if you are blind! But are you really so? And what has robbed you of all light? What induced you to replace the teaching of your fathers with your own conceit? Was it in order to come closer to the eye of the invisible, or to remove yourself from it? Did it happen to please the truth, or the lie? could the Spirit reach to you, or was it the flesh, the will, and evil desire?

I won't want to force myself on you, and extract a confession that would allow me to say to you: Return to the place where, as you well know, your will became impure; where you transgressed the law to which

you were subject, from disobedience, not from conscience; where you let go the faith that was in you; breached your word and your trust—Turn back, wash yourself pure, turn again to the light from [205] which you once turned away—or to another light that will shine in the same place. Only be faithful from now on; and keep to the faith that you have accepted, whatever its name: just renounce the conceit of your will, for this conceit will leave you without the law, like cattle, without light or right.* 108

I say, I don't want to impose on you in this way. But accept this other proposal instead.

You serve something invisible, or want to do service to it. *Let it be honour!*

Whoever does homage to honour, swears by the altar of the *Unknown God*. He promises to obey a Being who sees into the heart: for the service of honour consists in this, that we are as we appear; that we do not arbitrarily or secretly transgress any law; in the brief, steadfast word, *TRUTH!*

Go forth therefore, and obey your [206] Unknown God, faithfully and wholly. Appear in all things as you *are*, and be in all things as you *appear*. But take care that you don't let any spite slip by, for your God sees into your *heart*; that's his essence, his power. And if He does not soon announce his name to you then; if you do not soon experience who the Lord is, the fear of whom is wisdom, and from whose laws flow light and life, then, call me an impostor before the whole world, a fool, a fanatic—what you will!

"We have a friend in us—a delicate sanctuary in our soul, where God's voice and intention has long since resounded, sharp and clear. The ancients called it the *daimon*, the *good genius* of man, whom they revered with so much youthful love, and obeyed with so much respect. This is what the Christ meant by the *clear eye* that is the light of life and enlightens the entire body."⁶⁹ David asks for it in

*69. I cannot refrain from inserting a very [207] plain commentary on this saying, from an excellent recently published work: "The light of the body is the eye.⁴⁴ This is not said in a physical sense, yet meaningfully. The eye receives the

* From "what induced you. . . ." to "without light or right" is omitted in the second edition.

prayer, [207] as the *Spirit of Life* that leads him on the straight and level path, etc.¹⁰⁹ Let's call it *conscience, inner sense*, [208] *reason*, the *logos* in us, or what you will. It is enough that it speaks loud and clear, especially in youth, before the wild voices from inside and out, the roar of passions, and the chatter of a sophistic unreason, gradually silences it or falsifies it altogether. Woe to him, in whom it is made silent and false in this way! Woe especially to the young man and the child! He will gradually lose his God in the world; he will wander like a lost sheep, void of sound moral sense, without feeling the *theion* (the divinity) in even one thing of life, whether in himself or others. [209] We have only as much of God and his providence as we *can cognize* of them both *living in the individual and the universal*. The more we can see actively (without fanaticism or coldness of heart) how and why He acts with us, the more He is *ours*, and *ours alone*. Let the wind-bag and the doubter say what he wills against this: *experience overrides empty talk and doubt.*^{*70}

Let us say it again: man's understanding does *not* have its life, and its light, *in its self*; nor is the will formed through it. On the contrary, man's understanding is formed through his will, which is like a spark from the eternal and pure light, and a force from the Almighty. Whoever walks in

light for the entire body—the light which the body uses in all its doings.—If your eye is innocent, then your whole body is serene.—Innocent, healthy, uncorrupted: then the whole body has sufficient serenity.—If however your eye becomes bad (bad, unhealthy, corrupt), then your whole body will be in darkness—(the hands do not know what they reach to; the feet, where they are going).—But now, if the light that is in you is darkness (said very unphilosophically, yet with unmistakable meaning: If the member that ought to receive light for the entire body becomes corrupt, and ceases to receive light)—how great will the darkness then be!—(in what total darkness you will then sit, no amount of light being of any help to you!).

[208] "The clear meaning of this passage, therefore, is as follows: Man has in his soul a sense which is to the whole man what the eye is to the body; a sense which, when healthy, receives secure light for moving and working, but when it is corrupt it plunges man into total darkness, and renders him quite incapable of walking straight or acting straight." *Philosophical Lectures on the So-called New Testament*, vol. I (Leipzig, 1785).⁴⁵

*70. [Herder] *Letters concerning the Study of Theology* [Letter #31], Part III, pp. 89–90 [2nd ed., p. 91].

this light and acts by this power, will walk in purity from light to light; he will experience his origin and his destination.

[210] It is a universal revelation, or a lie of nature, that all that happens, every alteration [210] and movement, stems from a will, that the power for it must derive from a will. If there is a case where the *vox populi*, *vox dei* holds true, this is it. Thus the crude savage errs less than the learned sophist. For however often he confuses the outer with the inner, form with matter, appearance with essence, he knows them both none the less, and so he does not err *in substance*. The learned sophist on the other hand who only acknowledges the externality of things, and takes the appearance for the thing itself, and the thing to be the reflection—he *is the one who errs in substance*.

I do not know the nature of the will, of a self-determining cause, its inner possibility and its laws. For I do not exist through my own self. But I feel such a power as the inmost life of my being; through it I have intimations of my origin, and through its exercise I learn *what flesh and blood alone could not reveal to me*. I find that everything [211] in nature and Scripture refers to this exercise; all promises and all threats are connected with it—with the purification and contamination of the heart.—Experience and history teach me, moreover, that man's action depends less upon his thought, than his thought upon his action; that his concepts are directed according to his actions, and in a way only imitate them; that the way to knowledge is therefore a *mysterious* one—not the way of the syllogism—and much less the way of mechanism.

God spoke—and so it was—and all was good. "This action," says the worthy Jerusalem, "could not have been made truer and clearer to our reason. For the one and only ground [of the origin of things] on which reason can find rest is this: *the Almighty willed, and so it was*. This is at the same time the limit of all philosophy, where Newton too stood in awe. And the philosopher who regards it as below his dignity to abide by this divine will, but abandons himself [212] to an infinite progression from cause to cause beyond it, and to his own building of worlds, such a one will stray into eternal darkness, where he will ultimately lose track even of the Creator."¹¹⁰

This is the *Majesty of the Lord, the Countenance of God*, to which mortal eye cannot reach. But in his goodness He descends to us, and through his grace the Eternal One becomes a presence to man, and He speaks to him—to whom He gave breath from his mouth—*through man's feeling for his own life, his own bliss*. . . . I fall silent, I fall prostrate glowing with thanks and delight.—In shame lest I could still be asking for a better way

to knowledge and peace. . . . If anyone knows of one, let him show it to me!—Oh, would that I were strong and quick to run that way, the one royal way of *God's love, and God's BLISS!*

Allow me in conclusion—at the risk that I be called one of yours, and [213] be chided for being a *loyal man*—allow me, *honest Lavater*, to bless and seal my work with a word from your pious and angelically pure* lips.

"I came into the world that I may bear witness to the truth. Behold in that your mission, you man! you alone, though a creature of earth, are royal and capable of truth! Every mortal sees a portion of the truth that is the source of joy for all, and sees it in a *particular way*, as no other mortal can see it. To each the universe appears through a medium which is one's own. To give testimony to how things are present to us, to our point of view, means to think and to act royally. This is man's mission and man's worth! Through this honest testimony you will exercise the greatest influence on humanity; you will have the greatest power to attract those who are most similar to you and to unite them—and to sunder from you those who are most dissimilar, to set them at a distance from you, and make them united in opposition to you and all those who are like you—and thereby you will powerfully promote the unknown goal [214] of creation and providence—the great, the first and last, end—the *highest possible union of all things unifiable*. . . ."¹¹¹

"He who sees everything as it presents itself to him, who does not want to see anything except as it thus presents itself; he who lets truth, or anything that appears good to him, work upon him freely without reacting to it either noisily or quietly, publicly or in private, immediately or through an intermediary; he who behaves towards truth in a merely passive way—who does not resist it either offensively or defensively; he who only wills what truth wills—who wills the truth, the true nature of things, and its relation to us—the truth which is the reason of all reason, illumining all; he who does not deny it even before hearing it, because of obstinacy or self-love, because of precipitousness, sloth, ambition, servility—who never judges *before* mature, patient, dispassionate reflection, and even after judgment still retains an open and attentive ear, and docile heart, for every exhortation—he who [215] rejoices in the truth, wherever and whenever, by whomsoever and through whomsoever, it may be found—who does not let himself be touched by the error on the lips of his bosom friend—who eagerly draws out the truth from the lips of his mortal enemy and presses it to his heart—who

* *Engelreinen*. In the second edition this is changed to "righteous."

everywhere holds conviction in high esteem, and never acts, judges, or speaks without reflection—Such a one is the honest and righteous man, an honour to mankind—*he is of the Truth*. Christ would call him a *Son of the Truth*.”¹¹²

Notes to Jacobi's Texts

CONCERNING THE DOCTRINE OF SPINOZA (1785)

- 1 See Hamann's letter of 14 November 1784, *Hamann-Briefwechsel*, v (1783–85), #782, pp. 256–66. Also below, p. 33 of Jacobi's *Spinoza Letters*, the footnote.
- 2 Archimedes adds: "And I shall move the earth."
- 3 René Descartes, *Rules for the Direction of the Mind*, AT x/405–06, tr. John Cottingham, Robert Stoothoof, and Dugald Murdoch.
- 4 Redone in English by Jeremy Walker. This is the first of two poems of Goethe's that Jacobi published at his own initiative, without Goethe's knowledge, as part of the first edition of the *Spinoza Letters*. He probably came into possession of this poem, to which he openly attached the name of the author, during his stay at the poet's house 18–29 September 1784. See Scholz, *Pantheismusstreit*, p. ciii. The stresses were added by Jacobi. They highlight in a selective fashion the elements in Goethe's vision of man that also fall within the scope of Jacobi's own philosophy.
- 5 Pempelfort was the location of Jacobi's country residence until the turmoil that followed in the wake of the French Revolution. The presence of French troops in the vicinity eventually forced Jacobi to relinquish the place. Thomas Wizenmann, who was befriended by Jacobi shortly before his premature death and was Jacobi's guest at Pempelfort when he died, gives us a vivid description of the beauty of the countryside, and of the grounds of Jacobi's villa in particular. See Goltz, *Thomas Wizenmann, der Freund*, Vol. 1, pp. 298ff.
- 6 The friend is Elise Reimarus, the daughter of the deceased H. S. Reimarus. See Introduction, p. 57 above. Elise's letter is not extant. See *Briefwechsel*, 1.3, #881.
- 7 23 March 1783, *Briefwechsel*, 1.3, #886.
- 8 21 July 1783, *Briefwechsel*, 1.3, #914.

- 9 See *Letter to Lessing*, 1 June 1780; *Briefwechsel*, 1.2, #541. Jacobi had just read Lessing's *Education of Mankind*.
- 10 See Lessing to Jacobi, 13 June 1780; *Briefwechsel*, 1.2, #546. Jacobi is referring to his "big trip" during the summer of 1780, details of which are reported in his letter to J. J. W. Heinse, 20.23.24 October 1780, #582. See Introduction, p. 59 above.
- 11 I.e., the prize essay of 1763, *Üeber die Evidenz in Metaphysischen Wissenschaften* (*Concerning Evidence in the Metaphysical Sciences*), pub. 1764. In Mendelssohn's *Werke*, 11, pp. 266ff. See *David Hume*, Jacobi's pp. 74–75 below. The proof from the "idea" has been known since Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* as the "ontological argument."
- 12 See Introduction, pp. 71–72 above. Reading this work occasioned Jacobi's announcement to Lessing of his trip to Wolfenbüttel at the end of June 1780 and the despatch to him of a copy of his *Ein Stück Philosophie des Lebens und der Menschheit: Aus dem zweiten Bande von Woldemar* (*A Piece of Philosophy of Life and of Mankind: From the Second Volume of Woldemar*), *Deutsches Museum*, 1 (1779): 307–48; 398–427. See letter to Lessing, 1 June 1780, *Briefwechsel*, 1.2, #541, and Lessing's reply on 13 June 1780, #546. According to Altmann, the news that Lessing had said to Jacobi before witnesses that he had never discussed his system with Mendelssohn was the trump card that Jacobi held and would eventually play, with the publication of his *Spinoza Letters*, against Mendelssohn. The implication of this piece of information was that Mendelssohn was not, after all, as privy to Lessing's mind as everyone had assumed. Mendelssohn took Jacobi's report precisely in this way and felt humiliated. See Altmann, *Life of M.M.*, pp. 703–04.
- 13 In the second edition this expression of astonishment is removed, I suspect because in the controversy that followed Mendelssohn denied having ever been surprised. Mendelssohn also explained the pointedness of his questions to Jacobi on the ground that he had, at the time, no idea that Jacobi was reporting a piece of information allegedly obtained from Lessing directly. He thought, rather, that Jacobi was reporting mere travellers' tales. Mendelssohn complained about the many travellers who collected written mementos from celebrities they met, and later used these to suggest that they had actually engaged in deep discussion. See *Moses Mendelssohn an die Freunde Lessings* (1786; *M.M. to Lessing's Friends*), Scholz, *Pantheismusstreit*, pp. 294–96.
- 14 *Opera Posthuma* (Amsterdam: Jan Riewertsz, 1677). This edition included the *Ethica*, the *Tractatus*, the *De Emendatione Intellectus*, and the *Epistolae & ad eas Responsiones*. It also included, but with its own pagination, a Hebrew grammar. For Mendelssohn's message to Jacobi, see Elise Reimarus's letter to Jacobi, 1 September 1783, *Briefwechsel*, 1.3, #938.
- 15 The reference is to the article "Spinoza" in Pierre Bayle, *Dictionnaire Historique et Critique*, Quatrième Edition revue, corrigée, et augmentée,

avec la vie de l'auteur, par Mr. des Maizeaux, Tome Quatrième (Q–Z) (Amsterdam, 1730), pp. 253–71. A sixth edition identical to the fourth was published in Basel in 1741. In this article Bayle flatly calls Spinoza an atheist and offers six types of arguments to refute his “system,” which he characterizes as “the most monstrous hypothesis imaginable—the most absurd and diametrically opposed to the most evident notions of our mind” (Bayle's note N, p. 259).

- 16 As Altmann points out, by “others” Mendelssohn means himself, i.e. the early attempt at interpreting Spinoza along Leibnizian-Wolffian lines in his first philosophical work, *Philosophische Gespräche* (*Philosophical Writings*; Berlin: Voß, 1755). See Altmann, *Life of M.M.*, p. 617.
- 17 *Briefwechsel*, 1.3, #964.
- 18 I.e. Elise Reimarus.
- 19 The point of the metaphor seems to be that profundity of sense always penetrates to the centre of an issue regardless of where it starts, whereas sharpness helps to define ever new aspects of the issue without, however, ever reaching to its centre. Hamann complained that the metaphor was confusing. *Briefwechsel*, 1.3, Letter to Jacobi, 1 December 84, #1098, pp. 394–95.
- 20 In the 1770s, during the Wolfenbüttel tenure. See Introduction, pp. 55ff. above.
- 21 Published in 1778, one of three short pieces with which Lessing first met Pastor Goeze's attack on his *Fragments*. See Introduction, p. 57 above. The *Parable* tells the story of a splendid royal palace built by a wise king in his capital city. The palace had been built against all accepted canons of architecture, yet managed to please all the king's subjects. The windows were made of different sizes, and instead of one single majestic entrance there was a multitude of doors, each intended to bring a visitor to the centre of the palace by the shortest way possible, regardless of the point of access. In spite of the differences in the style and size of the windows and doors, all rooms were equally illumined by a light shining from above. The dwellers at the palace lived happily enough in it. In the course of time, however, the king's subjects began quarrelling among themselves, with different parties claiming to be in possession of the original plan of the edifice. They were deaf to the few among them who did not worry about the supposed original plan but were satisfied to enjoy the light and the beauty that pervaded the place. One day the watchmen sounded a fire alarm, and the subjects all rushed to save what they believed to be their most precious possessions, as if the fire were in their own houses and not in the palace. And instead of hurrying to save it, by whatever means possible, they began arguing about the exact location of the fire, using their many alleged original plans in proof of their opinion. Fortunately the watchmen had mistaken the Northern Lights for fire.
- 22 18 May 1779; a short note from the “author of *Nathan*” to the “author of

- Woldemar*,” with gratitude for the “instructive and sentiment-charged” hours that the *Woldemar* provided. The note must have accompanied a copy of the just published *Nathan. Briefwechsel*, 1.2, #510.
- 23 Letter to Lessing, 20 August 1779; *Briefwechsel*, 1.2, #516. Presumably, the spirits to be conjured up are those of Spinoza and Leibniz.
- 24 English rendition by Jeremy Walker.
- 25 See Hamann to Jacobi, *Briefwechsel*, 1.3, #1098, 1–5 December 1784, p. 395: “For all the beauty of the poem, I cannot find the application that Lessing makes of it. Why should Jupiter not help himself to the soil and the hut of the human potter? Jupiter was a slave of eternal Destiny, and hence just as much to lament—not to curse or despise as Prometheus does. Presumably, the ‘first hand’ referred to by Lessing was Aeschylus”; and Jacobi’s reply, #1107, 30–31 December 1784, p. 412: “With his first hand Lessing might have meant the nature itself of things.” Lessing definitely did not mean that he had taken scandal directly from Goethe.
- 26 “One and all.” “According to Lessing *hen kai pan* was the inscription on a temple of the ancients”: Jacobi to Hamann, *Briefwechsel*, 1.3, #1107, 30–31 December 1784, p. 412.
- 27 “Nothing is made from nothing.” See Bayle, *Dictionnaire* (4th. edition), Vol. IV, note N.1: “Now Spinoza did not believe that anything could be made from nothing” (p. 259).
- 28 Hebrew for “infinite.”
- 29 A fresco in Rome.
- 30 G. E. Lessing, [*Beiträge*] zur *Geschichte und Literatur. Aus den Schätzen der herzoglichen Bibliothek zu Wolfenbüttel*, Beitrag I, VII: “Leibniz von den ewigen Strafen” (“Leibniz on Eternal Punishment”; Berlin, 1773), p. 216. See Lessing, *Werke* (München: Hanser, 1976), Vol. VII, p. 180: “Er [Leibniz] schlug aus Kiesel Feuer; aber er verbarg sein Feuer nicht in Kiesel” (“He struck fire from every flint, but did not hide his fire in flints”).
- 31 There is an echo here of the cabbalist doctrine of the *Zimzum* (which is the Hebrew word for God’s self-contraction), as formulated by Isaak Luria towards the end of the sixteenth century. The doctrine was in response to the problem of how creation is possible, since nothing can exist outside God. Luria was led to believe that, in order to allow for creatures distinct from him, the Infinite must subject himself to a contraction. It is as if God cleared a space outside himself to make room for creatures. See Gershom Scholem, “Die Wachersche Kontroverse über den Spinozismus und ihre Folgen,” *Spinoza in der Frühzeit seiner religiösen Wirkung*, ed. K. Gründer & W. Schmidt-Biggeman (Heidelberg: Lambert Schneider, 1984), pp. 15–26, especially pp. 18–19.
- 32 See *Monadologie*, §47.
- 33 Jacobi apparently had a difficult time finding the passage in Leibniz, and even enlisted the help of his friend Thomas Wizenmann. *Briefwechsel*,

- 1.3, Jacobi to Wizenmann, Letter #1047, 17 July 1784, pp. 322–23. In the second edition Jacobi here refers to Supplement VII for the resolution of this puzzle. There, on p. 142, he cites from Leibniz's letter to Bourguet, *Opp.* II.1, p. 331–38: “[We should say that] God is in a constant state of expansion and contraction: this is creation and preservation of the world.” Hamann thought that Lessing had actually got the image from Bayle. *Briefwechsel*, 1.3, Letter #1098, 1–5 December 1784, p. 399; and *Dictionnaire Historique* (Article “Spinoza”), p. 263.
- 34 I.e. *Principes de la nature et de la grâce fondés en raison* (1714).
- 35 Jacobi was convinced that all of Spinoza's writings fell into one consistent whole. Herder, who had rejoiced at the news that Lessing was a Spinozist, had suggested that Jacobi was not interpreting Spinoza correctly—that he had made too much of the principle *ex nihilo nihil fit*, and that Spinoza's system was based rather on *quidquid est, illud est* (whatever is, is). Herder to Jacobi, 6 February 1784, *Briefwechsel*, Letter #992, p. 280. Jacobi replied by saying that he had reread the *Ethics* and all of Spinoza's other writings as well, and “Again was I struck by the inner consistency of the philosophy of this man.” *Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi's auserlesener Briefwechsel*, ed. F. Roth, 2 vols. (Leipzig: Fleischer, 1825–27), Vol. 1, #139, p. 377. In his letter (i.e. #992, above) Herder had also suggested that the need of a *salto mortale* only arises when one conceives of God abstractly in the manner of the speculative philosophers. There is no need for any such leap in a Spinozistic world, provided that one understands Spinoza in more positive terms.
- 36 The Augsburg Confession (*Confessio Augustiana*) is the primary statement of Evangelical beliefs.
- 37 In his translation of the passage, Vallée refers here to the motto on the frontispiece of the book: “Give me a place to stand.” Hamann had said to Jacobi that, for him, the only *dos moi pou stō* was God's word. *Hamann-Briefwechsel*, 22 January 1785, Vol. v, #801, p. 333.
- 38 Hamann, who had been kept informed of Jacobi's exchange of letters with Mendelssohn, says concerning Jacobi's *salto mortale*: “*Sapere aude* [Dare to know]—to the Kingdom of Heaven there belongs no *salto mortale*. It is like a mustard seed, a sour dough. . . . Woe to us if it depended on us to become creators, discoverers, and forgers of our future happiness. The first Commandment says: Thou shalt eat (Gen. 2) and the last: Come, all is accomplished.” *Briefwechsel*, 1.3, #1098, p. 399. Jacobi could not of course understand his friend's negative reaction. In an earlier letter Hamann had proclaimed: “Experience and revelation are one and the same—the crutches or wings of our reason if reason is not to remain lame and crawl. Sense and history is the foundation and the ground, however still deceptive the former or still naïve the latter, I prefer them to any castle in the air. *Dos moi pou stō*—Give me a place to stand, but no purified and

stripped down and empty words: these I shy away from as from deep still water or slippery ice." Ibid., #1091, 14–15 November 1784, p. 388. But Jacobi's appeal to faith was based precisely on this claim that all experience is revelatory in character. Since philosophers refuse to accept this natural revelation but try to excogitate existence from their minds instead, they ultimately fail to recognize the true nature of existence itself.

On this point Jacobi and Hamann were agreed. Yet in one respect they differed radically, and Jacobi's mental set made it impossible for him to recognize what lay behind the difference. Hamann had a trust in the human body, and in all the activities associated with it, that Jacobi did not share. Whether because of his peculiar temperament or because he had after all accepted a mechanistic view of the body, Jacobi did not believe that one could experience the presence of God on its basis alone. For that kind of experience one needed a spiritual power satisfying two apparently contradictory requirements. It had to be natural, since it was an indispensable organon of all truth. Yet it also had to transcend the limits of corporeity and could not therefore be available to those given to the life of the body alone.

Jacobi was therefore given to an elitism of feelings, which was indeed very much part of the sentimentalist culture of the day but which Hamann would have nothing of. Like Lavater, Jacobi was looking for extraordinary (albeit natural) revelations, for miracles, in other words, whereas Hamann was interested in eating and socializing. Thus, to Hamann, who had accused him of "a propensity to brooding," Jacobi replied that he was not to be blamed for it. He had not chosen to be troubled by an obsessive quest for "true sense." Nature had made him that way. And he continues: "*To philosophize our way to [the mysteries]—that we shall not do with and from our common body. If there is for man certain knowledge of God, a faculty must lie in his soul that will lead him to it organically [ihn . . . zu organizieren]. I believe—Lord, help my unbelief!*" Ibid., #1084, 18–22 October 1784, p. 373. Hamann retorts with his claim that "experience and revelation are one." But Jacobi insists: "Must not *therefore* a power lie in man—already lie in the natural man—whose impetus makes him capable of *receiving* the Spirit, of Whom we do not know whence It comes or whereto It goes, but Who however is Truth itself. . . . Truth is actuality, it is being; and certainty is the feeling of truth." *Johann Georg Hamann Briefwechsel*, Vol. v, 1783–85, #797, 11 January 1785, p. 320. The dynamics of Jacobi's belief made for an obsessive effort of savouring this feeling, and this is the attitude that Hamann could not accept.

For Jacobi's use of *Organization* and *organizieren*, see the relevant note to *David Hume*, p. 127 of first edition. For Hamann's criticism of Princess Gallitzin's spiritual perfectionism, see Introduction, p. 65 above. For Lavater, see *David Hume*, p. 197 of the first edition, the note. It must

- also be noted that the texts of the Hamann-Jacobi letters published in *Werke* 1 do not always correspond to the original. Jacobi must have edited them. For Herder's reaction to Jacobi's *salto mortale*, see p. 28 of Jacobi's text, and the note re Herder. Kant indirectly parodies Jacobi's *salto mortale* in *Religion innerhalb der Grenzen der bloßen Vernunft* (*Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason*, 1793), Acad. ed. VI (Berlin: Reimer, 1907), p. 121.
- 39 1614–87, Cambridge neo-Platonist given to mysticism, the Cabbala, and theosophy.
- 40 Jan Baptista van Helmont (1577–1644), a chemist and physician strongly influenced by neo-Platonism and the hermetic tradition.
- 41 This book had been the occasion for Lavater's challenge to Mendelssohn, either to refute Bonnet's scientific demonstration of Christian doctrine or convert. See Introduction, p. 40 above.
- 42 "Can one possibly imagine the universe to be less harmonious, less organic I almost said, than an animal?" The books referred to are *Contemplation de la nature* (Amsterdam: Marc-Michel Rey, 1764); *La palingénésie philosophique . . .* (Amsterdam: M.-M. Rey, 1769).
- 43 *Lettre sur la sculpture à M. de Smeeth* (Paris, 1769). There are two editions of François Hemsterhuis's works, *Oeuvres philosophiques de M. F. Hemsterhuis* (Paris: H. J. Jansen, 1790, i.e. two years after Hemsterhuis's death); *Oeuvres philosophiques de François Hemsterhuis*, ed. L. S. P. Meyboom, 2 Vols. (Leuwarde: W. Eekhof, 1846). A copy of the original edition of *Lettre sur l'homme et ses rapports* (Paris, 1772) bearing the handwritten glosses of Diderot has been mechanically reproduced and critically edited by Georges May (New Haven: Yale University Press; Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1964).
- 44 *Letter Concerning Man and His Bearings* (Paris, 1772); *Sophyle, or Concerning Philosophy* (Paris, 1778); *Aristée, or Concerning Divinity* (Paris, 1779). The dialogue *Alexis* (1787) was translated by Jacobi into German: *Werke*, VI, pp. 465ff.
- 45 Jacobi met Hemsterhuis in person in February of 1781, when Princess Gallitzin took him to Jacobi's home in Düsseldorf, unannounced. Diderot had stopped in Düsseldorf on his way from The Hague to Berlin and eventually to Saint Petersburg in August of 1773 (see Introduction, 1, note 53). The two must have discussed Hemsterhuis at that time. See Brachin, pp. 51, 54–55. For the scandal that Diderot's materialism caused in Germany during his visit there, see Roland Mortier, *Diderot en Allemagne (1750–1850)* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1954), pp. 32–33, 358, 391. For the Münster Circle, see Introduction, pp. 45ff. above. Diderot's first encounter with Hemsterhuis very likely took place in 1773, when Diderot sojourned in the Netherlands for about three months on his way to Russia, or perhaps on his way back in 1774. See *François Hemsterhuis, Lettre sur l'homme etc.*, ed. Georges May, p. 3.

- 46 The *Aristée* can be read as a Spinozist work for at least three reasons. (1) It claims that the concepts of order and disorder, good and evil, are relative, because they only have meaning with reference to individual beings and the strivings for existence particular to each. (2) It also claims “necessity” to be a relative concept dependent upon “existence.” All talk about the necessity of a series of causes, or the necessity of actions and durations, is ultimately reducible to assertions that there *are* (in actuality) certain causes, certain actions, and certain durations. (3) God exists *per se*, and “space” (which is one and infinite) is one of his attributes. There are other elements in the work, however, that hardly qualify it for the title of Spinozist. For instance, according to Hemsterhuis, the universe does not exist *per se* because it is essentially limited both as a totality and with respect to its parts. The order of these is based on the interplay of two basic forces, namely “action” and “reaction,” which left to their own dynamics would lead to perfect equilibrium and hence inertia. They are however kept in a state of movement by the introduction of “directions” imposed upon them from outside, i.e. from a cause (God) which must therefore have intelligence.
- 47 See Lessing's letter to Jacobi, 18 August 1780, *Briefwechsel*, 1.2, #562.
- 48 I.e. *Woldemar*, cf. Lessing's letter, 4 December 1788, *Briefwechsel*, 1.2, #599.
- 49 See Introduction, pp. 71ff. above.
- 50 *The Education of Mankind*, §73.
- 51 In a letter to Jacobi following the publication of the *Spinoza Letters*, Herder said that he had seen Lessing's motto inscribed in Gleim's garden house during a visit but had not been able to explain it to himself. He had not questioned Gleim about it, for he had not thought that such a serious subject as metaphysics would have been discussed in the home of that old erotic poet. Otherwise he would have inscribed his own *hen kai pan* “seven times under it, after the unexpected discovery that Lessing was a fellow believer of [his] philosophical creed.” *Briefwechsel*, 1.3, #992, 6 February 1784, p. 279. Dobbek, in his edition of Herder's letters, notes to this passage that Lessing had actually written “hen egō kai pan” (i.e. I am one and all), and that Herder had written under it, “Light, Love, Life.” Dobbek does not, however, give evidence for his claim. See *Herders Briefe*, ed. Wilhelm Dobbek (Weimar: Volkerverlag, 1959), p. 460, in note 4 to Letter 88. That “hen egō kai pan” had been the formula used by Lessing is accepted by Altmann as a possibility “not to be excluded.” See Alexander Altmann, “Lessing und Jacobi: Das Gespräch über den Spinozismus,” *Lessing Yearbook*, 111 (1971): 41. Altmann's hypothesis is taken as authoritative by Erwin Quapp, *Lessings Theologie statt Jacobis Spinozismus* (Bern: Lang, 1992), p. 17. Both formulas, “hen kai pan” and “hen egō kai pan,” have been attributed in antiquity to Heraclitus.
- 52 Marchese Girolamo Lucchesini (1751–1825), Prussian diplomat.

- 53 See p. 4 of Jacobi's text above, and note 15. Note N of Bayle's article begins with a statement of Spinoza's central thesis. There is only one substance endowed of an infinity of attributes, extension and thought among them. It follows that all bodies are modifications of this substance *qua* extension, and all souls are modifications of it *qua* thought. It also follows that all evils and imperfections are modifications of this one substance, which Spinoza calls God. Bayle proceeds to object that "extension" is made up of distinct parts; it does not have the simplicity of a mathematical point. It follows that, if God were indeed one with its attribute of extension, in as much as the latter is divided into distinct bodies, God's being would collapse into an infinity of distinct parts. And a parallel argument can be made with respect to the attribute of "thought." Spinoza must say that there are as many persons in God as there are modifications of thought. Bayle adds: "He (i.e. Spinoza) would undoubtedly make fun of the Mystery of the Trinity; he would be amazed that an infinitude of people dare to speak of a nature terminated by three hypostases—he who, strictly speaking, has given as many persons to the divine nature as there are people on earth." In the cited paragraphs of the preface to the *Theodicy* and the *Theodicy* itself, Leibniz agrees in essence with Bayle's interpretation of Spinoza. Spinoza grants "thought" in general to God, but not "intellect." Leibniz wrote the *Theodicy* mostly in an effort to combat the scepticism and fideism that motivated Bayle's *Dictionnaire*.
- 54 I.e. Mendelssohn. See above, p. 5, and note 16. Jacobi is insinuating that Lessing's friendship with Mendelssohn was not as intimate as it was generally believed to be.
- 55 Elise Reimarus's letter to Jacobi, *Briefwechsel*, 1.3, 5 December 1783, #977.
- 56 Intended is Dr J. A. H. Reimarus, brother of Elise.
- 57 On p. 71 of the second edition, Jacobi enters a note in which he points out that "this is not quite right." At the beginning of April 1784 Elise had let him know that her brother had wished to read his report on Lessing once more, and for that reason her brother had asked Mendelssohn to send the original letter, or a copy of it, to him. (Brother Reimarus had presumably read the report a first time when it was sent to Elise to be conveyed to Mendelssohn). Mendelssohn had obliged by sending the original, which to date had not been returned to him. Mendelssohn had not missed it, because he was sick at the time. He eventually received it back. See *Briefwechsel*, 1.3, 2 April 1784, #1030.
- 58 Jacobi's beloved wife, Helene Elisabeth, née von Clermont, known to everyone as Betty, died on 9 February 1784, not long after the death of the third Jacobi son, aged eleven. See the death notice prepared by Jacobi, *Briefwechsel*, 1.3, #995.
- 59 5 July 1784, *Briefwechsel*, 1.3, #1055.
- 60 See Introduction, pp. 47ff. above.

- 61 *Briefwechsel*, 1.3., 1 August 1784, #1059.
- 62 *Briefwechsel*, 1.3, #1071, and #1071.a.
- 63 Blaise Pascal (1623–62): “Nature confounds the Pyrrhonists, and reason the dogmatists.” *Pensées sur la religion et sur quelques autres sujets*, ed. Louis Lafuma, 3 Vols. (Paris: Éditions du Luxembourg, 1951), Vol. 1, Fragment #131, p. 85.
- 64 See letter of Jacobi to F. Hemsterhuis, *Briefwechsel*, 1.3, 7 August 1784, #1063. In the *Spinoza Letters* Jacobi gives the French text and a German translation of it. I am translating the German text using the French as control.
- 65 See letter of Hemsterhuis to Jacobi, 26 April 1784, *Briefwechsel*, 1.3, #1032. The letter is mostly to introduce a certain M. Adrien Gilles Camper, who comes to Düsseldorf to recover from an unfortunate love affair while visiting art galleries there. There is no mention in the letter of an accompanying article “Spinoza,” but reference is made to a book that Jacobi wished to have, *Les Principes de la Pantosophie de M. de Kuffler disciple & admirateur de Spinoza*. Hemsterhuis promises to have it sent to Jacobi at the earliest, “if possible accompanied by a portrait of Spinoza copied from an original design.” Hemsterhuis then goes on to express the sentiments about Spinoza that Jacobi reports in the paragraph immediately following. In a letter to Hamann of 12 September 1785, Jacobi says quite explicitly that by the “article” he had only meant the lines from Hemsterhuis’s letter that he had quoted word for word. See *Hamann-Briefwechsel*, Vol. VI, #870, p. 60. In the same letter Jacobi announces to Hamann that he had sent him three copies of his *Spinoza-büchlein* (“Spinoza-booklet,” p. 62) eight days before (p. 59).
- 66 Also from the *Aristée*, p. 123.
- 67 *Letter VII*, 341c–d; tr. L. A. Post, *Collected Works of Plato*, ed. E. Hamilton and H. Cairas (Princeton, N.J.: University Press, 1961), my adaptation. Jacobi cites in Latin.
- 68 5 September 1784, *Briefwechsel*, 1.3, #1071.1.
- 69 28 January 1785. Mendelssohn’s letter is reproduced in full in the second edition, pp. 159–61; Scholz, *Pantheismusstreit*, pp. 137–38.
- 70 1785.
- 71 The prefatory letter, dated Düsseldorf, 26 April 1785, is omitted in the first edition but reproduced abridged in the second (pp. 162–63; Scholz, *Pantheismusstreit*, pp. 139–40, who follows the slightly longer text of the third edition). Also omitted in the first edition is the first paragraph of Jacobi’s comments, and much of the second. Here Jacobi accuses Mendelssohn of prejudice against him. Mendelssohn had simply assumed that Jacobi did not know Spinoza, without confronting his (i.e. Jacobi’s) claims with the original texts. In a footnote to the second edition Jacobi explains that he had left out these passages in the original edition

because they seemed too harsh, and also because he had omitted the original text of Mendelssohn's *Memoranda*, to which he was responding (see below, pp. 35off.). Jacobi thought that these comments gave him a stranglehold on his adversary, presumably because they demonstrated Mendelssohn's failure to understand Spinoza. But since Mendelssohn had thought otherwise and had made his comments public, Jacobi was now ready to publish the full record (second ed., pp. 164–66; Scholz, *ibid.* pp. 141–43). In the response to Mendelssohn that follows, Jacobi cites at length from Spinoza, obviously in order to force a confrontation between his claims and Spinoza's own words.

72 P. 33 of Jacobi's text.

73 Leibnitz, *Opera Omnia*, Vol. VI, Sec. II, pp. 22–33. Jacobi cites in French. All stresses are his.

74 Leibnitz, *Opera Omnia*, Vol. II, p. 226. "Concerning the Active Power of the Body, the Soul, and the Soul of Irrational Animals."

75 See Hamann: "Since *faith* belongs to the natural conditions of our faculties of knowledge and the fundamental inclinations of our soul, every universal proposition rests on adequate faith, and every abstraction is and must be arbitrary." *Zweifel und Einfälle über eine vermischte Nachricht der allgemeinen deutschen Bibliothek (Doubts and Incidental Thoughts Concerning an Assorted Report in the "Universal German Library,"* XXIV (1776): 288–96; *Sämtliche Werke*, Vol. 3, p. 190). See: "Poesy is the mother tongue of the human race. . . . The whole treasure of human knowledge and happiness consists in images." *Aesthetica in Nuce* (1762), Vol. 2, p. 197. "The specific difference between Judaism and Christianity has to do . . . exclusively with temporal truths of history. . . . Hence the revealed religion of Christianity is with reason and justice called *faith, trust, confidence, trusting* and child-like assurance in divine utterances and promises." *Golgotha und Scheblimini* (1784), Vol. 3, p. 305. Hamann to Jacobi, 14 November 1784, *Hamann-Briefwechsel*, v, #782, especially pp. 264–65. Yet, despite apparent affinities between Hamann's conception of faith and Jacobi's, Hamann was eventually to take Jacobi to task for claiming that in the *Spinoza Letters* he (Jacobi) had used "faith" in the same sense as Hume. If that was the case, then Jacobi was operating at a philosophical level of reflection quite foreign to Hamann. See below, p. 23 of *David Hume*, and footnote 17. For possible affinities with Herder, cf. Herder, *Briefe, das Studium der Theologie betreffend (Letters Concerning the Study of Theology)*, 2nd ed., 1785; *Herder's Sämtliche Werke*, ed. Bernhard Suphan, 33 Vols. (Berlin: Weidmannsche Buchhandlung, 1883–1917), Part 3, Letter 25.

76 Aristotle, *Politics*, 1.2.1253a20.

77 Here Jacobi is practically quoting Helvétius. For the reference see below, p. 192 of Jacobi's text, and footnote to Helvétius.

78 See Introduction, pp. 30–31 above.

- 79 See St John 14:6–7.
- 80 Hamann, *Golgotha und Scheblimini*, in *Sämtliche Werke*, Vol. 3, p. 313.
- 81 See the parable of the unjust steward, Luke 16:3. Also, Hamann's letter to Jacobi of 14 November 1784, *Briefwechsel*, II.3., #1091, p. 388, lines 20–21.
- 82 The Leipzig Fair was held annually at Easter and in September.
- 83 See Mendelssohn's letter to Elise Reimarus, 29 April 1785, *Mendelssohn-Briefwechsel*, ed. Alexander Altmann, Vol. III, #692, *Moses Mendelssohn. Gesammelte Schriften* (Stuttgart: Fromann-Holzboog, 1977), Vol. XIII.
- 84 26 April 1785; see above, Jacobi's text, p. 117, and the note to the title of Mendelssohn's *Memoranda*.
- 85 In the actual letter there is added here: "Those of the party of the Archangel are illumined by Wachter's *Elucidarius cabalisticus*"; see Scholz, *Pantheismusstreit*, 140. The story of the battle between Satan and the Archangel Michael comes from Jewish folklore. In the present context "the party of the Archangel" are of course those who deny that Spinoza is an atheist. The connection between Spinoza and the Cabbala was first made for the learned world of the eighteenth century by a certain Johann Georg Wachter, in a book written and published in German, *Der Spinozismus im Judenthum, oder, die von dem heutigen Judenthum, und dessen Geheimen Kabbala, vergötterte Welt . . .* (*Spinozism in Judaism, or, The World as Deified by Contemporary Judaism and Its Secret Cabbala*; Amsterdam, 1699). Wachter's point was that the godlessness of Spinoza's philosophy had its source in Jewish religious tradition. Later Wachter retracted this earlier charge of godlessness, both as directed against the Cabbala and against Spinoza, but still insisted on the identity of the two. He made his retraction in a book that was written in Latin and therefore never enjoyed the popularity of the first, *Elucidarius cabalisticus* (Rome [Halle, in fact], 1706; this is the book to which Jacobi is referring now). By the two parties, the Archangel's and Satan's, Jacobi probably means the two interpretations of Spinoza and the Cabbala as represented by Wachter's two books. For the history of the reception of Spinoza and the connection made between his philosophy and the Cabbala, see Gershom Scholem, "Die Wachtersche Kontroverse über den Spinozismus und ihre Folge," cited at note to Jacobi's p. 22.
- 86 In this respect Jacobi proved to be successful. In retrospect, Goethe was to describe the events that followed as an "explosion." *Dichtung und Wahrheit*, v, *Sämtliche Werke*, xvi, p. 681.
- 87 The friend is Hamann. The letter is dated 1–2 June 1785, #840 in the *Hamann-Briefwechsel*; the reference to Mendelssohn is on pp. 447–48.
- 88 *Morgenstunden, oder Vorlesungen über das Daseyn Gottes*, Erster Theil (Berlin: Voß, 1785). The second part was never produced.
- 89 Letter of 22–30 June 1785, #846 in the *Hamann-Briefwechsel*; the news is on p. 466.

- 90 21 July 1785. The text is in the second edition, pp. 230–31; Scholz, *Pantheismusstreit*, pp. 181–82.
- 91 I.e. Elise's brother.
- 92 Intended is Reimarus, the brother of Elise. Cf. letter to Hamann of 13 October 1785, *Hamann-Briefwechsel*, Vol. VI, #881, p. 94.
- 93 It was part of Mendelssohn's strategy not to have Jacobi see the book except in print. See Mendelssohn's letter to Elise Reimarus of 24 May 1785, reprinted in Scholz, *Pantheismusstreit*, pp. 319–21. As Altmann points out, it is clear from this letter that Mendelssohn had given up trying to reach a common ground of debate with Jacobi. With the publication of his *Morgenstunden*—in which he granted that Lessing was a Spinozist, but of a sort totally compatible with the spirit of the rational religion of the Enlightenment—he was in fact stepping out of the fray. Mendelssohn had no intention of writing a sequel to his book and confronting Jacobi directly. It is also clear from the letter that Mendelssohn was irritated by what he strongly suspected to be Jacobi's "self-conceit and obstinacy." See Altmann, *Life of M.M.*, pp. 648–50.
- 94 The charge that Mendelssohn had not lived up to the terms of the contest but was stealing a march on Jacobi is only thinly veiled. Altmann remarks: "[Mendelssohn] had studiously refrained from including [in his *Morgenstunden*] any reference to Jacobi's report on Lessing or to the letter to Hemsterhuis, and thus there was no obligation on his part to submit the manuscript to Jacobi. Mendelssohn had simply written a book on the proofs for the existence of God and on Spinozism—nothing more." *Life of M.M.*, p. 647. This seems disingenuous to me. Mendelssohn had in fact done much more. He had held Jacobi at bay by temporizing in the debate, and in the *Morgenstunden* he was trying to pre-empt the possibility of any scandal from an eventual announcement of Lessing's alleged Spinozistic tendencies by fixing a totally innocuous meaning of Spinozism in the mind of the public. However "self-conceited and obstinate" Jacobi might have been (and no doubt he was), he had good cause to feel that he had been made a fool of.
- 95 *Copia ob fugam vacui* ("a copy for the sake of avoiding a lack") is an expression Hamann repeatedly used in his correspondence with Jacobi whenever he recorded the text of letters sent to third parties. (See, e.g., *Hamann-Briefwechsel*, Vol. VII, Letter #1070, 2–3 June 1787, p. 222; Letter #1140, 4–10 March 1788, p. 427). It would be rendered nowadays as "for the record." In the present context Jacobi perhaps has this meaning of *fuga vacui* in mind, since he is literally pre-empting the possibility that his true position remain unstated. However, see Jacobi's use of *in fugam vacui* in *Jacobi to Fichte* (below, p. 39 of Jacobi's text) where the expression clearly denotes horror in the face of a nothingness.
- 96 See the Preface to the first edition of the dialogue *David Hume* translated below.

- 97 See Supplement VIII, p. 435 of the second edition, and my note, p. 378 below.
- 98 Claude-Adrien Helvétius, 1715–71: a sensationist of the French Lockean school, he tried to derive the whole of man's psychological and moral character from environmental factors. *De l'homme, de ses facultés intellectuelles et de son éducation* (London, 1781), especially Section 1. See below, p. 192 of Jacobi's text and note about Helvétius. For Diderot, see Introduction, p. 26 above.
- 99 Matt. 6:24, Luke 16:13; Matt. 6:21, Luke 12:34.
- 100 The reference is to John the Baptist; see Matt. 3:4.
- 101 The term is probably used here in the broad sense of "rebirth" or "regeneration."
- 102 The reference is to *Oeuvres complètes de M. Helvétius*, 2 vols. (London: 1781), printed in octavo format; Vol. I: *De l'esprit*; Vol. II: *De l'homme, de ses facultés intellectuelles et de son éducation*. See Section 2, ch. 4 of the second volume, pp. 59–60, "On how spirit acts," or "That all its operations are reduced to observation of similarities and differences, of the conformities or the lack thereof of diverse objects between themselves or with respect to us. That any judgment passed after comparison of physical objects is nothing but a pure sensation. . . ."
- 103 Num. 21:8–9, Kings 18:4.
- 104 Mark 9:50, Luke 14:34.
- 105 "The wise of a nation are the fools of a foolishness common to all." The reference is very likely to La Rochefoucauld. *Maximes* (1678), #27, "Foolishness pursues us at every stage of life. If someone appears wise, that's only because their follies are in proportion to their age and their fortune."
- 106 Hamann, *Wolken. Ein Nachspiel Sokratischen Denkwürdigkeiten* (*Clouds. A Postlude to Socratic Memorabilia*; 1761), *Sämtliche Werke*, Vol. 2, pp. 107–08. Jacobi is very free and selective with Hamann's text.
- 107 The following lines are from Job 28.
- 108 Jacobi is harking back to the theme of the "elastic place" that propels one to the truth. See p. 33 of Jacobi's text. In the context of Lavater's earlier attempt at converting Mendelssohn to Christianity, the implication of Jacobi's words is that Mendelssohn cannot see the truth as proclaimed by Jacobi for the same reason that he cannot be a Christian. One can appreciate Mendelssohn's angry reaction to Jacobi's writing.
- 109 Psalms 23:3; 25:4–5; 86:11; 143:8–10.
- 110 Johann Friedrich Wilhelm Jerusalem (1709–89), *Betrachtungen über die vornehmsten Wahrheiten der Religion* (*Considerations Concerning the Main Truths of Religion*), 2nd improved edition (Braunschweig: Fürstl. Waisenshaus-Buchhandlung, 1760); Second Part, 1776; Second Volume of Second Part, 1779. Jacobi's quote is from the 1776 volume, pp. 119–20; the stresses are his. Jacobi was led to Jerusalem's

Betrachtung by the reading of Herder's *Letters Concerning the Study of Theology*. See letter to Hamann, 11 January 1785, *Hamann-Briefwechsel*, Vol. v, #797, p. 321. Jerusalem was a Lutheran theologian and a promoter of the Enlightenment. The anonymous publication of the *Betrachtungen* made him a foremost exponent of neology, i.e. a school of biblical interpretation committed to the reading of Scripture in purely rational terms. The section from which Jacobi is quoting is almost Kantian in tone. The purpose of the biblical narrative about the origin of creation is to remind reason in striking fashion of truths that are necessary to morality. There is no attempt on the part of the Bible to explain just how the world is made. Such explanation is the function of reason. Yet the biblical narrative provides a limit to reason. It is a reminder of truths that, though inherent to reason, cannot ever be comprehended by it. According to Jerusalem, the history of philosophy is full of the ruins of systems that collapsed because they were the product of reason trying to overreach itself. It is strange that Jacobi should here be appealing to the authority of Jerusalem, since Jerusalem's thesis, namely that the Bible is concerned with practical, not theoretical truths, is precisely the one that Mendelssohn was enunciating against Jacobi. Jacobi apparently met "the old worthy Jerusalem" in Braunschweig during his visit to Lessing, and was very impressed by him. See Jacobi to Heinse, *Briefwechsel*, 1.2, Letter #200, 20.23.24 October 1780, p. 202.

- 111 *Pontius Pilatus, oder, Die Bibel im Kleinen und der Mensch im Großen (Pontius Pilatus, or, the Bible Writ Small and Man Writ Large; Zürich, J.C. Füessli, 1782–85)*, 4 vols, Vol. II, p. 65; see Jacobi, *Against Mendelssohn's Accusations*, Scholz, *Pantheismusstreit*, p. 364. The book is mentioned by Jacobi's young friend Thomas Wizenmann in a letter to Jacobi of 22 May 1783. (*Briefwechsel*, 1.3, Letter #895, p. 150; also Letter #1054 of 4 July 1784, p. 334, where Wizenmann notifies Jacobi of the publication of the third volume of the work. See Goltz, *Thomas Wizenmann, der Freund*, Vol. 1, pp. 309–10.) Wizenmann wrote a short commentary on the book, which he must have sent in manuscript form to Jacobi with the letter of 22 May 1783. Jacobi apparently dissuaded him from proceeding with the project. (See Wizenmann's letter of 5 July 1783, #910, p. 169.) The publication of this book caused a rift between Lavater and Goethe.
- 112 *Pontius Pilatus* (see note immediately above), Vol. II, pp. 71–72.

DAVID HUME ON FAITH

- 1 *Epicharmos' Trochaic Fragments*, tr. E. O. Winstedt, as cited in Cicero, *Letters to Atticus*, 1.19. Jacobi cites in the original Greek. Epicharmos (5th century B.C.), author of comedies, was falsely reputed in antiquity to be the author of a collection of sayings.
- 2 See above, *Spinoza Letters*, p. 180 of Jacobi's text, and footnote about Pascal.