

## **THE PROVOCATIONS OF NIHILISM**

**THE PROVOCATIONS OF NIHILISM: PRACTICAL PHILOSOPHY AND  
AESTHETICS IN JACOBI, KANT, AND SCHELLING**

Jeremy Proulx, H.B.A., M.A.

A Thesis

Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies

in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements

for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

McMaster University

© Copyright by Jeremy Proulx, October 2010

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY (2010)

McMaster University

(Philosophy)

Hamilton, Ontario

TITLE:       The Provocations of Nihilism: Practical Philosophy and Aesthetics in  
              Jacobi, Kant, and Schelling

AUTHOR:     Jeremy Proulx, H.B.A. (Trent), M.A. (Western)

SUPERVISOR: Professor Brigitte Sassen

NUMBER OF PAGES: viii; 195.

## Abstract

The purpose of the dissertation is to describe how Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi's diagnosis of nihilism at the heart of the rationalist metaphysics of the Enlightenment provokes a turn to practical philosophy and aesthetics as alternative areas of philosophical scrutiny. I divide my analysis into two basic parts, treating practical philosophy and aesthetics respectively. The first part argues that Jacobi's debate with Moses Mendelssohn provokes the development of two unique approaches to practical philosophy, Jacobi's and Kant's. I interpret Jacobi's famous *salto mortale* as a balance between passively accepting feeling as a legitimate revelation of truth and actively creating the practical context in which feeling can appear as meaningful in the first place. I also argue that in his practical response to the Jacobi-Mendelssohn debate, Kant is still susceptible to Jacobi's critique of Enlightenment rationalism. In the second part, I turn my attention to how Kant and the early Schelling both develop their aesthetic theories as a response to Jacobi's diagnosis of nihilism. I show that Schelling's reinterpretation of Kant's theory of the postulates subtly introduces an aesthetic dimension to philosophy in the process of employing Jacobian ideas to address problems in Kant. I continue on to interpret Kant's *Critique of Judgment* as unified in its attempt to respond to Jacobi by accounting for the sensible elements of experience as legitimate domain for philosophers. But I also argue that Kant's unwillingness to see the world as a creative accomplishment of human reason ultimately condemns his project to failure. I conclude by showing that Schelling's *System of Transcendental Idealism* finally makes good on Jacobi's call to develop a philosophy that accounts for the active role that agents have in the constitution of a meaningful world of experience.



## Acknowledgements

Several people contributed to the final form of this thesis. First and foremost, my PhD advisor, Brigitte Sassen, was as a constant source of support. I remember being intimidated by the sheer volume of material in the German philosophical tradition and Brigitte was a remarkably helpful guide through several complicated texts. Brigitte somehow managed to relentlessly push me to write while at the same time allowing me to find my own way.

I would also like to acknowledge the efforts of my other committee members, John Russon and Richard T.W. Arthur. John's impressive knowledge of German philosophy helped me see problems in my interpretations and his own original work is an inspiration. Richard's knowledge of the Enlightenment and modern philosophy more generally helped me see connections between my own research and thinkers I would not have encountered otherwise. Richard's insightful comments on early versions helped avoid some problematic points.

I also extend my gratitude to the Department of Philosophy at McMaster University for providing me with resources and a home in which to pursue my research. A CGS Grant from the SSHRC provided me with financial support that, among other things, made it possible for me to spend time in Germany. A seminar on philosophical anthropology taught by Prof. Dr. Gerald Hartung at the Philipps-Universität Marburg helped me to organize and deepen my understanding of Kant and Schelling. I also thank the ARPA, the CPA and the International Kant Congress for providing me with the opportunity to present my research.

I would like to thank my parents Diane Sebastian and David Proulx and my grandparents George and Betty Proulx for supporting me from the beginning. I also acknowledge my friend Michael Hyman, whose remarkable creativity is an inspiration. Finally, I cannot imagine having been able to complete this work without the constant, unwavering support of my loving wife Barbara Slim.

## Table of Contents

|  |     |
|--|-----|
| <b>Abstract</b>  | iii |
| <b>Acknowledgments</b>   | iv  |
| <b>Table of Contents</b>   | v   |
| <b>Abbreviations and Primary Sources</b>                             | vii |
| <b>Introduction: The Aesthetic Question</b>                          | 1   |
| <b>Part 1: Practical Philosophy</b>                                  | 14  |
| Chapter I: Theory and Practice in the Jacobi-Mendelssohn Debate      | 15  |
| 1. <i>Jacobi's Salto Mortale</i>                                     | 19  |
| 2. <i>Feeling as Orientation in Philosophy</i>                       | 28  |
| 3. <i>Mendelssohn's Common Sense</i>                                 | 34  |
| 4. <i>Concluding Remarks</i>   | 39  |
| Chapter II: Rational Faith and Practical Postulates                  | 41  |
| 1. <i>On Orientation in Thinking</i>                                 | 42  |
| 2. <i>Kant's Theory of the Postulates</i>                            | 50  |
| 3. <i>Concluding Remarks</i>   | 60  |
| Chapter III: Jacobi's Philosophy of Action                           | 62  |
| 1. <i>Jacobi on Kant</i>   | 65  |
| 2. <i>Consciousness and Action</i>                                   | 69  |
| 3. <i>The Life of Reason</i>   | 74  |
| 4. <i>Concluding Remarks</i>   | 78  |
| <b>Part 2: From Practice to Aesthetics</b>                           | 79  |
| Introductory   | 80  |
| Chapter IV: Schelling's <i>Philosophical Letters</i>                 | 89  |
| 1. <i>Precarious Postulates: The Tübingen Interpretation of Kant</i> | 92  |
| 2. <i>Creativity in the Early Schelling</i>                          | 98  |
| 3. <i>The "Proper Principle of Aesthetics"</i>                       | 102 |
| 4. <i>How to Read Kant, or Schelling's Theory of the Postulates</i>  | 105 |
| 5. <i>Schelling's Jacobianism</i>                                    | 112 |
| 6. <i>Concluding Remarks on Greek Tragedy</i>                        | 117 |
| <i>Excursus: On the Letter form in Philosophy</i>                    | 120 |

|  |     |
|--|-----|
| Chapter V: Freedom, Beauty and Destination in Kant's third <i>Critique</i> | 122 |
| 1. <i>Kant's Critique of Spinoza</i>                                       | 127 |
| 2. <i>The Miracle of Beauty</i>  | 134 |
| 3. <i>Art and the Fecundity of Nature</i>                                  | 141 |
| 4. <i>Sublime Impotence</i>  | 149 |
| 5. <i>Concluding Remarks</i>   | 151 |
| Chapter VI: The Art of Self  | 153 |
| 1. <i>Transcendental Idealism and Natural Prejudice</i>                    | 155 |
| 2. <i>Activity and Passivity in the Self</i>                               | 165 |
| 3. <i>Practical Philosophy and the Moral Order of the World</i>            | 169 |
| 4. <i>Art as Keystone</i>  | 175 |
| 5. <i>Concluding Remarks</i>   | 181 |
| <b>Conclusion</b>  | 184 |
| <b>Bibliography</b>  | 188 |

## Abbreviations and Primary Sources

### *F.H. Jacobi*

References to Jacobi are to: Jacobi, F.H. 1812-25. *Werke*, 6 volumes. Edited by F.H. Jacobi and F. Köppen. Leipzig: Fleischer.

|              |   |
|--------------|---|
| 1815 Preface | Preface to <i>David Hume über den Glauben, oder Idealismus und Realismus. Ein Gespräch (1815)</i> |
| DH           | <i>David Hume über den Glauben, oder Idealismus und Realismus. Ein Gespräch</i>                   |
| SB           | <i>Über die Lehre des Spinoza in Briefen an den Herrn Moses Mendelssohn (1785)</i>                |
| SB2          | <i>Über die Lehre des Spinoza in Briefen an den Herrn Moses Mendelssohn (1789)</i>                |

### *Immanuel Kant*

References to Kant are to the standard *Akademie* edition of Kant's works: Kant, Immanuel. 1968. *Werke*. 8 volumes. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter.

|             |   |
|-------------|---|
| CPR         | <i>Critique of Pure Reason</i>                |
| CPrR        | <i>Critique of Practical Reason</i>           |
| CJ          | <i>Critique of Judgment</i>                   |
| Orientation | <i>Was heißt: sich in denken orientieren?</i> |

### *Moses Mendelssohn*

|               |   |
|---------------|---|
| AFL           | <i>An die Freunde Lessings</i>                                |
| Morgenstunden | <i>Morgenstunden, oder Vorlesungen über das Daseyn Gottes</i> |

*F.W.J. Schelling*

References to Schelling are to: Schelling, F. W.J. 1927. *Schellings Werke*. Edited by Manfred Schröter. Munich: Beck.

|        |   |
|--------|---|
| DC     | <i>Philosophical Letters on Dogmatism and Criticism</i>                 |
| I      | <i>Of the I as the Principle of Philosophy</i>                          |
| SP     | <i>Das Älteste System Programme des deutschen Idealismus</i>            |
| System | <i>System of Transcendental Idealism</i>                                |
| TE     | <i>Treatise Explicatory of the Idealism in the Science of Knowledge</i> |

# Introduction:

## The Aesthetic Question

These earnest ones may be informed of my conviction  
That art is the highest task  
And the proper metaphysical activity of this life.

– Friedrich Nietzsche, *Forward to Richard Wagner*

How is it that the world has meaning for us? This is a large question, too large indeed for a doctoral thesis. But it is precisely questions of this sort that motivated the classical German philosophers. This period of the history of philosophy, running for about fifty years from the late eighteenth to the early-mid nineteenth century, was an immensely rich period that witnessed the meteoric rise of several leading figures in the West. And the continuing influence of this period is due precisely to the bold risks it takes, its ambitious projects, lofty ideals and ostentatious claims. Beginning with such a large question, then, is part of what is involved in writing about classical German philosophy.

Indeed, it is this very question that is at issue in one of the most captivating and enigmatic documents of the classical German tradition, the fragmentary, so-called “*Ältestes System-Programme des deutschen Idealismus/The Oldest System Program of German Idealism*.” Here, three central figures in late eighteenth-century Germany (Hölderlin, Schelling and Hegel, all of them the fragment’s putative authors) propose a new direction for philosophy. The thematic thrust of the fragment – and the note on which it concludes – is the desire to find a philosophy that would be able to re-enchant the dead concepts of classical metaphysics with a renewed, an aesthetic meaning. Here is the relevant passage:

Until we make the ideas aesthetic, i.e., mythological, they will have no interest for the *people*; and conversely, until the mythology is rational, the philosopher will perforce be ashamed of it. Thus the enlightened and the unenlightened must at long last clasp hands; mythology must become philosophical, and the people rational, while philosophy must become mythological, in order to make the philosophers sensuous. Then eternal unity will prevail among us. No more the contemptuous glance, no more the blind quaking of the people before their sages and priests. Only then can we expect the *equal* formation of *all* forces, in particular persons as well as in all individuals. No longer will any force be suppressed; universal freedom and equality of spirits will then prevail! – A higher spirit, sent from heaven, will

have found this new religion among us; it will be the very last and the grandest of the works of humanity.<sup>1</sup>

It is important to see that the sunny optimism on such conspicuous display here is not the optimism that we in the West have come to expect from philosophy; it's not the optimism, that is, that presumes to be able to discover the Truth through reason alone and to reorder the world according to its dictates, an optimism perhaps better described as hubris. Indeed, Krell observes the optimism here takes its lead, as in the early Nietzsche, from a deeply felt pessimism about the dark, uncontrollable forces that constantly threaten to bubble up and swallow us whole.<sup>2</sup> What makes the optimism in this fragment of a new stripe is this awareness that certain aspects of our existence that cannot be explained or even adequately expressed in purely rational philosophical language. It is for this reason that aesthetics, sensuality (*die Sinnlichkeit*) and the relevance of the individual and the people (*das Volk*) become a central theme. Several lines earlier the authors wonder, "How must a world be fashioned for a moral creature?"<sup>3</sup> This question, at the very centre of the new physics envisioned by the *System-Programme*, is not a question of how philosophy might come to discover a pre-existing order of the cosmos; it is rather a question of how to structure the world speculatively, through ideas furnished by philosophy and from data supplied by experience.<sup>4</sup> This is no mere call to energize sluggish (*Langsamen*) experimentation with the metaphysical apparatus of classical metaphysics. What the authors of the *System-Programme* intend is to reform physics into a creative endeavour. This means that even the cold, impersonal experimenter, proceeding indifferently in his observation of nature must have what the authors call an "aesthetic sense" (*ästhetischen Sinn*).

This idea of an "aesthetic sense" is difficult to get a grip on, but its absolute centrality, not only for the fragment's authors, but also for this whole generation of German philosophy, is unquestionable. Indeed, it is this idea that answers the question of how the world has meaning for us. The world has meaning to us because it is a result of our own creativity; we can know it and know our relation to it because we had a hand in making it.<sup>5</sup> It is important to notice that Kant agrees with the general thrust of this sentiment: we

<sup>1</sup> "Das Älteste System Programme des deutschen Idealismus." Translated, alongside the original German, by David Ferrell Krell in "The Oldest Programme toward a System in German Idealism." In *The Tragic Absolute*. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005) 25-26. Henceforth, OSP.

<sup>2</sup> In this context, Krell points out that while chronologically absurd, the mysterious authorship of the *System-Programme* could be ignored altogether and we could decide to identify the early Nietzsche as the thinker most closely aligned to the ideas expressed in the text. (2005, 43) I find this admittedly glib suggestion to be a welcome break from the scholarly, but rather fruitless debates about authorship.

<sup>3</sup> OSP, 23.

<sup>4</sup> "... wenn die Philosophie die Ideen, die Erfahrung die Data angibt, können wir endlich die Physik im Großen bekommen, die ich von spätem Zeitaltern erwarten." (OSP, 23)

<sup>5</sup> We can understand this sentiment only partly through an appeal to Giambattista Vico's famous remark, *Geometrica demonstramus quia facimus*, we demonstrate geometry because we make it. Vico's point is that we can only have *a priori* knowledge of something we have made, something that is a product of our own rational process. In fact, one of the results of this thesis will be to have revealed a deeper sense behind the idea that we can only really know things we have had a hand in making. More than merely a result of rationality atwork, our knowledge of the world is an aesthetic achievement consisting in both an intuitive

only know appearances, and appearances are precisely those things that have been conditioned by human cognitive structures. But even the most adroit cognitive faculty does not an aesthetic sense make. An aesthetic sense, as several of the early German romantic idealists are eager to remind us, is something through which we can have an insight not only into the products of rational demonstration, but also into the mysterious processes with which we are all inextricably bound up, but which are not entirely our own. In a word, an aesthetic sense at once implies active creativity and passive receptivity in the face of what is created thereby. While meaning must be something we take part in, it also requires a moment of irreducible otherness that confronts our activity and renders us passive.

But in order to get a better grip on the function of this idea of an “aesthetic sense,” we need to understand its history, the context in which aesthetics can appear as a solution to a problem. Why did the three putative authors of the *System-Programme* think this way? What prompts this turn to aesthetics as a way to empower ideas and give them meaning for people, not just philosophers? What is it that aesthetics provides that the concepts of classical metaphysics cannot? Why does the faith that metaphysics can provide meaningful answers to deep existential questions come to be questioned? How does philosophy respond to this loss of faith? It is this basic constellation of questions that guides the historical and philosophical analysis this dissertation pursues. I suggest that if we are to understand the motivation for the turn to aesthetics that gripped German philosophy at the end of the eighteenth century, then we need to understand the events that propelled a loss of faith in classical metaphysics to the centre of mainstream debates. For the interest in aesthetics was not just an interest in art and beauty as *topics* for philosophers to treat; it is not an interest in aesthetics as a branch of philosophy, another “philosophy of . . .” of the sort that have lamentably become so popular on today's philosophical scene. The turn to aesthetics signalled in the *System-Programme* is a turn to a wholly new way of understanding the processes involved in discovering meaning in the universe. Indeed, and this will come to be at the centre of a constellation of themes with which this thesis is concerned, the *System-Programme* brings into question the very assumption that meaning is something we discover (*finden*) rather than something we invent (*erfinden*).<sup>6</sup> Thus the idea of “discovering” meaning does not really capture the new approach to philosophy signalled in the *System-Programme*. For these philosophers, meaning is not discovered at all, it is created; it is a creative achievement! So to demand an “aesthetic sense” of philosophers is not, or not only, to demand a philosopher with developed aesthetic sensibilities; it is not to demand some version of Hume’s ideal critic. What these philosophers demand is the capacity for creativity. “The philosopher must possess as much aesthetic force as the poet,” they declare, “Those human beings who are devoid of aesthetic sense are our pedantic philosophers.”<sup>7</sup> Ideas must be made to come alive; they must be products of a truly creative activity.

---

passivity and an active construction of the categories with which we engage in the very process of generating what is intuitively given.

<sup>6</sup> I owe this distinction to Nietzsche, to his discussion in *Beyond Good and Evil*, §11.

<sup>7</sup> OSP, 24.



This idea finds early expression in J.G. Hamann's idea that, as he puts it, "Poetry is the mother-tongue of the human race, as the garden is older than the ploughed field; painting, than writing; song, than declamation; parables, than logical deduction; barter, than commerce."<sup>8</sup> Since poetic and aesthetic images are the most basic modes of human expression, Hamann seems to want to say, we need to see that the world itself is an aesthetic phenomenon. "To speak is to translate from an angelic language into a human language," Hamann writes, "that is, to translate thoughts into words."<sup>9</sup> In this, Hamann challenges the representational paradigm whereby a word stands for some object in the world. Translation, itself a creative act, is the process through which nature becomes what it is. Here we have a viable alternative to the idea of philosophy as a task of interpreting and cataloguing the kinds of things there are in the world.

Coming back to our initial question, this thesis begins at one such moment when the question of how the world has meaning for us pushed itself into the mainstream philosophical arena. This moment is defined by two major events in German intellectual history. First, in 1781 Kant published his *Critique of Pure Reason*, his first *Critique*. The book was nothing less than a thoroughgoing critique of metaphysics as it was practiced at the time; its object, nearly all of Kant's contemporaries; its aim, to provide a firm foundation for philosophy that prevents unfounded speculations into transcendent territory, something that was practically synonymous with metaphysics at the time. The text, as is well known, did not enjoy the reception its author thought it deserved, but all of this began to change in 1785 with the second event, the publication of F. H. Jacobi's infamous *Über die Lehre des Spinoza in Briefen an den Herrn Moses Mendelssohn*/On the Doctrine of Spinoza in Letters to Moses Mendelssohn, the so-called *Spinoza Büchlein*.<sup>10</sup> This text, nothing at all like Kant's, also took there to be a deep problem with the metaphysical flights of the day. But instead of attempting to salvage something for philosophy, Jacobi dismissed philosophy altogether as unsuited to the job of delivering 'knowledge' of the transcendent objects of metaphysics. Jacobi's strategy – and he was a particularly adept polemical strategist – was to show that philosophy could not sustain both its commitment to discursive reason as capable of furnishing knowledge of God and human freedom and its commitment to these latter concepts. The claim was that the kind of knowledge delivered by discursive reason was not suited to these concepts, that we cannot 'prove' that God exists and we cannot 'prove' that we are free. Instead, Jacobi offered, we need to embrace feeling (*Gefühl*) and faith (*Glaube*) as the source of the immediate experience of the divine and the divine element of human life, freedom.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>8</sup> "Aesthetica in nuce." In *Writings on Philosophy and Language*. Edited by Kenneth Haynes. (Cambridge: 2007) 63.

<sup>9</sup> *Aesthetica in nuce*, 66.

<sup>10</sup> Henceforth, SB. Unless otherwise indicated, all references to Jacobi will be to *Friedrich Heinrich Jacobis Werke* (4 volumes). Edited by F.H. Jacobi and Friedrich Köppen (Leipzig: 1812-1825) by volume number and page, followed by a page reference, where possible, to George di Giovanni's translation, *The Main Philosophical Writings and the Novel Allwill*. (Montreal: McGill/Queen's University Press, 1994).

<sup>11</sup> In choosing these two texts to frame the discussion, I follow Frederick Beiser's suggestion that "Along with the publication of the *Kritik der reinen Vernunft* in May 1781, the most significant event in late eighteenth-century Germany was the so-called pantheism controversy between Jacobi and Mendelssohn." (1987, 44)

But this still does not explain how our question becomes an issue, and how these two texts are involved. Most relevant here is the second text, Jacobi's. But first, since his thinking is relatively unknown in North American philosophical circles, I would like to offer a word about Jacobi himself and his unique place in the history of German philosophy. Cassirer once remarked that there is a strange conflict between two aspects of Jacobi's thought, between "what Jacobi is as a thinker and writer and the historical consequences that developed out of his teaching."<sup>12</sup> Cassirer thus suggests that Jacobi's own thinking does not measure up to the historical consequences that followed from it. Cassirer surely makes an important point. If there was ever a philosopher whose work was influential in ways never intended, Jacobi is he. Still, while one cannot dispute that Jacobi's own exposition leaves much to be desired and his work was taken up in ways he never imagined, in reading his texts one cannot help but get the feeling that despite all of his misleading cues he has a deep and important philosophical point to make. As the polemical thrust behind the Spinoza controversy, one of the most important intellectual events in late eighteenth century Germany, Jacobi had a hand in shaping the dominant concerns of a whole generation of German thinkers. Jacobi, as Frank Ankersmit points out, had already formed his basic philosophical mentality by the time Kant began to publish his critical writings.<sup>13</sup> This meant that insofar as German idealism and romanticism can be defined as a struggle to find an alternative to the metaphysics Kant had wholly discredited, Jacobi was a particularly important resource. "Jacobi," Ankersmit continues, "was able to see the weaknesses in the Kantian system in a way unthinkable for those wrapped up in it."<sup>14</sup> One of the central claims this thesis will defend is that the ideas Jacobi developed in contrast to Kant's critical philosophy provide some of the most important resources for the post-Kantian project of reinterpreting and addressing its problems. In particular, and for reasons that will become clear as the story unfolds, I think that Schelling is an apt figure for tracing the impact of Jacobi's thought. This is not to say that Schelling and Jacobi are both, ultimately, teaching the same thing; indeed, both of them would have strenuously resisted this. It is to say, however, that Schelling and Jacobi share an important common ground, even if it is one that neither of them fully appreciated.

Coming back to the matter at hand, the polemical thrust of Jacobi's *Briefe* was that the exclusive reliance on discursive reason, something Jacobi associated with Enlightenment rationalism, can only ever reveal the world to us as a series of conditions, a web of mechanical causality in the fashion of Spinoza's *Ethics*. The problem was that this gives us a world without meaning. If all humans are capable of is discursive reason and all this provides are ever-more conditions, we can never come to a point outside of this causal web around which all these conditions congeal as a meaningful whole. It was with reference to this perceived problem that Jacobi introduced the concept of nihilism into philosophy. Reflecting on this in 1815, Jacobi writes,

<sup>12</sup> Ernst Cassirer, *Das Erkenntnisproblem 3: Die Nachkantischen Systeme*. (Berlin: Verlag, 1920) 17.

<sup>13</sup> "Jacobi: Realist, Romanticist, and Beacon for Our Time." In *Common Knowledge*. 14:2 (2008) 222.

<sup>14</sup> 2008, 222.

The moment man sought to prove scientifically the veracity of our representations of an immaterial world that exists beyond them, to prove the substantiality of the human spirit, and of a free Author of this universe who is however distinct from it, of a Providence conscious of its rule, i.e. a *personal* Providence, the only one that would be *truly* Providence – the moment he tried this, the object likewise disappeared before the eyes of the demonstrators. They were left with merely logical phantoms. And in this way they discovered nihilism.<sup>15</sup>

Here, then, is where our question emerges. What kind of philosophy must we have if the world is to be meaningful to us? How must we understand the world and the human place within it if we are to avoid seeing ourselves and everything else as just another term in a causal relation? This is not merely a problem in Jacobi's own time; it is a problem, Jacobi insists, inherent to the philosophical enterprise itself. Jacobi writes,

Ever since Aristotle the growing tendency among the schools has been to subordinate immediate knowledge to mediated cognition. The *faculty of perception* that originally grounds everything has been subordinated to the *faculty of reflection*, which is conditioned by abstraction – in other words, the prototype has been subordinated to the echtype; or the essence to the word, and reason to understanding.<sup>16</sup>

Philosophers who make this mistake have already lost themselves in the abyss of nihilism. As I shall explain in the first chapter, Jacobi's famous call for a *salto mortale* is made precisely in order to prevent the fall into the abyss; it is made in order to defend the natural faith we all have that our experience of the world tells us something about the objects of perception themselves. For if everything is mediated, then nothing, including us, can have real individual properties – there would be *nothing* to perceive, only an infinite concatenation of conditioned relations. In the context of the *Spinoza Büchlein*, Jacobi's main object of ire is the Spinozistic thesis that all things are what they are by virtue of their immanence in the substantial unity of God, but his criticism quickly finds another object in Kant's thesis that everything we experience is just an appearance, conditioned by the transcendental apparatus that makes empirical cognition possible. We shall have plenty of opportunity to explore Jacobi's alternative to this insidious nihilism in Part I of this thesis. Of more immediate concern is how Jacobi's text comes into confrontation with Kant's.

I mentioned that Kant's first *Critique* was not well received in the years immediately following its publication.<sup>17</sup> As if serendipitously, Jacobi provoked just the crisis that was necessary for Kant's real innovations to be appreciated by the wider philosophical community. The way Jacobi set things up allowed for only two kinds of knowing,

<sup>15</sup> *Werke* 2, 108; 583. This text is the 1815 preface to his text on *David Hume*. It also served as the general introduction to his 1815 collected works. Henceforth 1815 Preface.

<sup>16</sup> 1815 Preface: *Werke* 2, 11; 541.

<sup>17</sup> Brigitte Sassen, *Kant's Early Critics* (Cambridge: 2000) 1.

immediate and discursive. Jacobi did not want to reject the value of discursive reason altogether, but he did trumpet the absolute primacy of the immediate, of the feelings whose legitimacy can only be taken on faith. Thus Jacobi and his interlocutor Moses Mendelssohn (a prominent rationalist philosopher trained in the Leibniz/Wolff school) became locked in a seemingly intractable debate over the authority of reason and the role of feeling and faith. It was in the context of this debate – one of the classic debates in the history of philosophy – that the philosophical perspective described in Kant's first *Critique* first achieved the relevance Kant thought it always deserved. Though not immediately identified by Kant himself but rather by his follower and populariser Reinhold, Kant's philosophy seemed to offer a solution to the Jacobi-Mendelssohn debate. Kant was willing to grant to Jacobi that there really are some things we cannot *know*, that faith is an essential part of human life. But Kant was not willing to grant all to Jacobi, and he ultimately choose to side with Mendelssohn by claiming that whatever it is we feel, what compels faith is reason. Faith, for Kant, like everything else, is rational. And feeling, as Kant awkwardly puts it, is the feeling of reason's need.<sup>18</sup>

As I shall argue throughout the first part of this thesis, one of the results of this debate between Jacobi and Mendelssohn, then, was the emergence of two conceptions of faith and its function in practical philosophy; one an acceptance of immediate feeling, the other an attempt to square the subjective nature of faith with the traditional rationalist addiction to discursive reason. In a sense, Jacobi was on much firmer ground than Kant. Faith, *Glaube*, as late eighteenth century Germany would have understood it and how we still understand it today, is a feeling, a deeply felt conviction that is not amenable to rational illustration. This is the faith that Jacobi embraces and attempts to make some deeper philosophical sense of. Kant had a much more radical notion of faith, one that needed to explain the more traditional notion without abandoning rationality altogether. Kant never abandoned the idea that faith is a 'feeling', but he did subordinate this feeling to reason. It is significant that the 'conflict of faiths' that emerges in the opposition between Kant and Jacobi is characterized by Kant as two different approaches to philosophy itself. Late in his life, Kant remarks in a preface to a work of a former student that "the question is whether wisdom is *infused* into a person from above (by inspiration) or its height is *scaled* from below through the inner power of his practical reason."<sup>19</sup> The latter, Kant identifies with the true critical spirit, but "[h]e who asserts the former, as a passive means of cognition, is thinking of a chimera (*Unding*) – the possibility of supersensible

---

<sup>18</sup> *Was heißt: sich in denken orientieren?* In *Werke VIII*, 139; 8. Unless otherwise indicated, all references to Kant are to the pagination from *Kants Werke Akademie-Textausgabe*. (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1968), followed by a reference to an English translation. In the present case, I refer to "What Does it Mean to Orient Oneself in Thinking?" In *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason and Other Writings*. Translated by Allen Wood and George di Giovanni. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998). Henceforth, *Orientation*.

<sup>19</sup> "Preface to Reinhold Bernhard Jachman's *Examination of the Kantian Philosophy of Religion*." In *Werke VIII*, 441. In English translation in *Religion and Rational Theology*. Translated and Edited by Allen Wood and George di Giovanni. (Cambridge, 1996) 333. Jachman was a student of Kant's who grew to be a devoted friend in Kant's waning years. Kant supports this treatise of his dear friend as a corrective to all forms of "mysticism," with which Kant was constantly in battle throughout his entire career, and which was often, much to Kant's agitation, compared to his own rational faith.

experience (representing the transcendent as immanent) – and bases himself on a certain mysterious doctrine called mysticism."<sup>20</sup> In Kant's eyes, Jacobi was guilty of that former assertion, as were the post-Kantian idealists.

Despite their continual insistence that they were proceeding according to the spirit (if not the letter) of the Kantian philosophy, the systems of people like Fichte and Schelling never made it into Kant's good graces. One of the reasons for this – probably the chief reason – was that such systems relied on the notion of intellectual intuition, something that Kant had always rejected, and had explicitly denounced in the *Critique of Judgment*, the third *Critique*.<sup>21</sup> The distinguishing feature of human understanding is that it contains the universals under which judgment brings particulars. The understanding thus does not determine particulars, but only organizes them so that what is organized is contingent upon the diversity of nature given in intuition. If there were no such contingency, then understanding would be *intuitive* rather than *discursive*; that is, if the understanding did not depend on the faculty of sensibility to provide it with a manifold (*mannigfaltig*) of data, then it would be an intellectual intuition, which *spontaneously intuits* the whole rather than *receiving* the parts.<sup>22</sup> Here, there would be no distinction between whole and parts at all because everything would be unified and one in the famous night in which all cows are black.<sup>23</sup> If philosophy were like this, then it would be incapable of grasping freedom; its image of humanity would be one of absolute subservience to an order received from above. But "philosophy," Kant maintains,

in the literal meaning of the term, as a doctrine of wisdom, has an *unconditional* worth; for it is the theory of a *final end* of human reason, which can only be a single end toward which all others strive or to which they must be subordinated; and the complete *practical* philosopher (as an ideal) is he who fulfills this demand in himself.<sup>24</sup>

Philosophy for Kant is thus a labour (*Arbeit*) that answers the demand to fulfill the very purpose of human reason. Practical philosophy is the method through which such a demand can be fulfilled; it is not simply the pursuit of what works as opposed to the abstractions of theoretical reason; it is not pragmatic reason. It is rather, as Kant himself puts it, "everything that is possible through freedom"<sup>25</sup> and in this sense it is given *a priori* since anything that is truly free cannot be externally determined to action. To conceive the task of the philosopher as one of receiving wisdom from above (something Kant likens to a kind of *Alchemie*) would thus be to deny the freedom to actualize

---

<sup>20</sup> *Werke VIII*, 441, 333.

<sup>21</sup> All references to Kant's third *Critique* are to the Akademie edition of Kant's works, followed by a reference to Werner Pluhar's translation. (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1987) Henceforth CJ.

<sup>22</sup> CJ: *Werke V*, 405-10; 288-94.

<sup>23</sup> See Hegel's *Preface to Phenomenology of Spirit*. Translated by A.V. Miller. (Oxford 1977) 9.

<sup>24</sup> *Werke VIII*, 441; 333.

<sup>25</sup> CPR, A800/B828; 632. References to Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* will be to Kemp Smith's English translation (New York: St. Martens Press, 1965) and will maintain the common practice of referring to the paginations from the A and B editions.

practical goals through practical action. Jacobi's faith is on this model nothing more than a naive faith in *Alchemie* and its objects are mere chimera.

But notice that this way of posing the problem of how to do philosophy severely limits the kind of answer one might seek. Either we actively work our way to wisdom or we passively receive it. In setting things up like this Kant is attempting to define himself in opposition to religious *Schwärmer*s like Jacobi. If Kant wanted to include faith as a viable philosophical category and deny that its objects can be rationally demonstrated, then, lest he be misunderstood, he would have to set up his own position against any form of purely irrational faith. The Jacobi-Mendelssohn debate gave Kant just this opportunity.

Kant had already worked out the basic framework of his notions of practical reason and rational faith. It was these notions that Reinhold had suggested as ways to resolve the debate between Jacobi and Mendelssohn. But in the years immediately following the publication of Jacobi's *Spinoza Büchlein* and Reinhold's *Letters on the Kantian Philosophy*, Kant developed his practical philosophy and moral religion based strictly on the autonomy of reason and its systematic exigencies. Belief in human freedom, in God and in the afterlife is a perfectly rational belief since the very coherence of the universe as we know it requires that we embrace such beliefs. In this way, Kant is able to show that saving the dignity of religious conviction does not require that one as far as Jacobi's passive religious mysticism.

Thus it came to pass that given Kant's growing influence (ironically, something he owed at least in part to Jacobi) Jacobi was largely dismissed as a mystic, given to faith in a kind of alchemy. Part of the motivation for this dissertation – and the express purpose of Part I – is a desire to release Jacobi from this all-too-easy characterization. Kant, like Hegel after him, indeed like any great systematic philosopher, had an agenda. And we clerks of the tradition would all do well to take such judgments with a grain of salt. It is true that Jacobi is almost a parody of a non-systematic philosopher, and his style was certainly reflective of his anti-systematic tendencies. But the fact is that Jacobi had a very compelling point to make, albeit one that was shrouded in deeply mystical rhetoric and complicated by Jacobi's confusing presentation. It is the job of the historian and philosopher to read the tradition with a generous eye, and Jacobi, perhaps more so than several other figures, needs this kind of consideration.

While Jacobi and Kant both thought that they were, as Kant famously puts it, 'making room for faith', Jacobi's solution does not attempt to give faith a rational explanation. It is called faith precisely because it operates below the radar of rational demonstrability. Jacobi's contribution here is a kind of rudimentary practical philosophy that sees faith not only as passive reception of data from the external world, not only, that is, as a kind of mystical *infusion*, but also as consisting in certain practices that come to objectify the world taken passively on faith. For Jacobi too, then, labour (*Arbeit*) is an essential part of how humankind finds the world to be a meaningful place, but its importance does not imply the outright dismissal of a kind of *Alchemie* that describes the essential mystery of human experience. As I shall explain in Chapters One and Three, the core of Jacobi's practical philosophy is the claim that human activity is intimately and inextricably bound up with how the world appears to us as the meaningful world it is. On the one hand, we all find ourselves with immediate feelings that we cannot explain and cannot be attributed

to the activity of the subject, feelings that are not mediated by human cognition. On the other hand, these immediacies of human experience compel practical actions that flesh out the subjective content of these feelings in the real experience of an objective world. Jacobi's *salto mortale* is a kind of schema for this model of experience in that it is a free act that first opens up a context in which subjects take feelings as legitimate revelations of an objective world. It is in this sense that we can see Jacobi as an early predecessor of the methodological injunction of the *System-Programme*. When the authors of that text demand an aesthetic sense of philosophers they demand not only a certain kind of receptive sensibility, but also a creative ability that give reality to mere ideas, give aesthetic flesh and blood to the abstractions of philosophy.

As I argue in the first part, particularly in the first chapter, two paths of practical philosophy open up at the juncture in that Jacobi's polemical intervention enacts in German intellectual history, and the *System-Programme* is one of the results of the clash of these two approaches. The practical path opened up by Jacobi presents itself in the commitment to sensuality and the idea that God and immortality must be felt from within:

Finally come the ideas of a moral world, divinity, immortality – the overthrow of all {superstition} belief in a hinterhaven, the prosecution by reason itself of that hypocritical priesthood that has recently begun to ape reason. – the absolute freedom of all spirits who bear the intellectual world within themselves and dare not seek either God or immortality *outside themselves*.<sup>26</sup>

The authors of the *System-Programme* are unapologetic about their commitment to a kind of divine knowledge attained through looking inward, a kind of knowledge through which, as they say, “. . . a whole *world* comes to the fore – out of nothing – the sole true and conceivable *creation out of nothing*.”<sup>27</sup> This knowledge is a kind of divine creativity; it is the power to bring into existence that which was never there before. The authors are in this sense considerably more radical than Kant, or even Jacobi, who both, despite their other insurmountable differences, want to keep faith and knowledge completely separate. For his part, Kant never really abandoned the idea that philosophy had to remain contemplative. Even his practical philosophy was predicated on an assumption about a pre-existing world-order. And even in the most radical moments of his aesthetics, Kant insists that beauty is significant only because it reveals the intimate connection between humankind and this objective world-order. The divine knowledge necessary for the kind of creativity expressed in the *System-Programme* would remain forever beyond the reach of humankind. Similarly, Jacobi strove to maintain a strong distinction between faith and science, but he did so only in order to carve out a space for faith as “the distinguishing mark of the human race.”<sup>28</sup> But while for Kant faith could only ever be a rational

---

<sup>26</sup> OSP, 22-3.

<sup>27</sup> OSP, 22-3.

<sup>28</sup> 1815 Preface: *Werke* 2, 55; 561.

assumption, for Jacobi it becomes something much deeper, something much closer to the radical creativity envisioned by the authors of the *System-Programme*.

Faith is a shadowing of divine knowledge and will in the finite spirit of man. And if we could transform it into knowledge, then, at the moment of fulfillment, what the serpent promised to the lustful Eve in Paradise would come to pass: we would be like God.<sup>29</sup>

Jacobi does not think that such fulfillment is possible for a finite agent. His point is rather that there is an important, and importantly constitutive, difference between faith and knowledge. Faith can only ever be a “shadowing”, as Jacobi nicely puts it; to finally ‘know’ an object of faith would be to cease to be human. Yet if we shift the emphasis on faith as a shadowing of divine knowledge, if we, instead of calling it “only” a shadowing, draw attention to its *power* to shadow divine knowledge, then we can gain a wholly other appreciation of Jacobi’s deeper insight. It is a subtle but important point. If what we seek is perfect knowledge of an objective world order, the “view from nowhere” as Thomas Nagel has expressed it, then faith really does seem second best. From this perspective faith can only ever blindly accept what science and philosophy can prove. But if we take this scientific-philosophical hubris to be a false hope; if we take it, that is, that, as Schelling unforgettably puts it in the first edition of the Introduction to his 1797 *Ideas for a Philosophy of Nature*, “the idea of philosophy [is] only the result of philosophy itself, a universally valid philosophy, however, [is] an inglorious fantasy.”<sup>30</sup>; if we take this perspective, then we can see that Jacobi’s emphasis on faith is just another way of approximating divine knowledge. This approximation lacks the hubris of the view from nowhere. The faithful know that they are human, and know that faith is all they have. Yet faith and its practice can yield deeper insight into the divine than knowledge ever could. We have been struggling under the assumption that just knowing, just the kind of knowledge that science promises and peddles to the masses will make us happy, virtuous, peaceful, etc. But a good, honest look at the world would reveal to anyone that this project has been a failure. This thesis is an exploration of some significant historical alternatives to this failed approach to philosophy. And insofar as philosophy has still not dispelled what Schelling diagnoses as an ‘inglorious fantasy’, they are alternatives that still have relevance to us today.

The rationalist philosophy of the Enlightenment, the philosophy Jacobi had targeted in his *Briefe*, can accept neither the viability of feeling, nor the role of practical action in constituting the objective world. Kant’s critical philosophy showed that there was something wrong with this hubris of rationalism and he proposed that if we want to speak meaningfully about the objects of metaphysics, then we need to dismiss metaphysical proof in favour of the practical demand to postulate a universe in which moral action is both possible and makes sense. Jacobi and Schelling see that this is to do an injustice to the dynamic nature of human experience. If we think that wisdom comes through

<sup>29</sup> 1815 Preface: *Werke* II, 55-56; 561.

<sup>30</sup> Translated by Errol E. Harris and Peter Heath. (Cambridge: 1988) 9.



*infusion*, then we are committed to the absolute passivity of the subject. And if instead we think that wisdom is achieved through the struggle of practical reason, we are committed to an absolutely active subject, rendered passive by no object. Jacobi and Schelling both take this to be problematic, and their respective solutions are remarkably similar. For Jacobi's part, he advocates a *salto mortale* that actively embraces immediate feeling from a position of faith. The *salto* here is the action that creates the context in which the subject is passively receptive. No passivity without the context created by practical action. For Schelling's part, he agrees with Jacobi that we need to consider activity and passivity as moments of a single dynamic. My motivation for situating Jacobi in the context of post-Kantian philosophy and specifically aesthetics consists precisely in this; namely, that his practical philosophy represents an attempt to think the unity of activity and passivity. For Jacobi, we can only be passively receptive of divine revelation or of 'truth' insofar as we are always already active agents who have taken the leap into accepting feeling as a meaningful element of human experience.<sup>31</sup> This unity of activity and passivity is, I propose, a solution to the problem of nihilism that Jacobi himself diagnosed. In this, Jacobi was far beyond his own time. We need to take quite a leap ahead in classical German philosophy in order to find a philosopher venturing a similar reconciliation of activity and passivity. Indeed, it is arguably not until Schelling's 1795 *Philosophical Letters on Dogmatism and Criticism* that we find a comparable conception of practical philosophy. Significantly, it is at this very moment when practical philosophy makes the transition to aesthetics, the topic of the second part of this thesis. My basic thesis is that in Schelling's hands, Jacobi's critique of rationalism becomes a devastating critique of orthodox religion, so devastating that religion is replaced by art as avenue through which to appeal to the hearts and imaginations of people.

On this note, it is important to remember that all of Schelling, Hölderlin and Hegel were, well, not devoted Kantians, but were certainly committed to the evaluation of Kant's philosophical legacy. The *System-Programme* opens with a reference to Kant's doctrine of the postulates and the fact that it provides an example of the eventual collapse of all metaphysics into moral philosophy:

[...] *an ethics*. Inasmuch as the whole of metaphysics will in the future be subsumed under *moral philosophy* – a matter in which Kant, with his two practical postulates has merely provided and *example* and has *exhausted* nothing [...] <sup>32</sup>

The importance of Kant's doctrine of the postulates for Schelling and Hegel especially cannot be overstated, and the *System-Programme* propels the postulates and their proper interpretation right to the centre of the philosophical agenda of German idealism. One of the most important moments in the development of early German idealism is the

<sup>31</sup> Emil Fackenheim sets up the constellation of post-Kantian philosophy of religion in terms of Fichte's "religion of joyous moral action" and Schleiermacher's "religion of pious passivity," ultimately finding the unity of activity and passivity in Schelling's aesthetic idealism. See his *The God Within*. (Toronto, 1996) 53-60.

<sup>32</sup> OSP, 22.

reception of Kant's doctrine of the postulates. As Klaus Düsing has shown, both Schelling and Hegel were engaged in projects of reinterpreting Kant's doctrine of the postulates along the lines suggested in the *Oldest System-Programme of German Idealism*.<sup>33</sup> Instead of Kant's rational postulation of freedom, God and immortality for the sake of metaphysical context and systematic coherence, Schelling takes postulates to be practical demands to imaginatively construct the reality that postulates dictates. God becomes an object of practical action, a concept that we intuit within ourselves, but one that demands certain actions for its objective realization. Significantly, this conception of postulation also seems to be behind Jacobi's insistence on the importance of a *salto mortale*. To know that one is free is to act freely; to know God is to live a godly life. In taking the *salto mortale* one enacts the very freedom into which one leaps. Likewise, the process of aesthetic creativity can only be one where the activity and the passivity of the artist become moments of a single process that both discovers and creates all at once. In the context of a discussion of the postulation of a moral god, Schelling argues that 'knowing' God requires that we recognize a double submission, of the subject to the object and *vice versa*. Schelling refers to this double submission as 'the proper principle of aesthetics', by which he means that moments of passivity and activity are essential to the relationship with the divine. A moral God holds the world and ourselves within a boundary that stifles human activity, rendering us completely passive to the word of God. Yet to make God completely dependent on human activity is to embrace atheism and nihilism. Knowing God, indeed, knowing anything at all requires both the action that 'creates' what is known and the passivity in the face of what is created thereby.

I shall have more to in the Introduction to Part Two about what motivates this shift to aesthetics and in what it consists. I shall say now that this thesis is devoted to the task of exploring how this conception of the role of humankind as having in a hand in the mechanism of divine creativity emerges in the context of the turn to practical philosophy at the end of the eighteenth century and the subsequent turn to aesthetics to which practical philosophy eventually gave way. Let us turn now to an exploration of what motivates what comes to be understood as practical philosophy and how two of its most compelling exponents (Jacobi and Kant) collide on everything from its content to its actual function.

---

<sup>33</sup> See "The Reception of Kant's Doctrine of Postulates in Schelling's and Hegel's Early Philosophical Projects." Translated by Daniel O. Dahlstrom. In *The Emergence of German Idealism*. Edited by Michael Bauer and Daniel O. Dahlstrom. (Washington: The Catholic University of America Press, 1999).

## Part 1

### Practical Philosophy

yea, I would pluck ears of wheat  
*on the sabbath* just because I *have hunger*,  
*and the law is made for man*,  
*not man for the law*.

– F.H. Jacobi, *Jacobi to Fichte*.

## I

## Theory and Practice in the Jacobi-Mendelssohn Debate

[M]an'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.

– F.H. Jacobi

The cluster of polemical writings making up the Spinoza controversy that erupted around Lessing's putative Spinozism presents a daunting interpretive task.<sup>34</sup> Not only are the relevant texts painfully oblique, the main participants all have their own specific motivations that push the debate in competing directions. The controversy began in 1783, when Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi informed Moses Mendelssohn that Gotthold Ephraim Lessing had confessed to being a Spinozist. This mostly private debate did not become a full-blown controversy until 1785, with the publication of Jacobi's *Über die Lehre des Spinoza in Briefen an den Herrn Moses Mendelssohn/On the Doctrine of Spinoza in Letters to Moses Mendelssohn*, the so-called *Spinoza Büchlein*.<sup>35</sup> This haphazardly thrown together collection of letters to Mendelssohn, expositions of Spinoza's philosophy and general critiques of rationalism immediately sent a shockwave through the German intellectual scene. Within months, further texts appeared from Mendelssohn and Jacobi, and Kant was being urged to make his position on the matter known. On the surface, the

<sup>34</sup> Several accounts of The Spinoza controversy exist. Frederick Beiser's *The Fate of Reason*. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1987) contains a very good account in English, as does Alexander Altman's *Moses Mendelssohn: A Biographical Study*. (Alabama: University of Alabama Press, 1973). The texts that constitute the body of the debate are collected in Scholz, *Die Hauptschriften zum Pantheismusstreit zwischen Jacobi und Mendelssohn* (Berlin: Verlag von Reuther and Reichard, 1916), partially translated by Gérard Vallée in *The Spinoza Conversations Between Lessing and Jacobi* (New York: University Press of America, 1988). Though the debate is often referred to as the *Pantheismusstreit*, this is somewhat misleading since it actually has very little to do with pantheism. Jacobi's career a serial polemicist is actually known for at least three Controversies. The most well known is the one under discussion here, the so-called *Spinozismusstreit*. Another is the *Atheismusstreit*, the atheism debate that resulted in Fichte's dismissal from Jena. (see di Giovanni, 1989) Yet another is the *Pantheismusstreit* proper, the pantheism controversy that involved the accusation that Schelling was a pantheist and Schelling's bitter reply. (see Weischedel 1969; Ford 1965)

<sup>35</sup> Unless otherwise indicated, all references to Jacobi will be to *Friedrich Heinrich Jacobis Werke* (4 volumes). Edited by F.H. Jacobi and Friedrich Köppen (Leipzig: 1812-1825) by volume number and page, followed by a page reference, where possible, to George di Giovanni's translation, *The Main Philosophical Writings and the Novel Allwill*. (Montreal: McGill/Queen's University Press, 1994). A critical edition of Jacobi's works is now available, but I will make references to the 1812-25 edition of Jacobi's *Werke* since this is much more easily available, indeed it is even available digitally thanks to Google Books!

controversy concerned Jacobi's claim that Spinozism is fatalism and atheism, and that Lessing, one of the most esteemed figures in the German Enlightenment, with an unwavering devotion to reason as the final source of truth in philosophy, was a self-proclaimed Spinozist.<sup>36</sup> This was meant to establish that if Lessing could end up a Spinozist, then the whole project of the Enlightenment was doomed to a similar fate. The work was meant to be polemical, and for this purpose Jacobi could not have chosen better interlocutors. Mendelssohn was a highly respected Enlightenment philosopher, deeply committed to the Leibniz-Wolff school of metaphysics. And Lessing was, by many accounts, one of the most influential and respected figures in Germany at the time. As well, Lessing's recent death in 1781 would have made the evaluation of his philosophical legacy an especially timely and sensitive matter. Thus Jacobi's aim in the work is to associate Lessing with Spinoza, fatalism and atheism, thereby showing that the allegiance to reason the Enlightenment held so dear only leads to the requirement that it abandon the cherished notion of human freedom and the truths of natural religion.

But all this is just polemical veneer. Stripped of all the debates about the proper interpretation of Spinoza, and about the extent and nature of Lessing's Spinozism; stripped, that is, of everything that merely framed the debate, the controversy really concerned the old rationalist credo that the truths of metaphysics can be adequately demonstrated through discursive reason.<sup>37</sup> Jacobi's association of Lessing with Spinozism is really just a tool for making the broader – and much more interesting – point that the rationalist metaphysics dominating mainstream philosophy in Germany at the time will only end up denying the possibility of human freedom and undermining the importance of faith and morality. The historical significance of this occurred in the context of the long history of rebellion against the established order of organized religion.<sup>38</sup> But out of this largely negative point emerges Jacobi's most basic motivating claim; namely, that the feeling of ourselves, of God, of our moral responsibility, of our very identity as members of the human race finally hinges on an intimate and intensely personal experience. Jacobi wants to show that meaning, the deep kind of meaning that people expect to ground their actions and their identities, is not to be found in some pre-existing rational order that only reason can apprehend; it is rather *not to be found at all* (*nicht gefunden werden*); it is to be

---

<sup>36</sup> At this time in Germany, to be labelled a Spinozist was to be associated with the most vulgar determinism and atheism. It was the sort of thing that could easily lead to the loss of an official post, and it would have had a disastrous effect on one's reputation. One of the ironies of the Spinoza Controversy, however, was that in bringing the supposed evils of Spinozism to centre stage it sparked a Spinoza revival in Germany. For an account of Spinozism in Germany see Beiser 1987, 48-61.

<sup>37</sup> Here, I am only concerned with what Jacobi wanted to accomplish by associating Lessing with Spinozism, rather than with the details of this association. I follow Beiser's suggestion that, "We can understand the significance of Lessing's Spinozism only when we recognize that it was only a symbol – a symbol for the consequences of all rational inquiry and criticism." (1987, 80) I take the issue of Lessing's putative Spinozism as secondary to Jacobi's main concern; it was simply the best way for him to make an impact.

<sup>38</sup> I can only intimate this here, but I see Jacobi and the Spinoza controversy he spurred on as part of a long, slow and often violent rebellion against the authority of organized religion. We can trace this back to Martin Luther, follow it through the protestant reformation and through figures like Galileo, Bayle, Spinoza, Hume and forward to Kierkegaard and Nietzsche.

*invented (erfunden)*, generated out of the practical action of finite human agents. This, as I will argue in what follows, is the heart of Jacobi's polemic in the *Spinoza Büchlein*, and it is in this context that one can see more clearly Jacobi's positive proposal for a rudimentary form of practical philosophy of human action that takes its lead from a basic commitment to a kind of immediate experience that is not amenable to rational explanation.

Unfortunately, Jacobi's main interlocutor, Mendelssohn, seems to have been so blinded by Jacobi's charges against Lessing that he could not clearly see what was really at issue. This is due in no small part to Jacobi's sheer failure to present his ideas in a coherent manner, but in reading the relevant texts one cannot help but notice that seemingly no effort was made to understand the issues that actually motivated Jacobi. This is an unfortunate pattern that, as we shall see in the next chapter, was also repeated with Kant. Still, it is not surprising that Mendelssohn took the charges personally: he and Lessing shared a long and close friendship, and he was also deeply committed to the values of which Lessing was such a passionate defender, and that Jacobi had so shamelessly slandered. Yet again, it is difficult not to be struck by the way in which Jacobi and Mendelssohn simply seem to be talking past each other. Indeed, as I shall argue in what follows, had Mendelssohn been more attentive to Jacobi's argument, he would have perhaps realized the relative weakness of his own position. One of the ironies of the Controversy – and the reason it was so consequential – was that the further Mendelssohn went in his defence of rational speculation to deliver determinate knowledge of the objects of metaphysics, the more he provided an example of Jacobi's central philosophical claim that discursive thought requires a basis in the certainty of immediate feeling. For despite their seemingly irreconcilable philosophical commitments, Jacobi and Mendelssohn share the idea that speculative knowledge must always return to a ground of immediate, non-discursive experience for orientation. But where Jacobi developed his conceptual apparatus to support a practical philosophy that creates meaning grounded in this core devotion to immediate experience, Mendelssohn had to square this intensely personal intuition with a pre-existing definition of the rational order of the cosmos. This confusion only served to undermine his already precarious position in the debate with Jacobi and indeed the consistency of his own philosophical commitments. The result is that the apparent agreement between Mendelssohn and Jacobi only brings their differences into sharper relief. Where Mendelssohn attempted to make common sense into a faculty for orienting reason in its task of demonstrating the objects of metaphysics, Jacobi understood feeling as a faculty of orientation that compels one to take a leap of faith in accepting the veracity of what it discloses and to the activity that realizes what is felt.

Philosophically speaking, the controversy revolved around the possibility of knowing the supersensible – Mendelssohn's answer was that it could be rationally demonstrated; Jacobi thought it had to be practically realized, both through the initial act of the *salto mortale* into the arms of belief and through the practice that such a belief compels. In this chapter, I want to explore how the theme of practical philosophy emerged in the context of the Spinoza controversy. It is well known that the controversy provided Kant with the

opportunity to develop his concept of rational faith.<sup>39</sup> It is not often acknowledged, however, that Jacobi too provided a practical solution to the perceived bankruptcy of traditional rationalism. Jacobi thought the rational demonstration of God was a futile endeavour, but he also thought that one could come to 'know' God through practice. Jacobi's solution to the problem of how we can know God was based not on some proof or clever demonstration, but rather on human will, on the freedom we have to determine our own fate through the practical realization of the divine in finite human life. Jacobi takes the pietist emphasis on the role of the practical service of faith and combines it with the epistemological claim that there are some things that can only be known immediately, without the use of reason, explanation or argument. In what follows I will argue that the three elements of feeling, faith and practice are at the centre of Jacobi's critique of rationalism, and that together they amount to a practical solution to the problems of traditional rationalism. This is especially significant since the controversy also provided an opportunity for the popularization Kant's critical philosophy. With the periodical publication of Reinhold's *Letters on the Kantian Philosophy*, the wider philosophical community could see that Kant, already in 1781, provided a compelling solution to the Jacobi-Mendelssohn debate. Of interest here is the way in which Reinhold couched the importance of the critical philosophy in terms of the solution it was able to offer to the Jacobi-Mendelssohn debate. Thus, and this is what I want to show in the first part of this thesis, the debate had the unexpected consequence, of introducing two unique practical approaches to the problem of philosophical knowledge of the supersensible.

Unfortunately, Jacobi's devotion to feeling and belief only served to reinforce the opinion of many that he was nothing but a religious fanatic, a *Schwärmer* in the terminology of the time.<sup>40</sup> The careful exegesis of Jacobi's often confusing text will allow me to show that Kant's famous and influential characterization of Jacobi as a philosophical *Schwärmer*, a fanatic or enthusiast given to flights of fancy unchecked by reason, while perhaps not entirely unfounded, is misleading at best. Jacobi was of course partly to blame for the misconception since his text provided almost no coherent argumentation at all, and his subsequent attempts to clarify his position only kicked up sand in already murky waters. In the next chapter we shall have the opportunity to examine some of Jacobi's clarifications. For now, it is enough to merely point out that while such clarification was necessary, Jacobi's ideas were not treated fairly. Indeed, as I will argue in the last section of this chapter, it is easy enough to see that Kant gladly employed this false caricature of Jacobi in order to frame the debate in terms that allowed him to most clearly develop his own concept of rational faith. In this sense, where Mendelssohn provided a demonstration of Jacobi's central claim that discursive knowledge requires an immediate ground in feeling, Kant provides an object lesson in the related claim that the heart guides the mind, or that our thinking is manifestly determined

---

<sup>39</sup> The relevant text is the *Orientation* essay.

<sup>40</sup> This word, *Schwärmerei*, had some significance at this time. The verb *schwärmen* just means to be very enthusiastic or excited about something, but *ein Schwarm* is a swarm and so the word calls to mind the image of overzealously going off in swarms, compelled by irrational feelings that have not been carefully thought through. I shall argue that this is an unfair characterization of Jacobi, based, one might say, on the *schwärmerisch* devotion to reason as the final authority in all matters philosophical.

by our personal orientation to the world.<sup>41</sup> So much for my rather lengthy introductory remarks; they were necessary in order to identify my small area of interest within this very large debate. Let us now turn to an examination of the relevant texts, beginning with the *Spinoza Büchlein* itself.

### 1. Jacobi's *Salto Mortale*

Dominating the front of the first edition of the *Spinoza Büchlein* is the first of two poems by Goethe, both published without permission.<sup>42</sup> The second poem, unlike the first, is not explicitly attributed to Goethe and it would not have been known at the time, but it is his now well-known *Prometheus*, employed by Jacobi as a symbol of Spinozism. Many commentators have pointed out that this is a rather strange symbol, for there is nothing very Spinozistic about the poem at all.<sup>43</sup> Vallée suggests that Jacobi's association of the figure of Prometheus with Spinozism was due to his own rather opportunistic interpretation of concurrent events in Goethe's life; namely, his personal reasons for writing the *Prometheus*, and his infatuation with Spinoza.<sup>44</sup> It is undeniable that Jacobi is not being very clear, for as di Giovanni points out, Spinoza was not common philosophical currency at the time, and Jacobi's interpretation of Spinoza only comes out – and only very ambiguously – in the body of the text itself.<sup>45</sup> Nevertheless, from the perspective of the text as a whole I think that the poem has some immanent meaning, pointing to the broader concerns beyond Spinozism that the *Spinoza Büchlein* raises. We will come back to this. The first of Goethe's poems presents an easier interpretive task, one that will enable us to see more clearly the significance of the second poem. Indeed, the two poems need to be read together because they constitute a schema of Jacobi's basic philosophical orientation.

The opening poem sets up a tension between two anthropological conceptions of humankind, between humans as 1) subject to natural necessity, bound by the merciless exigencies of external forces; and humans as 2) free from these exigencies, free to strive for that which is impossible through natural forces alone. On the one hand,

<sup>41</sup> I owe this insight indirectly to George di Giovanni, who makes the same point about Fichte in "From Jacobi's Philosophical Novel to Fichte's Idealism: Some Comments on the 1789-99 'Atheism Dispute'." In *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 27:1. (1989). 76.

<sup>42</sup> Di Giovanni 1994, 177, n.4. Having been cut from Jacobi's *Werke*, this poem only appeared in the first 1785 edition. I thus refer only to di Giovanni's translation, which, gladly, includes this poem.

<sup>43</sup> See: Vallée 1988, 26; di Giovanni 1994, 68; Scholz 1916, ciii.

<sup>44</sup> Vallée writes, "In itself the poem embodies Goethe's wrestling with the enormous pressure under which the twenty-five year old poet found himself "fesselt" like Prometheus, bound by professional worries and social relations . . . If Jacobi had been able to connect Prometheus and Spinoza, it was because he knew that Goethe, at the same time as he was coming to terms with his own situation with the help of the Prometheus myth, was also reading Spinoza with the enthusiasm of one who found his real father and saviour." (1988, 26)

<sup>45</sup> Di Giovanni 1994, 68.



*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.<sup>46</sup>

According to this familiar determinist theme, we are subject to impersonal processes. Here there is nothing moral, nothing to serve as a model for humankind. There is, rather, simply indifference; we are merely sewn into the fabric of causal necessity.

All, we all must,  
 According to great,  
 Honoured, eternal laws  
 Accomplish the cycle  
 of our existence.<sup>47</sup>

On the other hand, it is precisely this perspective that Jacobi associates, rightly or wrongly, with Spinozism, and as such it is the view that he seeks to reject. Just as Spinoza posits an immanent infinity with which we are all bound up so that there is no escape from causal necessity, so too does this first anthropological conception see humans as subject to natural forces that cannot be escaped, but only understood. The view Jacobi endorses is expressed in the next two stanzas:

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*.<sup>48</sup>

---

<sup>46</sup> Di Giovanni 1994, 175.

<sup>47</sup> Di Giovanni 1994, 176.

<sup>48</sup> Di Giovanni 1994, 176.

With this tension set up, Jacobi is posing a deep philosophico-anthropological question: are we beasts, powerless against the Moirae? Or are we, rather, like gods, with the power to bring together in a new way what is so inanely strung together by nature? What, Jacobi demands, is it to be human? The last two stanzas flesh out what is really at stake for Jacobi.

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!<sup>49</sup>

This double movement of the divine becoming human and the human becoming divine is the core of what Jacobi will call the practical path of faith. Several pages later, Jacobi quotes Hamann, "In order to do away with the infinite *disproportion* between man and God, man must partake of a divine nature, and the Divinity take on flesh and blood. Reason that has fallen into poverty and has become speculative, or in other words, *degenerate* reason, can neither commend nor tolerate this practical path."<sup>50</sup> The tension Jacobi sets up, then, is not merely the perennial tension between reason and faith, but rather one between theory and practice. Jacobi's polemics against the authority of reason in philosophy, against the conviction that knowledge of the supersensible can be obtained rationally, all need to be understood as part of the larger argument that it is practical and not theoretical knowledge that is appropriate to God and indeed to all things supersensible.

It is with this idea of a practical approach to knowing God that one is meant to read the *Spinoza Büchlein*. The first order of business is to show that reason, that special human power, the very thing that is commonly assumed to separate us from the brutality of natural exigency, is really only going to be appropriate to the first definition of the human. We may have the intellectual capacities to observe the natural order, but as long as we remain in this merely passive stance, we fail to see that humans are free from the natural order, free for reward and punishment, for good and evil, free for the practical

---

<sup>49</sup> Di Giovanni 1994, 176f.

<sup>50</sup> SB: *Werke* 4.1, 213f; 231f. As cited in di Giovanni (1994), n. 80, p. 602, the passage is from Hamann, *Golgotha Scheblimini*, in *Werke*. Vol. 3, 313.

realization of a free human life as a manifestation of the divine on earth. This is the thematic heart of Jacobi's critique. If humankind is to be more than a passive observer, then it must be capable of more than passive explanation. But this is the only thing that rationalism is capable of, and it is precisely this point that Jacobi's association of Lessing – and thereby of Enlightenment rationalism entirely – with Spinozistic fatalism is meant to establish, and this is the primary goal of the second poem, Goethe's *Prometheus*.

As I have pointed out, there is nothing very Spinozistic about this poem at all, but this only reinforces the point that Jacobi is using Spinoza as a tool, and Lessing's putative Spinozism as a symbol. Further, as I also suggested, while Jacobi's choice to employ the *Prometheus* as a symbol of Spinozism seems motivated by considerations of Goethe's own life, the poem seems to have some immanent significance that can be understood in the context of the first poem.

In a sense, the *Prometheus* agrees with the powerful statement of human freedom in the first poem, for in both poems we find a celebration of human freedom from external forces. The vital difference between the first and the second poems is to be found in how human freedom is conceived. In the first poem, humankind is free from the natural order that is devoid of meaning for human life. Nature doles out fortune and misfortune to all indifferently, but humankind can assign meaning and reorder the world in a more appropriate way. In this way, the divine takes on flesh and blood through practical human activity and the moral agent becomes the enabling power of divine grace. But in the *Prometheus* the gods are portrayed as miserable parasites at the head of what Marx might liken to a kind of vampire regime. Here, the recipe for human freedom is an indifference to divine hubris. Yet such indifference does not presume to be able to free human beings from the natural order.

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?<sup>51</sup>

Humankind may be able to refuse to submit to the whims of the gods, but they are still part of a system in which they are merely strung along the thread of fate. Like the first of Goethe's poems, the *Prometheus* sets up a choice between two conceptions of the human: we either abandon ourselves to indifferent gods, or we abandon ourselves to the dominance of Fate. Both poems see humankind as faced with a choice of how to conceptualize its place in the world order. Yet "what a wretched salvation we find"<sup>52</sup> in

---

<sup>51</sup> SB: *Werke* 4.1, 53; 186.

<sup>52</sup> SB: *Werke* 4.1, 54; 187.

the *Prometheus*, for with indifferent gods, no personal relationship is possible; one must abandon oneself one way or another. The *Prometheus* offers nothing to humankind, no model upon which to live, and no escape from the enslavement to the eternal order of things. But in the first poem, the salvation offered is an escape from fatalism via the practical realization of the image of God in us and an image of ourselves in God. Thus, while both poems pose a question of how humankind is to understand its place in the world, the different resolutions they offer setup a tension on a higher level. Is the human situation such that we are riveted to the necessary sequence of cause and effect, able only to observe and understand, or is it such that we are free to accomplish our own fate practically, through a realization of an infinite God in finite human life? How one chooses to understand the human has significant consequences for one's philosophy.<sup>53</sup> Jacobi fears that philosophy has fallen into, as he calls it, "the physical necessity or fatalism system," the system of Spinoza.<sup>54</sup> If one opts for this system, one has abandoned oneself to the "wretched salvation" of the *Prometheus*. But what Jacobi wants, again using his words, is a "system of freedom."<sup>55</sup> The interesting thing about the way Jacobi sets things up is that the tension between philosophical systems must be navigated by making a choice. Jacobi thus makes his argument for freedom on two levels. The first is the direct claim that he prefers the "system of freedom," where humans are conceived in terms of the first poem. The argument here amounts to little more than an appeal to the feeling we all have of our own freedom, to the conviction that we are not simply part of a mechanical system. Were this the only argument Jacobi offered with these two poems, they would hardly be worthy of analysis. But the second level of the argument is much more subtle and convincing. It says that as soon as one admits that one's philosophical allegiance hangs on a choice of systems, one commits oneself, in a sense, to the system of freedom. After all, the very act of putting one's connection to the world into question itself presupposes a freedom from the interconnectedness of things. Jacobi's predilection for the system of freedom is, then, not just a statement of preference, but also an enactment of freedom itself; it is a realization of freedom through the active choice of its embrace. This is the heart of Jacobi's practical philosophy. The thought is that simply asserting that we are free does not begin to capture what it means to an actual agent to be free. For this, only free action itself is sufficient. In his most recent book, John Russon puts this point very nicely: "precisely how we find ourselves revealed to ourselves is *as active*."<sup>56</sup> To be free from the exigencies of natural processes is to feel oneself as free and act on this feeling. We have

---

<sup>53</sup> Jacobi is perhaps the model upon which Schelling, and later Fichte, understood one's commitment to a philosophy as contingent upon the kind of person one is. This comes out most clearly in Jacobi's formula, "As the heart, so too the mind; and as the mind, so too the heart." (*Werke* 4.1, 232; 237). Schelling articulates this theme most clearly in 1795, in the sixth letter of his *Philosophical Letters on Dogmatism and Criticism*. (*Werke* 1, 308) Fichte repeats this theme two years later in the *First Introduction to the Science of Knowledge*. (*Werke* 1, 432f) Dale Snow notes this connection in "F.H. Jacobi and the Development of German Idealism." In *Journal of the History of Philosophy*. 25:3 (1987). 408-410. Ingtraud Görland discusses Jacobi's influence in Schelling specifically in *Die Entwicklung der Frühphilosophie Schelling's in der Auseinandersetzung mit Fichte*. (Frankfurt: Vittorio Klostermann, 1973). 55-61.

<sup>54</sup> SB: *Werke* 4.1, 147; 210.

<sup>55</sup> SB: *Werke* 4.1, 147; 210.

<sup>56</sup> *Bearing Witness to Epiphany*. (Albany: SUNY Press, 2009) 47.

no theoretical or discursive knowledge of the reality of this freedom and to demand such knowledge would be to drastically miss the point. It is only in practice that freedom emerges as something significant in human experience. The Spinozistic model assumes that there is no way to tear oneself from the causal fabric, that the feeling we all have of freedom is nothing but the ignorance typical to a finite perspective. A complete intuition of the whole of *deus sive natura* would only reveal that everything, including ourselves (our body and its correlative ideas) is absolutely determined in a perfectly rational universe. A perspective of this sort is purely theoretical. As we shall see, Jacobi thinks this leaves nothing to the practical choices made by philosophers based on their immediate experience of the world, and it denies that our free activity contributes something to the kind of person we are. It is in the context of this tension between theory and practice that one needs to understand Jacobi's critique of rationalism and its association with Spinozism.

1.2. Jacobi's reported conversation with Lessing is where the text really gets under way, but as we have seen, a careful reading of the two poems already provides a thematic entry point, namely, the primacy of the practical and the paucity of theory. Jacobi's concern now is to show that the committed use of reason in all matters philosophical will inevitably lead to nihilism and fatalism. Here, his most powerful weapon is his illustrious interlocutor, Lessing. Jacobi's critique of the authority of rational demonstration is directed particularly at Mendelssohn, but he does not attack Mendelssohn directly; his strategy is much cleverer. Lessing had a reputation for being a deeply honest and rigorous thinker, prepared to follow reason wherever it may lead.<sup>57</sup> Indeed, Mendelssohn himself reports that Lessing had such a love of argument and discussion that he "took greater pleasure in hearing an absurd proposition cleverly argued than in hearing the truth poorly defended."<sup>58</sup> Jacobi thought that Lessing's well-known deep commitment to reason and rigorous argument would allow him to make the case that if Lessing was committed to the maligned dogmatic atheist Spinoza, then this is where all use of reason would lead, if, that is, it remained honest to its pursuit.<sup>59</sup> Thus Jacobi's strategy is to lead Lessing so far into the absurd claims of Spinoza that the only possible escape would be through a *salto mortale* into the arms of faith.

Perhaps one of the most famous lines in the *Spinoza Büchlein* is Lessing's confession of his allegiance to the spirit of the *Prometheus* poem that Jacobi had given him to read. "The point of view from which the poem is treated is my own point of view," Lessing says, "The orthodox concepts of the Divinity are no longer for me; I cannot stomach them. *Hen kai pan!*"<sup>60</sup> I know of nothing else."<sup>61</sup> Jacobi and Lessing agree that the

<sup>57</sup> Beiser 1987, 76.

<sup>58</sup> *An die Freunde Lessings*. In *Schriften zur Philosophie, Aesthetik und Apologetik I*. Herausgegeben von Moritz Brasch. (Hildesheim: Georg Olms Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1968) 474. In English translation in Vallée 1988, 136. I will refer to the German, followed by the English translation. Where no English pagination is listed, the translation is my own. Henceforth, AFL.

<sup>59</sup> I owe this insight to Beiser 1987, especially pp. 75-91.

<sup>60</sup> "One and all!"

<sup>61</sup> SB: *Werke* 4.1, 54; 187.

*Prometheus* is very much in the spirit of Spinoza, and Lessing goes on to state that Spinozism is in fact the only philosophy – for once one understands Spinoza, one cannot help but submit to his infectious demonstrations. As I have suggested above, this is precisely the meaning that Jacobi intends the *Prometheus* to have. When Goethe writes, “Was I not forged into a Man /By Time, the all-mighty, /And everlasting Fate [*Schicksal*], /My lord and yours,”<sup>62</sup> Jacobi understands an acknowledgement of the existence of an order of the universe that cannot be overcome but only understood. It is this submission to inevitable forces that Jacobi thinks is so insidious about Spinozism. For Jacobi, the spirit of Spinoza can be expressed in the old saying *a nihilo nihil fit*,<sup>63</sup> but if we are to take account of free will, then how something can come from nothing is precisely what needs to be explained; that is, free will is impossible if everything must come from something. It is important to point out that this does not imply the claim that freedom consists in uncaused actions, which seems contradictory anyway.<sup>64</sup> Jacobi’s rejection of the principle of *a nihilo nihil fit* certainly does seem a bit precarious. Still, if we are willing to interpret Jacobi’s claim as slightly weaker than an outright dismissal, which, given the fact that Jacobi always complained about the unfitness of his mind for philosophical subtleties, seems like a valid interpretive manoeuvre, then we can allow that Jacobi really only wants to suggest that freedom cannot be accounted for systematically, rationally. On Spinoza’s account there is no way to extract oneself from the economy of efficient causes, and this means that “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 efficient causes.”<sup>65</sup> On this account, freedom is perfectly continuous with the mechanism of cause and effect, meaning that it too is determined by rationally discoverable forces. The salvation offered by the *Prometheus*, the self-abandonment to the fatalism of natural exigency only brings one to the brute fact of existence, never providing any foothold into the mystery of free will. But just as the first poem offers another option, a freedom from necessity based on the recognition of one’s capacity to accomplish one’s own fate, so too will Jacobi offer an escape from the “wretched salvation” to which Lessing had resigned himself.

This escape is Jacobi’s famous *salto mortale*, a leap out of the relentless machinery of efficient causes into the arms of faith. Di Giovanni notes that the expression “leap of faith” does not appear at all in Jacobi’s writings,<sup>66</sup> and readers are well-advised to not interpret the *salto mortale* as a leap of faith in any common sense; that is, it is not unmotivated by reason, and it does not demand that one accept paradoxical doctrines like those found in Christianity.<sup>67</sup> This *salto* is an active leap of assent to what is intimately felt but cannot be explained; it is a choice of a certain kind of system (the system of freedom), and in this it is in part a conceptual assent to the undeniable feeling that

---

<sup>62</sup> SB: *Werke* 4.1, 53; 186.

<sup>63</sup> Nothing can be made from nothing.

<sup>64</sup> Thanks to Richard T.W. Arthur for pointing out the need for this clarification.

<sup>65</sup> SB: *Werke* 4.1, 59; 189.

<sup>66</sup> 1994, note to 195.

<sup>67</sup> Here I find myself in disagreement with Beiser, who maintains, “Jacobi’s *salto mortale* is contrary to reason.” (1987, 116).

freedom makes sense as an explanation of human experience. But it is also an active assent, an activity that itself grounds the feeling of freedom. It is after all in the active embrace of human freedom that one is finally able to make the *salto mortale*, and it is really only in acting freely that one can feel one's freedom.

The reason Jacobi thinks that a *salto mortale* is necessary is not just because it allows an escape from Spinozistic nihilism and fatalism; Jacobi is also deeply committed to feeling as an immediate form of knowing that does not admit of rational explanation. As in Hume, faith, or belief (Jacobi's word is *Glaube*) is the name for a state of the mind that is compelled by a feeling of the veracity of a certain judgment.<sup>68</sup> But Jacobi does not just repeat Hume. For Jacobi, feeling is the faculty that provides the content; faith is the confidence we have that the content is genuine.<sup>69</sup> The *salto mortale* into faith is compelled, as in Hume, by the veracity of the judgment that what one feels is real, that the intuition that we are free from the forces to which things outside us seem inextricably bound can be trusted. For Jacobi, feeling compels faith; "it not only commands, but impels, each and every man to believe."<sup>70</sup> While this formula has wide philosophical implications (some of which Jacobi himself never sees, or never explores), the issue in the *Spinoza Büchlein* is knowledge of the supersensible. In this context, the specific claim is that God can be known through immediate feeling, faith in the veracity of what feeling reveals, and the practical activity that realizes the presence of God in finite human life. "Man becomes aware of God," Jacobi says, "through a godly life."<sup>71</sup> God's presence is *felt* and cannot be denied, but to *know* God is to take on a divine nature and to enact the divine in the realm of human finitude. The *salto mortale* is thus no mere leap into irrationalism, and it is far from the *Schwärmerei* of which so many of his critics will accuse him. Jacobi does not demand the privilege to believe whatever he wants, but rather takes his guidance from what is most intimately known through feeling. Faith is reserved for that which is most clearly felt, not for any old fiction of the imagination. In drawing attention to the importance of feeling and faith, Jacobi intends to show that there is a natural limit to the powers of demonstration, a limit at which one must simply accept what is given immediately. Jacobi is not opposed to the use of reason, but rather sets it up in tension with feeling, where both have their own respective domains of legitimacy. Indeed, this has been a bit of a misconception in the interpretation of Jacobi, with some commentators preferring to lump him in with irrationalism.<sup>72</sup> Jacobi is certainly no rationalist, but that he does not reject reason outright is clear in the conversation with Lessing:

<sup>68</sup> See *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*. Edited by Eric Steinberg. (Cambridge: Hackett, 1977). 32.

<sup>69</sup> I owe this insight about the relationship between feeling and faith to Crawford (1905, 34), who makes a similar distinction.

<sup>70</sup> SB: *Werke* 4.1, 211; 231.

<sup>71</sup> SB: *Werke* 4.1: 212; 231.

<sup>72</sup> Two examples: Georg Lukács, *Die Zerstörung der Vernunft*. (Nuwied am Rhein: Luchterhand, 1962); Allan Arkush says that Jacobi was opposed to any use of reason whatsoever in *Moses Mendelssohn and the Enlightenment* (NY: SUNY Press, 1994) 70.

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 one I believe that he gains the greatest room within himself for genuine human truth. Lessing: Words, dear Jacobi, words! The boundary that you want to establish does not admit 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.<sup>73</sup>

The thing to note here is that Jacobi sees himself engaged in something akin to a Kantian critique of reason, or at least a restriction of the capacities of reason to a domain appropriate to them. As one of Jacobi's contemporaries nicely puts it, "As we are in no position to see with our ears, or to hear with our eyes, we cannot and should not [attempt to] either prove feeling or feel rational deduction [*Vernunftschlüsse*]. The entire orbit of human knowledge is divided into these two spheres: experience and rational deduction."<sup>74</sup> Jacobi and Kant agree that the bankruptcy of traditional rationalism demands a new conception of reason. And Kant seems to agree with Jacobi's diagnosis of the threat of rationalism's inherent nihilism. For Kant, the solution amounts to conceiving of reason as primarily practical; for Jacobi, this amounts to the claim that reason has a final ground upon which it rests, and from which all knowledge must proceed. The only way to escape the lifeless machinery of efficient causation is to embrace the ground upon which reason rests as a space of revelation, a space where only feeling and faith can serve as guides. The only way to escape, that is, is to make the *salto mortale*, that awkward foot over head leap that is meant to land one back on one's feet after walking on one's head for so long.<sup>75</sup>

Reflecting in a letter to his friend Johann Neeb, Jacobi clarifies what he means by this admittedly ambiguous concept of the *salto mortale*. Whereas Neeb seems to understand this as a tail over head (*Kopfunter*) plunge (*hinabstürzen*) from a cliff into an abyss, Jacobi understands such a plunge rather as a swinging away (*hinwegschwingen*) from level ground von over the cliff and the abyss to the other side where one finds oneself standing on one's feet.<sup>76</sup> To plunge into the abyss would be to leave solid ground altogether. But in making the *salto mortale*, one only leaps over to another ground. The

<sup>73</sup> SB: *Werke* 4.1: 71f; 194.

<sup>74</sup> Thomas Wizenmann. *Die Resultate der Jacobischen und Mendelssohnschen Philosophie von einem Freiwilligen*. (Leipzig: Göschen 1786). 21. Translations from this text are my own. Henceforth, *Resultate*.

<sup>75</sup> In describing Jacobi's *salto mortale*, Lessing says: "Überhaupt gefällt Ihr *Salto mortale* mir nicht übel; und ich begreife, wie ein Mann von Kopf auf diese Art Kopf-unten machen kann, um von der Stelle zu kommen." (*Werke* 4.1, 74) This is a rather confusing turn of phrase. Jacobi seems to be advocating the *salto mortale* as a movement away from a thinking enslaved to rational explanation. To take the *salto mortale* from Lessing's Spinozistic position is to cease being guided by rational argument (thus walking on one's head, as philosophers tend to do) and subordinate the head by finally walking on one's feet.

<sup>76</sup> 30 May 1817. *F.H. Jacobi's Auserleßener Briefwechsel*, Band 2. (Bern, 1970). 466.



image Jacobi calls forth is one of flipping oneself from one's head back onto one's feet. Rationalist philosophers mistake their concepts for reality; they attempt to walk on their heads. In claiming feeling as a legitimate philosophical category, Jacobi thinks he can turn philosophy back on its feet and give it a new solid ground upon which one can truly stand. The *salto mortale* is thus both a leap into the conviction that one must be *passive* towards what is revealed in feeling, and an *active* assent that itself grounds what is felt. The seemingly circular logic of this formulation should not be dismissed on grounds of sloppy inference. It is after all only in *acting* freely that one can *feel* one's freedom, and it is only in acting on this feeling of freedom and embracing the feeling of the divine that one can come to know God through the practice of a divine life. For Jacobi, everything was finally rooted in the particularity of individual insight, and his concern was always with revealing the way in which the world emerges as meaningful to real historical agents. It is Jacobi's desire to liberate humankind from an incipient nihilism that motivates his *salto mortale*.

The reported conversation with Lessing comes to a close with Lessing lamenting over being too old and rigid to take the leap with Jacobi. Jacobi reports that the leap is even appealing to Lessing: "Take me with you," he urges Jacobi. But alas, Lessing laments, "that too takes a leap that I can no longer ask of my old legs and my heavy head."<sup>77</sup> For such a leap, though the only way out of the wretched salvation offered by Spinozism, requires a certain intellectual agility, or at least the energy to break with the cycle of abstraction and explanation and reorient oneself to the way in which one simply finds the world as given. In the context of the tension between theory and practice that Jacobi sets up with the two poems, one might even read Lessing's inability to make the *salto mortale* as symbolic of his inability to tear himself from the causal fabric, to admit that a philosophical system is ultimately contingent upon the choices a philosopher makes.

## 2. Feeling as Orientation in Philosophy

In a word, Jacobi's issue with Spinozism is that once one accepts its devotion to reason and rational demonstration as the only manner of human knowing, one commits oneself to a fatalism that denies human freedom, and a nihilism that denies that the world contains any deep structures of meaning. Jacobi's emphasis on the importance of feeling is meant as a kind of spiritual tonic against the infectious charm of rationalism's deductive certainty. In devoting oneself to reason, one loses the intimacy of individual, lived experience, or as Jacobi calls it, *Gefühl*, feeling. It is important to point out that this word does not actually come up very often in the *Spinoza Büchlein*, but it is central to Jacobi's conceptual apparatus.<sup>78</sup> Jacobi does not deny that there is a place for rational demonstration, but for all its explanatory power, there is always something beyond its

<sup>77</sup> SB: *Werke* 4.1: 74; 195.

<sup>78</sup> One of the places where this word is used is in a letter to Hemsterhuis. Jacobi notes that both Plato and Hemsterhuis agree that it is impossible to articulate that which appears in the soul as an intuition, or feeling of the divine. Jacobi agrees with this, but wonders whether there may be a way to liberate the use of the faculty of feeling in those who do not seem disposed to it on their own. (SB: *Werke* 4.1: 159ff; 214f).

reach, namely, the very thing one wants to explain. Simply put, explanation presupposes a certainty – Jacobi uses the term *Gewissheit* – and a belief in the thing one seeks to explain. For Jacobi, all explanation – indeed all use of reason – is predicated upon an initial certainty from which reason derives its basic orientation. Explanation can only ever give an account of things that we already know with the most intimate certainty: “Conviction by proofs,” Jacobi says, “is certainty at second hand. Proofs are only indications of similarity to a thing of which we are certain. The conviction that they generate originates in comparison, and can never be quite secure and perfect.”<sup>79</sup> It is this basic conviction that drives Jacobi’s claim that an allegiance to reason as the final arbiter of truth will always end up disregarding the certainty that comes with direct experience.

However difficult it may be to find a philosophical position that distinguishes Jacobi’s thinking generally, the insistence that the categories of feeling and belief are things that the philosopher needs to pay attention to is an awfully good candidate. Jacobi’s most basic positive claim, and the one for which he is remembered, revolves around his formula, “As the heart so too the mind; and as the mind, so too the heart.”<sup>80</sup> Knowledge is empty without an unmediated ground of feeling, and such feeling cannot be questioned or doubted; what it offers must simply be felt and believed (*geglaubt*). We find ourselves with various drives, desires, intuitions, instincts, feelings (*Triebe* is Jacobi’s word), and it is incredibly (*unglaublich*) decadent to deny these feelings and attempt, as Jacobi nicely puts it, “to invent spectacles that enable us to see without eyes – *and even better!*”<sup>81</sup> In Jacobi’s opinion, this is the error of traditional rationalism, and he offers a viable alternative to this rationalist decadence,<sup>82</sup> an alternative that amounts to embracing instinctual feeling through faith and practice. In a characteristic passage from *David Hume on Faith*, Jacobi writes,

It has been a fact about me, for as long as I can remember, that I could not make do with a concept unless its object, whether external or internal, were not made graphically present to me through sensation or through feeling. For me objective truth and actuality were one, just like clear representation of the actual and cognition. I was blind and closed to any demonstration that could not be verified proposition by proposition, or to any definition that could not be intuitively checked against its object, i.e. that was not established genetically.<sup>83</sup>

<sup>79</sup> SB: *Werke* 4.1: 210; 230.

<sup>80</sup> “*Wie die Triebe, so der Sinn; und wie der Sinn, so die Triebe.*” (SB: *Werke* 4.1, 232; 237) Clearly, “heart” does not quite capture the German *Triebe*, which is much closer to “drives”, or “instincts.” The translation is di Giovanni’s, and readers may consult di Giovanni 1994, 378, where he discusses it. I agree with di Giovanni that “heart” is a loose but faithful translation since it captures, at least, the spirit of Jacobi’s formula.

<sup>81</sup> SB: *Werke* 4.1, 232; 237.

<sup>82</sup> I am indebted to Nietzsche for this use of the term “decadence.” See *The Twilight of the Idols*, especially “The Problem of Socrates.” Translated by R.J. Hollingdale. (London: Penguin, 1968) 29-122.

<sup>83</sup> *David Hume über den Glauben, oder Idealismus und Realismus. Ein Gespräch*, *Werke* 2: 178; 278-9. Henceforth DH. Hume’s influence on Jacobi runs through the background of the whole Spinoza controversy, and the influence here is striking. In a passage from the *Enquiry* that could easily have come

For Jacobi, until a concept can be embodied in a personally intimate feeling it remains an abstraction that has no claim to the fullness and perfection that comes with immediate experience. To describe this kind of intimate certainty, Jacobi uses the word "*vollkommen*", meaning, quite simply, "perfect", but the explicit connection with "fullness" in the German should not be overlooked.<sup>84</sup> Jacobi is not talking about an unfounded belief; on the contrary, belief in what is intuitively felt is perhaps the most firmly grounded kind of belief since no amount of evidence or proof could ever equal the *fullness* that comes with the certainty of immediate experience. How could an explanation of an emotional state, for instance, ever equal the *fullness* and certainty with which that state is *felt*?

Jacobi's *salto mortale* is really a recognition that we have always lived our lives in feeling; the *salto* is into faith, into the trust that what is given in feeling is genuine. For too long philosophers like Mendelssohn had ignored the importance of feeling, and as a result they were lured into the delusion of abstraction. "My dear Mendelssohn," chides Jacobi, "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."<sup>85</sup> The point is not that we are born into a certain religion that becomes habituated and in turn becomes an inescapable fact in our lives. The point is rather that we are born into a context that presents us with certainties that cannot be questioned because they are themselves the basis of all questioning. The path to genuine human truth is through an examination of the situation in which humankind finds itself, and for Jacobi this situation simply presents things that are inexplicable. Quoting Jerusalem, Jacobi writes, "the one and only ground [of the origin of things] on which reason can find its rest is this: *The Almighty willed, and so it was*. This is at the same time the limit of all philosophy, where Newton stood in awe."<sup>86</sup> The job of the scholar, then, is not to labour along the failed path of explanation, but rather to reveal things as they are, as they present themselves immediately in feeling. Understood in the way Jacobi wants, faith has nothing to do with unfounded or irrational belief, and everything to do with the refusal to deny what is most immediate and certain. Faith is the confidence we have in what can neither be explained nor proved, neither rationalized nor

---

from Jacobi, Hume writes: "It is easy for a profound philosopher to commit a mistake in his subtle reasonings; and one mistake is the necessary parent of another, while he pushes on his consequences, and is not deterred from embracing any conclusion, by its unusual appearance, or its contradiction to popular opinion. But a philosopher, who purposes only to represent the common sense of mankind in more beautiful and more engaging colours, if by accident he falls into error, goes no farther; but renewing his appeal to common sense, and the natural sentiments of the mind, returns into the right path, and secures himself from any dangerous illusions." (*Enquiry*, 2) Di Giovanni has examined the relationship between Jacobi and Hume, specifically in relation to the Spinoza controversy in "Hume, Jacobi, and Common Sense." In *Kant-Studien*. 89:1 (1998) Also see Isaiah Berlin. "Hume and the Sources of German Anti-Rationalism." In *Against the Current*. Edited by Henry Hardy. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001) 162-87.

<sup>84</sup> "Die Ueberzeugung durch Beweise ist eine Gewissheit aus der zweiten Hand, beruht auf Vergleichung, und kann nie recht sicher und vollkommen sein." (SB: *Werke* 4.1: 210)

<sup>85</sup> SB: *Werke* 4.1: 210; 230.

<sup>86</sup> As reported by di Giovanni (1994, 604, n.110), Jacobi is referring to Johann Friedrich Wilhelm Jerusalem's *Betrachtungen über die vornehmsten Wahrheiten der Religion/Considerations Concerning the Main Truths of Religion*. (Braunschweig: Fürstl. Waisenshaus-Buchhandlung, 1760).

demonstrated. What proof can I offer, for instance, that I am happy? My happiness is not reducible to its outward manifestations; my happiness is not my smile, nor my gestures, nor my tone of voice. Every explanation I offer of my happiness already presupposes the feeling of being happy, something that cannot be proved but only felt. There is no denying this feeling, yet no proving it either; I must simply have faith that such a feeling tells me something meaningful and relevant about the world and my relation to it. So when I strive to make my happiness clear through explanations, to prove it to others via demonstrations, I must already be certain that I am happy. “How can we strive for certainty unless we are already acquainted with certainty in advance,” Jacobi wonders, “and how can we be acquainted with it except through something that we already obtain through certainty?”<sup>87</sup> Jacobi uses the example of the certainty of having a body.<sup>88</sup> When I am looking at the screen, yet feeling my hands typing, when I feel the cool breeze from the open window, when I feel my stomach growling I am having sensations of my body, individual units of sense that tell me this or that. One might be tempted to say that the experience of having a body could be explained as a kind of patchwork of such individual units of sensation, that the experience not of *having* a body but of *being* a body is the result of a certain threshold of sense – once I gather enough units of sense, Eureka! But this is perhaps not the best way to describe such an experience. We are always already acquainted with the experience of being a body – this is Jacobi's point about the primacy of certainty. My experience of, say, having a sore shoulder does not provide me with just one more piece of evidence that I in fact have a shoulder, that I have a body; that is, I do not need any kind of evidence to conclude that I have a body; my experience of pain is just part of the already unified experience of being a body. Consider the example of an infant captivated by the new discovery of her feet. As her feet float in the air in front of her, she reaches that threshold where she realizes that all those sensations, those pricks, rubs, scratches, etc. originated there, in those things bouncing around in front of her face; she feels her feet for the first time as a locus of sense and experiences them as a part of her body. But it is not at all that the feet are felt for the first time; it is, rather, that they are felt for the first time *as* these particular objects of sense. The feeling that was simply there, neither sensed nor thought, but only felt is now given sensual coordinates. Without the original feeling of being a body, the sensual coordinates that the discovery of feet offer would have nothing to congeal around. What is striking to the infant who sees her feet for the first time is the mapping of sense onto feeling and feeling onto sense. The feeling that was there all along now has a shape; it corresponds to an object: “A veritable and wondrous revelation!”<sup>89</sup>

**2.1.** But feeling is only one prong of Jacobi's solution to the traditional problems of rationalism. The contrast between the two Goethe poems already reveals that Jacobi's solution is not simply the promulgation of feeling as a way of knowing. The real concern is with an understanding of practical action that embraces feeling and, in a sense,

---

<sup>87</sup> SB: *Werke* 4.1: 210; 230.

<sup>88</sup> SB: *Werke* 4.1: 211; 231.

<sup>89</sup> SB: *Werke* 4.1: 211; 231. It would be interesting to explore the parallels between Jacobi and Merleau-Ponty.

actualizes it. Recall: the *salto mortale* is not only an assent into the veracity of what one feels but cannot explain; it is also an active assent that is itself a confirmation of one of the most deeply held human feelings, the feeling of freedom. When Jacobi advocates a *salto mortale* it is thus both a theoretical claim about reality and a normative demand for a certain kind of action. We can only know that we are free by acting freely. Freedom, as Kant is wont to remind us, cannot be rationally demonstrated. But in action, Jacobi insists, there is an immediacy of certainty that no amount of reason could ever equal. The only way to know at all is through action, and it is the certainty involved in action that Jacobi calls feeling.<sup>90</sup>

So once one takes the *salto mortale* into faith, thereby accepting the veracity of what feeling reveals, one finds oneself with a set of undeniable beliefs that admit of no rational demonstration. Were Jacobi to stop here, he would surly be guilty of a kind of religious *schwärmerei*, where everybody simply takes their own feelings and beliefs to be a revelation of truth. But that this is not what Jacobi is after is clear even on a surface reading of the *Spinoza Büchlein*. In a striking passage, Jacobi cites Pascal:

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. 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.<sup>91</sup>

Part of this merely reiterates Jacobi's commitment to feeling, to what I have characterized as a kind of existential orientation to the world. No amount of skepticism can deny what comes to us through feeling. Indeed, insofar as skepticism is a response to the epistemological problem of the criterion of knowledge, then the kind of certainty Jacobi claims that feeling provokes is not amenable to the skeptic's suspicions. If feeling is a product of a living relation between human and world, then there is no need for a criterion that guarantees the veracity of the represented. This would be like asking for a criterion upon which I base my conviction that I am happy. But Jacobi pushes the consequences of his doctrine of feeling further. If everything one knows ultimately has its root in immediate feeling, then one's thinking is not the sole result of a conceptual apparatus of which one is in possession. Jacobi's problem with Spinozism is that it confines humans to passive observation. But this assumes that one can come to know the world without

---

<sup>90</sup> I should admit that Jacobi does not do a very good job of making this point in the *Spinoza Büchlein*, but in the years immediately following the explosion of the debate, Jacobi makes his position more clearly known. On this front, I may be fairly accused of interpreting the *Spinoza Büchlein* in retrospect. I think, however, that my analysis is a fair one, and the discussion in the next chapter should confirm that my interpretation is accurate.

<sup>91</sup> SB: *Werke* 4.1, 230; 237. Di Giovanni explains that the passage is actually made up of two separate passages, Fragments 131 and 406, from pages 85 and 231 respectively. In: *Pensées sur la religion et autres sujets*. (di Giovanni 1994, 637. N. 37).

acting in it, through pure analysis. It is not enough to passively examine the context in which we find ourselves. As I noted in section one, the very fact that we can raise ourselves above the context of the relationship between ourselves and our world is alone testament to the fact that we are free from this context, or at least not determined in all of our actions by this interconnection. If we do not embrace this freedom, if we do not make the *salto mortale* then we are left without the salvation offered by the first poem, and thus left without the ability to realize what humankind can truly be. "Man," says Jacobi, "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."<sup>92</sup> This counts for all human endeavours. What one seeks to explain always has its basis in feeling, in an initial spur to activity that cannot be analysed by reason because it is what motivates the use of reason itself. This is what is meant by being *moved*, or *disposed* to something. One's feelings, one's intuitions, the content of one's immediate experience *disposes* or *moves* one in certain directions. But to complete this formula, an initial spur is not enough – one must *move* oneself, one must *dispose* oneself. It is thus not only that feeling compels one to action, but also that activity involves a fundamental kind of feeling of oneself, a feeling that is not susceptible to doubt since it involves the existential awareness that we have of ourselves, the very ground upon which all our experience rests. So while Jacobi places great emphasis on feeling as an important philosophical category, he also thinks that one must *act* on feeling, that one must embrace the faith to which one is compelled.

There are thus two fronts from which Jacobi attempts to provide an alternative to rationalist metaphysics. The first front embraces feeling as a kind of existential orientation to the world as a way of avoiding the fatalism implicit in all rational explanation. Jacobi's strategy here is to break the chain of efficient causation by introducing elements of human experience that are not amenable to such explanation. The second front proposes that it is in the context of the activities to which our feelings compel us that our cognition develops. This second front is Jacobi's practical philosophy; at the centre of it is Jacobi's formula, "As the heart so too the mind; and as the mind, so too the heart."<sup>93</sup> The thing to notice is the reciprocity of this relation: one's feelings compel one's thinking, which in turn compel one's feelings. The "powerful economy" of this relation is the heart of Jacobi's critique of rationalist philosophy. As an illustration, Jacobi rehearses a story from Plutarch. As the story goes, the Spartans had killed Persian herallds sent by Xerxes, the Persian king. As a gesture of contrition, two Spartans, Sperchis and Bulis, had voluntarily chosen to follow a command of the oracle to sacrifice themselves for their land, people and laws in order to settle the wrong Sparta had committed. But when Xerxes heard the offer, he was so impressed at its nobility that he offered Sperchis and Bulis a chance to remain among the Persians in the highest luxury and honour. Hydarnes, a Persian prefect, also pleaded with them to stay and enjoy the luxuries of his kingdom and the friendship of his King. Sperchis and Bulis refused; they felt that their experience could not abide such an abandonment of their convictions, that

---

<sup>92</sup> SB: *Werke* 4.1: 232; 237.

<sup>93</sup> SB: *Werke* 4.1, 232; 237.

their identity, dignity and liberty as Spartans was not consistent with a new life in the Persian empire. The central point is that the conviction of Sperchis and Bulis, their philosophy if you will, is rooted in their personal experience, in the history they have actively lived through. Sperchis and Bulis "had no philosophy," Jacobi says, "or rather, their philosophy was just their history."<sup>94</sup> This is why they refused the kind offer, for its kindness really only makes sense given the lived history of the Persian nobility. It is not that the offer is wrong, nor that the Persian custom is foolish; it is a lifestyle with its own measure. The fact that we always already find ourselves in a certain context means that any thinking that is not embedded in this context (any thinking that is too abstract or too far removed) will always be incompetent when it comes to those things that are the most intimate and undeniable. It is out of his doctrine of feeling, then, that the central claim of Jacobi's practical philosophy emerges. Feeling provides the kind of existential orientation to the world that no amount of rational argument can demonstrate or deny. Out of this basic orientation, its desires, instincts, drives, its *Triebe*, emerge patterns of activity that establish a person in their basic convictions. Jacobi's context for this argument is a good deal larger than the immediate matters of the Spinoza controversy; larger, namely, than the matter of how knowledge of the supersensible is possible. But in these more narrow terms, the claim is that knowledge of God is a matter of the heart; it is something that we all feel, and must establish in our own lives through the practical path of faith. Just as Sperchis and Bulis could not see the sense in doing anything but giving their lives for their people, the person who has an intuition of God and establishes this belief through practice cannot see the sense in any other conviction. And just as Sperchis and Bulis could not see the sense in the Persian's offer, yet see nothing foolish or mistaken about it, the person who establishes himself in his faith has no grounds upon which to question the faith of others. The cosmopolitan tendency of Jacobi's thinking is clear: all people establish themselves in their own understanding and their own truth through practice and everybody can undertake this practical path.

### 3. Mendelssohn's Common Sense

All participants in the debate agreed that knowledge alone was unable to establish the way in which reason was to be employed, that some extra-discursive mode of orientation was necessary as a guide. Jacobi thought that our orientation was based on immediate feeling, from which we are able to descend into the economy of discursive abstraction. But even Mendelssohn, a fierce defender of rationalist metaphysics, relies on a notion of immediate feeling – what he calls common sense – to underpin the employment of speculative reason, and this, as I shall explain, seems to undermine his rationalism. After all, common sense seems to imply more a faith in individual, lived experience than it does a reliance on rational methods.<sup>95</sup> The central text here is Mendelssohn's *Morgenstunden*,

---

<sup>94</sup> SB: *Werke* 4.1, 234; 238.

<sup>95</sup> Alexander Altman points out that for Mendelssohn common sense is a "function of the senses," where reason is "an exercise in the analysis of the senses." Altman also speculates that with this distinction

*oder Vorlesungen über das Daseyn Gottes/Morning Hours, or Lectures on the Existence of God*, and aside from the *Spinoza Büchlein* itself, it is the most important text to the controversy.<sup>96</sup> My concern in this section is to show that Mendelssohn's notion of common sense only served to discredit the claims of rationalist metaphysics to be able to demonstrate the existence of God using purely rational methods. While Jacobi only provides a somewhat sketchy argument that all rational demonstration leads to fatalism and atheism, Mendelssohn provided a real example of how hopeless the rationalist project had become. Common sense simply did not fit Mendelssohn's rationalist commitments. For if rational knowledge has the demonstration of an objectively existing external world as its ground, then common sense hardly seems an appropriate tool. The fact is that the objective feature Mendelssohn claims is a part of human nature is reason, not common sense.<sup>97</sup> If the latter were the case, Mendelssohn could simply follow out an analysis of common sense, probing, in the manner of Hume, the various psychological structures at work in human understanding. It is reason, however, that is the objective feature to which Mendelssohn is committed. The upshot of this commitment is that the inherently subjective nature of common sense must be derived as a manifestation of an abstractly conceived faculty of reason. We are thus left with the language of abstraction to describe intuitions that by definition are not reducible to the level of abstract symbols.

All of Mendelssohn's problems circulate around this relation between reason and common sense [*Gemeinsinn*], what he variously calls healthy reason [*gesunde Vernunft*], healthy human understanding [*gesunde Menschenverstand*], or occasionally plain understanding [*schlicht Verstand*]. In the third lecture of *Morgenstunden*, Mendelssohn distinguishes between reason and healthy human understanding, where the former is the basis of the latter. "Healthy human understanding," Mendelssohn says, "presupposes operations of reason that take place without our being conscious of them."<sup>98</sup> Healthy human understanding is reason operating at an unconscious level. Mendelssohn continues, "healthy human understanding and reason are at bottom one and the same thing; [what] in sensual knowledge must proceed by feeling, occurs in reason through thought."<sup>99</sup> So it is not simply that Mendelssohn thinks reason is at the ground of all human intellectual operations, but rather that human understanding, if it is healthy, is really just one side of reason. The idea seems to be that healthy understanding is reason that has become habituated, proceeding so quickly because the rigor of rational,

---

Mendelssohn has in mind Francis Hutcheson's identification of the various human senses. (1973, 676; n. 21, 864).

<sup>96</sup> AFL: 463; 128. Altmann reports that the text was intended by Mendelssohn to be a pedagogical tool to teach his son Joseph the importance of rigorous reflection on the rational knowledge of God. It began as a series of lectures/seminars in which Mendelssohn and his students would gather in the morning hours (hence the title) to discuss the topics covered by the book. (1973, 642f.)

<sup>97</sup> Thanks to Richard Arthur for helping me to see this point.

<sup>98</sup> *Morgenstunden*, In *Schriften zur Philosophie, Aesthetik und Apologetik I*. Herausgegeben von Moritz Brasch. (Hildesheim: Georg Olms Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1968). 325.

<sup>99</sup> "... gesunder Menschenverstand und Vernunft im Grunde einerlei sei, und beim Empfinden eben das in der sinnlichen Erkenntniss vorgehen müsse, was beim Denken durch die Vernunft geschieht." (*Morgenstunden*, 325)



discursive knowledge is implicit. When one internalizes the principles of reason, one grasps them intuitively and can thus perform them unconsciously.

This distinction, and the reducibility of its terms to a central conception of reason that governs all human intellectual operations, is revisited in lecture X. There, Mendelssohn gives an account of an 'allegorical dream' he had after listening to a story about a trip through the Swiss Alps. Mendelssohn dreamt that he was traveling with two guides: one, a rustic, young Swiss boy with strong limbs but crude intellect; the other, a tall, thin woman, fantastically dressed and of a rapturous character [*schwärmerischer Physiognomie*], who appeared to have wings. But when they came to a fork in the road, the rustic boy went to the right and the seemingly winged woman went to the left, thus leaving Moses without any guidance. At this point Mendelssohn learns the names of his two guides: the strong young boy was named *Gemeinsinn*, or common sense, the angelic woman, *Beschauung*, or contemplation. The allegory here is obvious: there are times when our common sense will not agree with what we are able to derive through the full discursive application of speculative reason. The trouble is that when our speculative conclusions contradict our common-sense intuitions or *vice versa* we are left without guidance. Enter: an elderly matron named *Vernunft*, or reason. The two warring faculties have to return to the point where they parted, to their common ground in reason in order to determine the source of error and thus reorient the progress of thinking, and it is reason that facilitates this process. This is Mendelssohn's method of orientation. In this scenario, reason is neither common sense nor speculation; reason is rather a third faculty that can take an objective distance to the other two and decide where one went wrong.<sup>100</sup> But this is not the picture of the relation between reason and common sense that we have seen above, where reason was no third faculty, but rather the ground of its two applications, intuitive and discursive. But now Mendelssohn wants to claim that reason is something different, some third thing reducible to neither. For if both applications are susceptible to error, then something external must be brought in to clear up this error. We are thus left with two conceptions of reason: 1) as the ground of its discursive and intuitive applications, where the latter is the final say; or 2) as a separate faculty that mediates the errors that can develop in either its intuitive or discursive applications.

Mendelssohn never clears up this ambiguity. In a later contribution to the Spinoza Controversy, *An die Freunde Lessings/To Lessing's Friends*, Mendelssohn again discusses his method of orientation. With reference to Spinoza, or to any philosopher who denies the system of final causes, Mendelssohn says, "it is high time . . . that he re-orient himself and search for the simple human understanding which he has left so far behind."<sup>101</sup> Here orientation comes back to common sense in an effort to determine where speculation went wrong and get back on track. This is similar to the first conception of common sense as an intuitive form of reason, but Mendelssohn never makes the connection explicit. The point is simply that common sense is the most basic form of knowing, common to all people, and thus the fundamental touchstone for the progress and orientation of thinking in general.

---

<sup>100</sup> Beiser 1987.

<sup>101</sup> AFL: 490; 143.

But perhaps the most confusing element of Mendelssohn's account of common sense is its proximity to Jacobi's notion of feeling. Indeed, Mendelssohn seems to be almost of a mind with Jacobi when he speaks of final causes, which he thinks are the most evident facts about the world. "No fact," Mendelssohn says, "can be more incontrovertible than the fact that in the visible world around us and in the world within us *final causes* are aimed at . . . [w]e need but open our eyes, consider any work of nature with a minimum of attention, to be utterly convinced of it."<sup>102</sup> This last sentence could easily have come from Jacobi, who in the *Spinoza Büchlein* says almost the same thing.<sup>103</sup> This points to a deep and striking shared commitment to the human ability to observe plain and simple truth, unmediated by reason or abstraction. One of the many ironies of the Spinoza controversy is that Mendelssohn's attempts to defend the rational knowledge of the truths of natural religion only provided an illustration of Jacobi's central claim that all knowledge is finally grounded in a form of nondiscursive, immediate knowing. Mendelssohn reports that he has often explained the natural ideas of God to peasants and they have always easily understood. Like Socrates to Meno's slave boy, Mendelssohn allows the peasant to come to his own conclusions, thus showing that there is a deep harmony between the truths of natural religion and the common sense of even the most ordinary *Landmann*. "He [the peasant] felt the force of those ideas," Mendelssohn says; "they cheered, comforted, strengthened his soul."<sup>104</sup> But where Jacobi is clear that that which is most intimately felt cannot be captured by any rational explanation, Mendelssohn seems to waver. The force felt by the *Landmann* is the force of reason itself, and for Mendelssohn this is what is most intimate to us all. Feeling and reason are cut from the same cloth, the first of which is an intuitive expression of the second. The truths of natural religion are given to us all through common sense; metaphysics can only make this implicit knowledge explicit.

But in the end, Mendelssohn cannot concede to Jacobi that what we know with the most intimate certainty does not admit of rational analysis, for he does not want to abandon the claim that all truths are amenable to rational demonstration. The trouble is that one cannot simply equate common sense and reason in its full discursive application because the latter is susceptible to the fatalistic reasoning that Jacobi thinks all use of reason is subject to. It does not matter whether reason is embodied in common sense, or whether what common sense reveals can be demonstrated discursively. Rational demonstration is still always the highest authority, and so we still find ourselves caught in the deterministic web articulated by Goethe's *Prometheus*. It should perhaps come as no surprise that a notion like common sense would ride along awkwardly with Mendelssohn's rationalist metaphysics. After all, the appeal to what the ordinary person would know is deeply bound up with the philosophical and religious traditions from which Jacobi is deriving strength and that were driving the various critiques of rationalism in the mid-late eighteenth century. For one, as is well known, Jacobi was

---

<sup>102</sup> AFL: 492; 144.

<sup>103</sup> "I have no concept more intimate than that of the final cause." (SB: *Werke* 4.1: 70; 193); and "so far as final causes are concerned, I claim for my part that it is sheer nonsense to reject them." (SB: *Werke* 4.1: 147; 211)

<sup>104</sup> SB: 478; 139.

profoundly influenced by Hume, whose scepticism fuelled deep doubts about the capacity of rationalism to deliver knowledge of the objects of metaphysics. Hume's shift away from metaphysical speculation to considerations of individual human experience is a shift from elitist and impersonal metaphysical concepts towards what any human being would have the capacity to know. Also, while di Giovanni has warned against seeing any direct historical connection between Jacobi and the German pietist tradition,<sup>105</sup> it is instructive to see that there are conceptual parallels between the pietist emphasis on individual spiritual experience and Jacobi's appeal to feeling as the unmediated ground of all knowledge. What is important for Jacobi is the way in which individual feelings compel a faith in what these feelings reveal, and a practice of this faith that is consistent with the initial epistemological and existential orientation that feeling provides. Thus when Mendelssohn employs the notion of common sense to clarify his understanding of reason, he is invoking philosophical powers that are conspiring to demolish the principles he holds so dear. It is no wonder, then, that Mendelssohn became so entangled in confusion and contradiction around his notion of orientation. Had Mendelssohn been guided rationally, he might have realized the inconsistency of his position. As it was, Mendelssohn seemed so blinded by his commitment to reason that he could not see his own specious reliance on common sense as problematic. It seems the heart guided even Mendelssohn! One of the many ironies of the controversy was that the very participant most committed to defending the old rationalist metaphysics was the one who made it most clear that theoretical reason was simply unfitting both for questions about the existence of God and as the final touchstone for all our knowledge. At this point in the debate, then, Jacobi seems to have the upper hand. Despite Mendelssohn's extraordinary status in the German philosophical world, his disadvantage in this debate was becoming unquestionably clear. It would take the fresh eyes of a certain Königsberger to escort the commitment to reason out of this conceptual impasse.

But in the meantime, there was at least one critic to notice the irony of Mendelssohn's appeal to common sense. His name was Thomas Wizenmann, arguably the only author at the time to give the debate a fair evaluation.<sup>106</sup> As I will argue in the next section, even as penetrating a critic as Kant never really saw the force of Jacobi's thinking, preferring to regard his emphasis on feeling as nothing more than a particularly insidious form of *schwärmerei*, or enthusiasm. It was Wizenmann who first saw that Jacobi proposed a practical solution to the problem of knowledge of the supersensible. Jacobi, writes Wizenmann, has no particular religion or doctrine to which one could be converted, for his commitment is to "humans themselves, and with the different kinds of evidence that humans [are capable of]."<sup>107</sup> Wizenmann thus sees that Jacobi is part of a kind of psychological shift in philosophy, a shift away from impersonal rationalist metaphysics to the intimacy of individual human experience. It is indeed this that attracts Jacobi to Hume's empiricism, and it is this commitment to the situation in which humankind finds itself that leads Jacobi away from speculative metaphysics and towards the practice and

<sup>105</sup> 1994, 45, n. 105.

<sup>106</sup> My analysis of Wizenmann here owes much to Beiser (1987, 109-26), whose text I have shamelessly mined for references.

<sup>107</sup> *Resultate*, 157.

activity that makes human life meaningful. "What he [Mendelssohn] had lost through the fanaticism of reason [*Ausschweifung der Vernunft*]," Wizenmann observes, Jacobi hoped to find through the practice of a "godly life."<sup>108</sup> The solution to the problem of how knowledge of the supersensible is possible is not, then, some clever rational proof, or some new metaphysical category, but rather the insight that the supersensible must be felt and realized practically through human will.

This practical solution gave Jacobi a clear advantage in the debate. Mendelssohn wanted both the logical grounding of a fully rational demonstration of God's existence and the personal intimacy and contingency that comes with common sense. The trouble is that if we are to take seriously the claim that common sense orients our rational thinking, then it dangerously undermines reason's claim to be the final authority in philosophy. Simply put, Mendelssohn's rationalism cannot abide the contingency implicit in common sense. Jacobi, on the other hand, celebrates this contingency. "The idea of a virtuous being," says Jacobi, "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."<sup>109</sup> For Jacobi, it is only through activity, through practice that one's ideas develop.<sup>110</sup> In this way, Jacobi avoids all the problems implicit in any effort to rationally demonstrate God's existence since 'knowledge' of the supersensible here requires a kind of finite actualization, where God only *becomes* real through finite human activity.

#### 4. Concluding Remarks

With this, I come to my concluding remarks. On my reading, the significance of the Spinoza controversy is two-fold. First, in its negative mode, it issued a deep challenge to the authority of reason that had been the presupposition of Enlightenment rationalism. This is the significance usually attributed to the debate. But the debate also had the consequence of bringing the viability of Jacobi's doctrine of feeling into the centre of mainstream philosophical debates in Germany. Indeed, the controversy forced Kant to provide an account of the feeling that Jacobi had categorized as immediate intuition. Which brings us to the second fold the controversy's significance; namely, that it enabled the shift to practical philosophy as a solution to the problems in rationalist metaphysics. As I will argue in the next chapter, this second fold of significance acquires an even deeper meaning since the controversy also provides Kant with the opportunity to comment explicitly his own practical solution to the debate between Jacobi and Mendelssohn, his own version of practical philosophy. Arguably, the *Orientation* essay makes no new developments in Kant's practical philosophy, but it does couch the

---

<sup>108</sup> *Resultate*, 161.

<sup>109</sup> SB: *Werke* 4.1, 241; 243.

<sup>110</sup> Again, the parallel to Hume is striking. In the final pages of the *Enquiry*, Hume writes: "The great subverter of *Pyrrhonism* or the excessive principles of scepticism, is action, and employment, and the occupations of common life. (109)

practical philosophy and one of its central concepts, rational faith, as a solution to the Jacobi-Mendelssohn debate. And in this sense, this

As one final concluding gesture, I shall observe that that despite radically different philosophical commitments, Jacobi and Mendelssohn are both guided by their own irrational commitments of the heart. Indeed, even if one is not convinced by Jacobi's admittedly rudimentary arguments, one cannot deny that the debate itself proceeded not according to the relative strengths of the participants' respective arguments, nor was it propelled by a search for some basic metaphysical truth. Rather, the debate was fuelled by the *Triebe* of its participants, by their nonrational convictions of the heart. In this sense, the debate itself is a profound testament to Jacobi's basic philosophical instincts. And perhaps for a generation of thinkers for whom philosophy and literature were cut from the same cloth, this is the most compelling kind of proof. But further, a difference of opinion as profoundly rooted as Mendelssohn and Jacobi's, far from being negotiable with the penetrating eyes of the Enlightenment's unfettered reason, could only be resolved through a *salto mortale*. That is to say, the debate between reason and faith is really a debate that only the former can take seriously; the latter, the faithful, sees nothing to debate, sees only intractable conviction. As Jacobi puts it, "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."<sup>111</sup> Even the commitment to reason is finally only grounded in a conviction that cannot be demonstrated rationally. So while we must admit the fundamental opposition between faith and reason, we must also recognize that this very disclosure immediately decides the argument in favour of faith. In sum, if we want to see the true impact that this event had on the history of philosophy, we need to reexamine Jacobi's arguments. Such a reexamination as the one I have offered here will of course not change the terms of the debate, but it will enable one to more accurately place Jacobi in the history of philosophy and more profitably trace his true philosophical heirs.

---

<sup>111</sup> SB: *Werke* 4.1, 189.

## II

### Rational Faith and Practical Postulates

freedom is the only thing that is given *a priori*  
and consists in thus being given *a priori*;  
the *a priori* rule of freedom in a world in general  
constitutes the *formam mundi intelligibilis*.  
This leads, in accordance with grounds of freedom,  
to the presumption of the *intelligibilia*,  
God and a future world, in which everything (nature)  
will be in accord with the moral laws.

– I. Kant, *Reflection 4349*.

Kant's reasons for participating in the Spinoza Controversy are not entirely clear, but a brief consideration of his perspective on the philosophical landscape around 1785/86 can help to clarify things. The reception of the critical philosophy was lukewarm at best. In fact, until the Feder/Garve review in 1782 it was not really considered at all.<sup>112</sup> This was due in no small part to the simple fact that Kant was doing something radically new, so new that nobody really understood the significance of the position Kant was working out. Kant had published the *Prolegomena* as a kind of introduction to the critical philosophy, but it was not really until Reinhold's *Letters on the Kantian Philosophy* began to appear in instalments in 1786 that the Kantian critical philosophy was positively received. The key to the success of Reinhold's *Letters* in finally popularizing Kant lay in the way in which he was able to show that his philosophy already contains a solution to the Jacobi-Mendelssohn debate.<sup>113</sup> "The *Critique of Pure Reason*," Reinhold writes, "demonstrates from the essence of practical reason the necessity of a moral faith."<sup>114</sup> What Reinhold does is explain that with Kant, the issue of whether the existence of God can be apodictically demonstrated or whether it must be taken on a faith not amenable to rational demonstration is not as simple as it appears. It is foolish to refuse to accept the nonrational conviction that many have about the existence of God; and it would be equally foolish to deny that reason could have any role in faith.<sup>115</sup> The critical philosophy shows there is something more behind the appearance of these two approaches to knowing God; it reveals more precisely why faith in God is such a worthy and dignified

<sup>112</sup> Sassen 2000, 1.

<sup>113</sup> Sassen points out that the positive reception of the critical philosophy was mediated by the Spinoza controversy, which meant that it was the practical philosophy that became influential. This is reflected in the nineteenth century development of idealism in Fichte, Schelling and Hegel. (Sassen 2000, 2).

<sup>114</sup> *Letters on the Kantian Philosophy*. Translated by James Hebbeler. (Cambridge, 2005) 20. Henceforth *Letters*.

<sup>115</sup> *Letters*, 19.

belief. We can no more prove God's existence than we can deny that faith has some basis in reason. But in Kant's new system, "reason ceases to be presumptuous and faith ceases to be blind."<sup>116</sup>

This new approach to framing the Spinoza controversy in terms of the debate between dogmatic metaphysics and blind faith had important consequences for how Kant assessed the debate, and consequently for how Jacobi's thinking was interpreted. Because Jacobi had been labelled a religious fanatic, Kant was deeply motivated to establish a distance from Jacobi's claims that he was ultimately teaching the same thing; namely, a kind of faith established through practice.<sup>117</sup> One can imagine that Kant would have been quite eager to distinguish himself from what seemed to him to be a way of thinking no better than superstition or blind faith, and thus in no way appropriate to a truly free and moral life. It is worth pausing for a moment to point out that at least in terms of the commitment to human freedom as a necessary condition for a moral life Kant and Jacobi are in agreement. Jacobi saw that rationalism entailed a slavish adherence to apriori proofs, which in turn entailed a loss of human freedom and a loss of the possibility of the personal practice of faith. Kant also saw this consequence of rationalism, which motivated his own move to practical reason and the emphasis on the freethinking that grounds real faith as an expression of the freedom of the subject. This basic agreement testifies to the claim that the Spinoza controversy facilitated the development of two distinct approaches to practical philosophy. Yet despite this obvious analogy, Kant never seems to have entertained for a moment that Jacobi was up to anything but religious fanaticism. Part of the reason for this, as Dieter Henrich points out, is that Kant thinks that aside from his own critical system, there are only three possible philosophical systems, the rationalism of Spinoza and Leibniz, the empiricism of Locke and Hume and a kind of generic mysticism that names almost any doctrine that relies on some special form of intuition.<sup>118</sup> Kant had refuted the first two systems in his first *Critique*, but mysticism had not yet felt the sting of Kant critical insight. Given Kant's rather non-specific definition of mysticism, it was impossible for Jacobi to escape this label, and Kant used the Spinoza controversy (with Jacobi as his antagonist) to develop his critical stand against it.

## 1. On Orientation in Thinking

To be fair, it is easy to see how Jacobi could be labelled a mystic, and the history of philosophy has generally been content not to challenge this characterization. Jacobi confesses to the deep influence that Pietism had on his pre-philosophical development,<sup>119</sup> and his emphasis on the importance of feeling does permit a freedom to believe that is not

---

<sup>116</sup> *Letters*, 22.

<sup>117</sup> "Wider Mendelssohns Beschuldigungen". In Scholz, *Hauptschriften*, 351.

<sup>118</sup> *Between Kant and Hegel*. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003) 71-2.

<sup>119</sup> *Allwill: Werke I*, 33; 401.

constrained by rationality. Furthermore, Jacobi's references to Lavater,<sup>120</sup> a well-known representative of irrational mysticism, only contributed to the received view of Jacobi's thinking. Given such poor presentation, any reader could be forgiven for thinking that Jacobi too was a devotee of Lavater's passive submission to the divine mysteries. But in order to understand Jacobi's more subtle and insightful position, we need to see that these confusing decoys only serve to obscure the real concern with the intimacy feeling, faith and practice. Recall that feeling is just the agreement of representation and represented, it is an immediate awareness of an object. Here one can only speak of passivity insofar as it refers to this kind of epistemological relation. Where Jacobi and Lavater seem to split is in terms of how one accepts what is given immediately in feeling. As I pointed out in the last chapter, Jacobi's understanding of faith can be fairly accurately understood in Hume's terms, as a state of the mind compelled by the veracity of a certain judgment. It is important to remember, however, that for Jacobi faith is something we choose – we make a *salto mortale* into the arms of faith, into the “system of freedom.” Unlike in Lavater, there is no passivity here; passivity is only possible when one submits oneself to the mechanical sequence of conditions. Just the recognition that one is free to question one's connection to the world is evidence that one is free from its causal necessity. There is thus nothing but activity in the *salto mortale* that accepts the veracity of what is revealed in feeling.

Still, even though a careful reading can see past the somewhat misleading cues in Jacobi's own text, other forces would have conspired to convince Kant that Jacobi's ‘philosophy’ is merely the result of *eine affectierte Genieschwärmerei* he had described in a 1786 letter to Marcus Herz.<sup>121</sup> I have already mentioned that Kant's taxonomy of philosophical systems severely limited the view he could take of Jacobi's ‘philosophy.’ But also, from very early on Kant was being urged to take a stance against Jacobi's irrationalism. In a letter from late 1785, Johann Erich Biester asks Kant to “write something about philosophical fanaticism . . . in connection with Jacobi's letter to Moses Mendelssohn.”<sup>122</sup> The common assumption about Jacobi was thus that he was a religious fanatic, precisely the sort of person that Kant's critical philosophy had been designed to refute, the sort of person who thought he could have knowledge of the supersensible. Thus Jacobi's suggestion that he and Kant were up to the same thing, or were at least on the same side in the fight against rationalism could only have served to further motivate Kant to make his attack on Jacobi and his dangerous brand of *philosophische Schwärmerei* even fiercer. It is indeed this that motivated Kant to lump Jacobi together with the *Schwärmer*s and enthusiasts who decried the use of reason. From his letters, it is clear that Kant considered the whole Jacobi-Mendelssohn debate the result of the cult of genius, and as such, as Kant remarks in a letter to Marcus Herz, is “nothing serious” and

<sup>120</sup> Johann Kaspar Lavater, 1741-1801. Lavater is famous for his studies in physiognomy, and he was also a prominent pastor and Christian mystic. His influence waned after 1769, the year he challenged Mendelssohn to either refute certain arguments from natural religion or convert to Christianity. Many felt that this was an unfair challenge.

<sup>121</sup> Letter to Marcus Herz, April 7, 1786. In *Correspondence*. Translated and Edited by Arnulf Zweig. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999). 251.

<sup>122</sup> November 8, 1785, *Correspondence*, 233.



“hardly worthy of a serious refutation.”<sup>123</sup> But despite this dismissive attitude, in the *Orientation* essay Kant does seem to think that such enthusiasm is worthy of refutation, that the 'mere' *affected Genieschwärmerei* is more dangerous than Kant had initially let on. Kant directs his attacks towards fideism, or the contention that faith is superior to reason, and he uses the eighteenth century cult of genius as a case of this misguided thinking: “it's maxim,” Kant chides, “is that reason's superior lawgiving is invalid – we common human beings call this *schwärmerei*, while those darlings of beneficent nature call it *illumination*.”<sup>124</sup> Kant's main trouble with these “darlings” is that they have no regard for reason's ability to communicate ideas clearly to others, and in fact their *illumination* is defined precisely as an intuition of nature to which only the genius is privileged. Even if one grants that the genius has a privileged access to nature,<sup>125</sup> the idea still has to be communicated to others. For Kant, freedom to think is really nothing but freedom to think in a community with other people, and it is precisely this second component that the cult of genius threatens. Emphasizing the importance of the freedom to think too much thus undermines the whole project of civil life by separating creative human thought from its engagement with a community of other people. And further, it is not just that the *Schwärmer*s ignore the engagement of the genius in civil life, it is that they ignore the requirement that thinking (defined by Kant in terms of the complex of operations under the aegis of reason) must take its lead from its situation in a community with others. In this way, one needs to understand Kant's *Orientation* essay as part of his wider campaign against philosophical enthusiasm and mysticism.

Jacobi, of course, passionately and quite fairly disputed this association of his thinking with *Schwärmerei*. Aghast, Jacobi challenges such accusations: “I am a *Schwärmer*, and want to promote blind faith or faith in miracles – because I maintain that one can only believe in God and establish oneself in this belief through *practice*?”<sup>126</sup> But despite such protestations, and even despite the spirit of Jacobi's text, the central importance of practice and action in Jacobi's thinking was largely ignored. Kant, like many others, thinks that unless faith is rational it is pure *Schwärmerei*. Wondering about what the object of Jacobi's attacks are, Kant writes, “I do not know whether it is directed only against *rational insight* and knowledge (through the supposed strength of speculation) or also against *rational faith*, so as to set up in opposition to it another faith which everyone can make up for himself as he likes.”<sup>127</sup> It is clear enough that Kant sees things in this rather simplistic way: faith must be rational; if it isn't, it is nothing but the fantasies of the religious *Schwärmer* taking his own inspiration for a revelation of truth. So what does it mean for faith to be rational?

<sup>123</sup> April 7, 1786, *Correspondence*, 251.

<sup>124</sup> *Orientation: Werke VIII*: 145; 13. The romantic idea of genius as free from authority of reason had an established place in German thought. While it was very much a part of the *Sturm und Drang* movement in philosophy, Kant rightly detected its roots much earlier in the 1760's in his rival Hamann, and his former student Herder. On this point, see Zammito, *The Genesis of Kant's Critique of Judgment*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1992) 34; Beiser 1987, 34.

<sup>125</sup> Kant himself seems to grant the genius such an access. See §45-49 of the *Critique of Judgment*. (*Werke V*, 306-319; 173-88)

<sup>126</sup> *Wider Mendelssohns Beschuldigungen*. In *Hauptschriften*, Scholz 1916, 351.

<sup>127</sup> *Orientation: Werke VIII*: 143; 11.

1.2. On the surface, Kant seems to be striking a middle ground between Jacobi and Mendelssohn. To Jacobi, Kant grants that faith requires a subjective basis in feeling; to Mendelssohn, Kant grants that the root of this feeling is really reason. Kant's original contribution is the claim that it is not reason itself, but rather the theoretical and practical *needs* of reason. Kant claims that what we experience in feeling is actually reason in its practical application, where reason seeks practical requirements rather than theoretical demonstrations; that is, instead of proofs, reason seeks the assumptions it requires in order to proceed in its theoretical tasks and in order to explain human moral behaviour. Kant says that reason in its practical application is actually "far more important" because it is not conditional upon any assumptions.<sup>128</sup> Theoretical reason is conditioned because its requirement is conditional: *if* it wants to explain the world as a contingent web of cause and effect, *then* it must assume the existence of a final cause or an original being.<sup>129</sup> But in its practical application, the need of reason is unconditioned because it is the very ground upon which moral action rests; it is the necessary assumption that not only motivates moral agents to work towards the highest good, but also provides the very context in which such moral action is meaningful at all. In this, Kant thinks that he is providing a corrective to Mendelssohn's confused conception: "It is not *cognition*," Kant writes, "but a felt *need* of reason through which Mendelssohn (without knowing it) oriented himself in speculative thinking."<sup>130</sup> The problem with Mendelssohn's account of reason is that he could not ground it as meaningful in the lives of real historical agents. What is it, precisely, that the *Landmann* feels when he is compelled by the force of a rational demonstration of the existence of God? If the demonstration only puts discursive flesh on the feeling of God that had been there all along, then Jacobi is right, all rational conviction *is* grounded in immediate feeling. If the *Landmann* is only convinced by Mendelssohn's demonstration to adopt a belief in God, then the so-called feeling is merely a function of impersonal reason and not the prediscursive common sense Mendelssohn seems to advocate. Kant goes on to say that Mendelssohn would eventually have been brought to the admission that speculation is insufficient for the task of demonstrating supersensible metaphysical concepts had it not been for his old age and habituated ways of thinking.<sup>131</sup> Indeed, as I argued in the first chapter, Mendelssohn's notion of common sense became so confused precisely because of the conflict between his commitment to reason and his need to ground reason in the intimacy of common sense.

Given such comments, it is tempting to agree with Susan Neiman's suggestion that Kant's purpose in the essay is a critical reading of Mendelssohn's method of orientation.<sup>132</sup> I explained in the last chapter how Mendelssohn got himself caught up in contradiction over his notion of common sense as the touchstone for orientation in

<sup>128</sup> *Orientation: Werke* VIII: 139; 8.

<sup>129</sup> Kant develops this point in the third *Critique*, in the *Analytic of Teleological Judgment*. See *Werke V*: 362-84; 239-64.

<sup>130</sup> *Orientation: Werke* VIII: 139f; 8.

<sup>131</sup> *Orientation: Werke* VIII: 140; 9.

<sup>132</sup> *The Unity of Reason*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994) 156.

thinking. The problem was that the contingency of common sense undermined what were supposed to be universal truths demonstrated by reason. In a letter to Christian Gottfried Schütz, Kant calls Mendelssohn's *Morgenstunden* a "self-deception of reason", a case of mistaking "the subjective conditions of our reason's determination of objects in general for the conditions of the possibility of these objects themselves."<sup>133</sup> By placing all of his confidence in speculative reason's ability to provide information upon which to base one's philosophical convictions, Mendelssohn violates Kant's maxim of thinking for oneself, the very cornerstone of enlightenment. A philosophy based purely on facts is a kind of enslavement. Faith is required not only because speculative reason cannot provide demonstrative proof of the supersensible objects of metaphysics, but also because an adherence to facts cannot serve as a principle of thinking for oneself.<sup>134</sup> If everything could be rationally demonstrated, if everything either exists or does not, is either good or bad, then there is no freedom to make one's own decisions or form one's own opinion. The freedom to think for oneself must be a freedom *from* an absolute order.

But this polemic against Mendelssohn only accounts for part of the way Kant sets things up. It seems to me that Kant's position in the *Orientation* essay needs to be seen as a response to both Mendelssohn and Jacobi. Kant's discussion of the freedom to think at the end of the essay is directed not only at the kind of enslavement to facts to which he thinks Mendelssohn's rationalism inevitably leads, but also at the philosophical *Schwärmerei* against which Kant had waged a lifelong campaign, and of which, Kant thought, Jacobi was a particularly insidious exponent. Contra Mendelssohn, Kant thought that a faith that is not riveted to facts is the only way to guarantee the freedom to think; contra Jacobi, Kant thought that this faith must be rational, based on the rational assumption of the existence of a supreme intelligence, an assumption that can serve as a "universal principle for the use of reason."<sup>135</sup> Freedom to think can go too far – this is the danger of *Schwärmerei*. "Men of intellectual ability and broadminded disposition," Kant implores,

I honor your talents and love your feeling for humanity. But have you thought about what you are doing, and where your attacks on reason will lead? Without doubt you want to preserve inviolate the *freedom to think*; for without that even your own free flights of genius would soon come to an end.<sup>136</sup>

It is impossible to interpret a passage like this as being directed at Mendelssohn. Kant did think that Mendelssohn's commitment to traditional rationalism opened the door to a kind of infectious enthusiasm that ultimately ended up subverting the very commitment to reason it held so dear. A case in point, as we have seen, is the concept of common sense. By claiming that the task of reason is the rational demonstration of the supersensible objects of metaphysics, yet maintaining that reason itself requires orientation,

<sup>133</sup> End of November, 1785, *Correspondence*, 237.

<sup>134</sup> Susan Neiman also makes this observation, and I am indebted to her illuminating analysis. (1994, 160). Kant only makes this point clear in a footnote at the end of the essay. (*Werke* VIII, 146; 14).

<sup>135</sup> *Orientation: Werke* VIII, 146; 14.

<sup>136</sup> *Orientation: Werke* VIII, 144; 12.

Mendelssohn inadvertently undermined reason by subordinating it to a form of nondiscursive, immediate knowing. As I argued above, Mendelssohn's notion of common sense wavers between a habituated form of reason and something that is separate from reason altogether. But this is no 'free flight of genius,' and Mendelssohn was hardly attacking reason. Kant's concern is clearly Jacobi; it is clearly the confidence (or faith) that feeling can reveal metaphysical truths that Kant finds so threatening. Thus when Neiman says that Jacobi is "barely mentioned" because his position is "clearly false but uninteresting to attack" she misrepresents Kant's concern with the dangers of *Schwärmerei* and the role that this concern played in the genesis of Kant's little essay.<sup>137</sup> From Kant's perspective, Jacobi's version of faith amounts to an irrationalism that threatens both the validity of a rational belief in God and the freedom of thought that grounds Kant's liberal politics. Indeed, it is this conviction of Kant's, this obsession with the infectious enthusiasm of the *Schwärmer*s, that led Kant to interpret the Jacobi-Mendelssohn debate in the way he did, as a contest between reason and faith. Jacobi, of course, does nearly nothing to dispel this impression, and I pointed out above that his own presentation goes a good way toward reinforcing it. Still, I think it is fairly clear that a careful and charitable reading of the *Spinoza Büchlein* can reveal that Jacobi was not a *Schwärmer*, that his concern is rather in developing a philosophy of practical action that avoids the problems of abstraction.

1.3. We can see the core of the disagreement between Kant and Jacobi when Kant suggests that it would be possible but disadvantageous for reason to extend itself to postulate all kinds of supernatural beings as causes of the world of sense. It is disadvantageous because there is plenty simply given to the senses to occupy us in the study of nature. Moving beyond what is given in sense is thus the result of impatience, or as Kant puts it, "excessive curiosity [*Vorwitz*]."<sup>138</sup> In the case of a final cause, however, reason's need is so great that it outstrips any *Vorwitz* that it might be accused of. In the first case, reason goes beyond what is given in the senses simply because it wants greater understanding without doing the necessary empirical research; that is, reason wants to underpin contingency in nature supernaturally when there are plenty of natural causes to investigate. In the second case, reason comes to a point where contingency simply cannot be underpinned by natural causes, where a final cause of the world is necessary if we are to make sense of what is given in sensation at all. The assumption of a final cause is what Kant calls orientation in thinking, which he clarifies in a footnote by saying that, "to *orient* oneself in thinking means: when objective principles of reason are insufficient for holding something true, to determine the matter according to a subjective principle."<sup>139</sup> This subjective principle turns out to be nothing but the feeling of reason's need, the principle through which thinking orients itself when objective concepts fail; it is the need of reason to assume the existence of something that it requires for its theoretical and practical applications. It is this notion of a felt need of reason that puts into great relief the

---

<sup>137</sup> 1994, 156.

<sup>138</sup> *Orientation: Werke* VIII, 137; 6.

<sup>139</sup> *Orientation: Werke* VIII: 137; 6.

basic disagreement between Kant and Jacobi. For Jacobi, faith in a final cause is not a response to a need; it is rather the natural result of one's intuitive grasp of final causes, a grasp that admits of no rational demonstration. And because final causes cannot be proved, one can only believe them, or have faith that they are real. One does not *need* to posit final causes to *fulfill* any practical demands that reason has to make sense of the world. Final causes appear in feeling, compelling belief. And while final causes enjoy a kind of privileged place in Jacobi's conceptual pantheon,<sup>140</sup> other feelings compel faith too. One's body, other people and the outside world are all given immediately via the faculty of feeling, and they demand not demonstration (this is impossible anyway), but faith.<sup>141</sup> Jacobi writes: "we have a revelation of nature that not only commands, but impels [*zwingt*] each and every man *to believe*, and to accept eternal truths through faith."<sup>142</sup> Where for Kant faith is finally rooted in reason's inability to arrive at knowledge of the supersensible, and so finally rooted in reason's own need to act practically *as if* the supersensible existed, Jacobi roots faith in the feeling that one finds oneself with, and thus sees faith as *acting from* the conviction that the supersensible exists to establish oneself in this faith.

Once we recognize the substance of the disagreement between Jacobi and Kant, it becomes clear that Kant, like Mendelssohn before him, is simply talking past Jacobi. Notice that Kant opens his discussion of orientation in thinking with metaphors of spatial orientation. When orienting oneself geographically, Kant notes, one requires a subjective sense of the differentiation of space, for without such an internal feeling of differentiation one would not know how to relate sense data to one's own spatial position.<sup>143</sup> Jacobi would agree: feeling is what provides the basic orientation in the world; it is the immediate certainty that cannot be derived by reason and is given through the channels of sense experience. In the next paragraph Kant further develops his concept of orientation by drawing an analogy with orienting oneself in a dark room. Kant's idea is that on occasions where we are entirely deprived of sensory experience (a sensory deprivation chamber would probably be a better example than a dark room), we can still appeal to a "*subjective ground of differentiation*"; we can still orient ourselves according to the subjective feeling of our own body, specifically of its situation in space in terms of right and left, up and down, etc.<sup>144</sup> Again, Jacobi would probably agree, who wouldn't? As we have seen, Jacobi thinks that the feeling of one's own body is a certainty around which sense data congeals, again giving us a basic orientation in the world. But Kant's full position finally becomes clear when he extends his geographical and mathematical analogies to his real concern, namely, to orientation in thinking in general. The notion of a subjective ground of differentiation is now revealed as a guide for the use of reason when it cannot take its cues from sense experience. In a footnote, Kant reveals that "*to orient oneself in thinking means: when objective principles of reason are insufficient for*

<sup>140</sup> "I have no concept more intimate than that of the final cause." (SB: *Werke* 4.1, 70; 193)

<sup>141</sup> "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." (SB: *Werke* 4.1, 211; 231)

<sup>142</sup> SB: *Werke* 4.1, 211; 231.

<sup>143</sup> *Orientation: Werke VIII*: 135; 5.

<sup>144</sup> *Orientation: Werke VIII*: 135; 5.

holding something true, to determine the matter according to a subjective principle."<sup>145</sup> Part of what it means to be human for Kant is to find oneself in the dark when it comes to supersensible concepts. When deprived of sensory input, all we can do is paw our way around in the dark using our subjective faculty of feeling.<sup>146</sup> This is supposed to be Kant's concession to Jacobi: there is something we call feeling, and it is important to the intellectual life of human beings, but it only provides guidance to reason; in fact, it is reason itself that feels, and so it is reason itself that is primary.

It is at this point that we can see the force behind Kant's commitment to Mendelssohn's notion of orientation in thinking. Kant and Mendelssohn agree that reason is the feature that grounds human experience. What Kant has done is explained what it means that even a common *Landmann* can *feel* the force of reason in its full discursive application; Kant has made Mendelssohn's notion that reason is something that can be felt much more honest to the lived experience of conviction or moral resolve. To believe in God is not merely to feel the force of discursive reason; to believe in God is to feel the rationality of the belief in an entity that guarantees a moral world order. But for both Kant and Mendelssohn everything hinges on reason.

In this sense Jacobi should be considered as offering a seriously viable alternative to Kant's practical philosophy. For unlike Kant, Jacobi understands feeling to be a deeply intimate experience of the world, of god, of one's body, of others, etc. This may be a radically subjective experience, but it is rooted in a deep commitment to a kind of empiricism. In this way, Jacobi sees us as in anything but a dark room. Feeling illuminates our experience in a way that reason can only attempt to describe or explain; it is like the light from an elementary flame, a flame that can be fanned, yet never extinguished. "We find ourselves situated on this earth," Jacobi reminds us, and this situation always furnishes us with feelings that give us our primary orientation in thinking. For Jacobi, it is the greatest injustice to the most intimate elements of human experience to demand that we make assumptions in order to practically realize reason's theoretical goals. We have no need of assumptions! All we need to orient our thinking is already given in feeling; we need only open our eyes, as Mendelssohn says in a different context.

Read in this way, Kant's critical stance against Jacobi falls somewhat flat. For in the context of this disagreement a basic concord between Kant and Jacobi emerges, albeit one that Kant never recognized. Both thinkers make the human awareness of the supersensible rest on a form of faith, but where Jacobi thinks that this faith is compelled by the nonrational faculty of feeling, Kant holds that it is rational, an indispensable

---

<sup>145</sup> *Orientation: Werke VIII*: 137; 6.

<sup>146</sup> It is, to say the least, a stretch to suggest that feeling is a faculty for Kant. Yet given Kant's language here and given what he says in the *Anthropology* about feeling as a prediscursive awareness, one might make the argument that feeling, like intuition, imagination and judgment, is a faculty that plays a significant role in the human cognitive process. It would be interesting to pursue this thesis in the context of the third *Critique*, where feeling is a fundamental mode of aesthetic experience. However this might be pursued, the notion of feeling in Kant is deeply problematic. Along different lines, but still testifying to the importance of this little essay is a recent presentation at the 11<sup>th</sup> International Kant Congress, where Angelica Nuzzo aligns Kant's notion of orientation with the issue of defining the problem of practical reason. Orientation, Nuzzo claims, allows agents to define a "moral space." Paper read at Pisa, Italy on 25 May 2010.

holding-to-be-true [*Fürwahrhalten*] that supports humankind in its moral endeavors. Still, for both thinkers, faith and action are directly linked. For Kant, holding something to be true on faith is conditional upon the guidance it provides for moral activity, i.e. one holds it to be true that a moral God exists as a motivation to act morally. Such a faith does not determine the objective existence of the supersensible, but it does determine the will of the subject along a particular course of action. For Jacobi, feeling compels a *salto mortale* into the arms of faith and motivates the practical activity that establishes one in such a faith. One of the most significant aspects of the Spinoza controversy, then, is that it fleshed out these two distinct approaches to practical philosophy.

1.4. We can now see more clearly Kant's motivations for participating in the Spinoza controversy. The answer consists in the way in which Kant was able to frame the debate in such a way as to make it congenial to his own purposes. It was not until Kant was able to find a way to make the issue of the debate about his own philosophical ambitions that he put pen to paper. Indeed, in addition to being a central text in the Spinoza Controversy, this short essay has a very important place in Kant's works since it allows Kant to articulate his notion of rational faith, a notion that played an important role in Kant's philosophy as a whole.<sup>147</sup> It is interesting to note that Kant's own unwillingness to take Jacobi's position seriously, to group him together with the *Schwärmer*s and to use the controversy as a springboard to develop his own ideas only serves to illustrate Jacobi's claim that the mind is guided by the heart, or at least that one's ability to assess the world rationally is deeply affected by one's personal, subjective orientation to the world. "Let us say it again," Jacobi emphatically declares, "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."<sup>148</sup> Kant clearly appropriates the terms of the controversy to suit his own needs, and this appropriation required Kant to force its participants into the roles that served his own purposes. So while Jacobi's own confusing style must assume some culpability, Kant's framing of the debate is perhaps the principal reason why Jacobi's position is so poorly understood.

## 2. Kant's Theory of the Postulates

In the last section I explained how Kant's notion of rational faith is an attempt to navigate the debate between Jacobi and Mendelssohn about the nature of human reason and of finite knowledge of the supersensible. At first blush, Kant seemed to strike a middle ground between the two positions, granting that one does indeed have a feeling of God,

---

<sup>147</sup> In this sense, this short essay and the Spinoza controversy itself provided Kant with an opportunity to *orient* his thinking. As Beiser points out: "When Kant challenged Hume and Leibniz, he could always take for granted one important assumption: that reason is the final standard of truth in philosophy. But when he took issue with Jacobi and Mendelssohn, he was forced to examine and justify just this assumption. Hence the importance of Kant's essay is that it reveals the motivation and justification behind his allegiance to reason." (1987, 115)

<sup>148</sup> SB: *Werke* 4.1, 248; 248.

but also making the important qualification that this feeling is really a feeling of reason. The existence of God cannot be proven, but there is simply no way to finally explain the subtle and complex organization of the natural world other than by appeal to final causes. Kant develops this point at length especially in the third *Critique*, but it appears in different forms at least since the first *Critique* onward. The problem with which Kant is concerned is the explanation of the contingency of the world itself, with why there is something rather than nothing. In the first *Critique* Kant makes a distinction between *physico-* and *ethicotheology*. The former is really not a theology at all but rather just a propaedeutic for the empirical investigation of nature; it is a method based on the assumption that the world is teleologically ordered. This method allows one to explain the contingency of *states* of substance, or the *form* that matter takes, but cannot explain the contingency of *matter itself*. The latter proof requires the *physicotheologist* to “suddenly leave this ground [experience], and pass over into the realm of mere possibilities, where they hope upon the wings of ideas to draw near to the object – the object that has refused itself to all their *empirical* inquires.”<sup>149</sup> The failure of physicotheology is here characterized as a failure of the theoretical employment of reason to reach beyond the confines of empirical contingency and speculate about the contingency of the whole, which cannot be given in any experience. In the face of this failure of physicotheology, what is required is what Kant calls *ethicotheology*, the practical endeavor to posit a final purpose of nature itself. For Kant, this final purpose has to be humankind since without humankind even the physicotheological project of discovering the system that the organized forms matter takes would be impossible. Humankind, as the famous claim from the third *Critique* goes, is the ultimate purpose of nature because it is the only creature that can form a concept of purposes and use reason to turn an aggregate of purposively structured things into a system of purposes.”<sup>150</sup> This takes us a bit astray from the main topic of discussion, but is helpful to see that Kant is thoroughly committed to the idea that in order to answer the most fundamental question about the world and the human place within it, it is necessary to assume the existence of final cause. This also highlights the dualistic nature of Kant’s thought. There is an absolute divide between limited human knowledge and the limitlessness of human striving. If such striving is to be meaningful at all, then it is necessary to assume a metaphysical vision of the universe; it must assume, that is, that human action actually makes a difference in the wider context of God’s plan. Such an assumption guides us not only in our empirical investigations of nature (physicotheology), but also in our practical endeavor to discover the final purpose of nature in general (ethicotheology). As rational creatures, we orient our thinking in terms of these basic assumptions that allow us to understand that which could not possibly be understood even through the most exhaustive empirical research. Such a belief is rational because it stems from the need of reason to orient itself in thinking.

Still at the height of the controversy, Kant further fleshes out this resolution by developing his famous theory of the postulates of practical reason. In the *Orientation* essay Kant had only really shown that rational faith was the correct way to orient one’s

---

<sup>149</sup> CPR, A630/B658.

<sup>150</sup> CJ: *Werke V*: 427; 314.



thinking; that is, Kant had only shown that rationality required certain indemonstrable assumptions about the world. Kant now adds metaphysical content to this rational supposition by postulating the actual existence of freedom, God and immortality. The postulates are still merely indemonstrable assumptions, but they now purport to make a claim about the world, about reality as such.<sup>151</sup> Gordon Michalson puts this point very well, "The inner secret of Kant's philosophy of religion is the way it transforms these needs [the needs of reason] from being predicates of thinking alone to being predicates of reality as such: Kant moves from thought "making sense" to reality "making sense," all the while implicitly trading on the latter to give movement to the former."<sup>152</sup> This movement from rational faith to postulation, from logical coherence to metaphysical commitment is a stunning piece of philosophical sleight-of-hand. If one is willing to allow Kant's thesis that one must orient one's thinking about the world based on the assumption of an intelligent creator, it is a small (indeed nearly indistinguishable) step to the thesis that these assumptions are theoretical claims about the nature of reality. As far as Kant is concerned, this movement from rational faith to postulation is perfectly legitimate so long as it is grounded in the command of reason for the practical end of rational activity. For Kant, all moral agents rationally strive towards the highest good, of which the postulates of God and immortality are conditions. It is not that the highest good is some reward for which moral agents strive since this would undermine the categorical imperative and thereby Kant's whole deontological system of ethics. It is simply that the highest good is that towards which *reason* strives. The rational moral agent indeed acts out of duty, but the end of this rationally prescribed duty (an end that is only an end for reason) is the promotion of the highest good. ". . . we find ourselves to go so far, namely to the connection with an intelligible world, to seek the possibility of the highest good which reason points out to all rational beings as the goal of all their moral wishes . . ."<sup>153</sup> What Kant thus suggests is that it is perfectly legitimate to assume the existence of something that cannot be theoretically demonstrated as long as it is something that is taken to be necessary on the grounds of practical reason. But what, precisely, constitutes these grounds? And how does Kant arrive at the postulates?

**2.2.** In a word, a postulate of practical reason is a theoretical assumption that cannot be theoretically demonstrated. On this, Kant says that while the practical extension of theoretical reason does not in any way allow for theoretical speculation about the supersensible, it is "no extension of speculation" and "nothing further is accomplished in this by practical reason than that those concepts are real" because, as Kant puts it, "nothing is thereby given us by way of intuition of them" and "no synthetic proposition is possible by this reality granted them."<sup>154</sup> It might seem that these postulates are rather weak assumptions since we cannot make any theoretical claims about them; they are merely assumptions made by practical reason. But this would be to miss Kant's point. A

<sup>151</sup> *Werke V*, 134. I refer to Mary Gregor's translation of the *Critique of Practical Reason* in *Practical Philosophy*. (Cambridge 1996) Henceforth CPrR.

<sup>152</sup> *Fallen Freedom*. (Cambridge, 1990) 20.

<sup>153</sup> CPrR: *Werke V*: 115; 232.

<sup>154</sup> CPrR: *Werke V*: 134; 248.

postulate is actually a response to a logical necessity, much stronger than any theoretical hypothesis made in an attempt to explain something. When an archaeologist hypothesizes a certain trading pattern between a network of prehistoric cities based on material remains, it is only to propose a possible explanation of the empirical data collected. Other explanations of the data are certainly possible, and the explanatory purpose for which the data is employed is entirely arbitrary. Another archaeologist could, for instance, use the data to support a hypothesis about the development of pottery styles. But postulation is a completely different breed of assumption. In this case, that which is assumed (the postulate) is known to be the necessary condition for the existence of that which we seek to explain. For instance, it is impossible to explain the possibility of the duty to obey the moral law unless one postulates the possibility of the highest good as the object of the will of the rational agent. Unlike in the case of hypotheses, the highest good and its associated conditions of God, freedom and immortality are the only possible way to explain how a rational agent can be duty-bound to follow the moral law in the way practical reason demands.<sup>155</sup> For instance, the existence of God must be postulated, which means that it refers to something real, precisely because simply hypothesizing God is never going to provide the certainty necessary to support moral duty.<sup>156</sup> In natural theology one hypothesizes the existence of God as the only possible cause of the purposive order that exists in nature. Here, God cannot be determined to be an absolutely necessary being, but rather only as "the most reasonable opinion for us human beings."<sup>157</sup> On this account, God is known naturally; God is still an object of faith, but all that is sought is the first cause of things, some hypothetically necessary being that fulfills the required explanatory role. As in Aquinas, the existence of the first cause can be inferred from the effects, and this is what we call God. But to *postulate* God's existence is to regard it as *the only possible explanation*; indeed, it is known *a priori* to be the only condition under which the moral law is even possible. In Aquinas' proofs, God is not demonstrated, but something that can reasonably be called God is inferred from empirical data. Given the limited human perspective, we may be mistaken; that is, what we commonly call God may not be God at all; there may be another explanation for the data. But for Kant, to *postulate* God is not only to settle for the best possible explanation. To postulate God is, in the strongest possible sense, to assume that God exists.

Perhaps the most important postulate is that of freedom. Its importance consists not only in the fact that is the central assumption of Kant's moral system, but also in the fact that the other postulates actually depend on it. Indeed, Kant's whole moral system depends upon the *assumption* of the reality of freedom, of a *noumenal* self that escapes the argument of the Second Analogy that every phenomenal event has a cause. According to Kant, moral responsibility depends on the freedom of the will to break the cycle of causation and enact an effect not determined by antecedent causes. Of course, given the

<sup>155</sup> Yet as Paul Guyer points out, the *Metaphysics of Morals* paints a different picture of the rationality of the belief in the supersensible. In that text, Kant suggests that the pursuit of the highest good is justified simply by the conviction that its realization is not impossible. See *Kant on Freedom, Law and Happiness*. (Cambridge, 2000) 335.

<sup>156</sup> CPrR: *Werke V*: 142, 11n; 254, 145n.

<sup>157</sup> CPrR: *Werke V*: 142; 254.

transcendental box Kant so carefully constructed in the first half of the first *Critique*, we can only have knowledge of appearances, of *phenomena*, thus making the putatively free *noumenal* self completely unknowable. So while I cannot have knowledge of freedom, without it I cannot take morality seriously, which means, for Kant, that its assumption is warranted, even necessary. But Kant also seems to make an even stronger argument for the reality of freedom. As soon as one submits one's will to a set of maxims one becomes immediately aware of the moral law.<sup>158</sup> This immediate awareness consists in the awareness that my acting on these maxims is not determined by natural mechanism; it consists, that is, in my awareness of my *noumenal* freedom. Kant thus has two arguments for the reality of freedom. First, freedom is the condition of the moral law, which, given the fact that we do subject our will to moral maxims, guarantees that its assumption is legitimate; second, in acting in accordance with the moral law, we become aware of freedom. Kant clarifies this in a footnote, where he calls freedom the *ratio essendi* of the moral law and the moral law the *ratio cognoscendi* of freedom.<sup>159</sup> Without freedom, the moral law is impossible; without the moral law, we would have no awareness of freedom. Given the centrality of this concept of freedom, it is not surprising that Kant actually bases the other postulates on it:

Now, the concept of freedom, insofar as its reality is proved by an apodictic law of practical reason, constitutes the *keystone* of the whole structure of a system of pure reason, even of speculative reason; and all other concepts (those of God and immortality), which as mere ideas remain without support in the latter, now attach themselves to this concept and with it and by means of it get stability and objective reality, that is, their *possibility* is *proved* by this: that freedom is real, for this idea reveals itself through the moral law.<sup>160</sup>

Yet despite the language Kant uses to speak of freedom; despite, that is, the strong suggestion one is bound to get that freedom somehow carries a stronger claim to belief than the other postulates, the fact is that Kant has no grounds for such a claim. Freedom may be more important, strategically, to Kant's moral system, but assent to it is based on grounds no stronger than the assent to God or immortality. "[O]ur *cognition* of the unconditionally practical," Kant writes,

cannot start from freedom, for we can neither be immediately conscious of this, since the first concept of it is negative, nor can we conclude to it from experience, since experience lets us cognize only the law of appearances and hence the mechanism of nature, the direct opposite of freedom.<sup>161</sup>

The only grounds Kant has for asserting the reality of freedom is thus the intolerable conclusion that follows from denying freedom. If I deny that I am free, I must also deny

---

<sup>158</sup> CPrR: *Werke V*, 30; 163.

<sup>159</sup> CPrR: *Werke V*, 4n; 140n.

<sup>160</sup> CPrR: *Werke V*, 3f; 139.

<sup>161</sup> CPrR: *Werke V*, 29; 163.

that I have the power to do things that I have an immediate awareness of myself doing; namely, submitting my will to the moral law. For this reason, freedom simply has to be postulated, not merely in order to guarantee the logical coherence of a moral system, but, more importantly, because the feeling that all moral agents have of their capacity to follow moral maxims necessarily implies the reality of freedom. What Kant achieves with this definition can be understood as an extremely clever solution to the problems raised by the Spinoza controversy. As the *ratio essendi* of the moral law,<sup>162</sup> freedom finds a place in reason itself since the possibility of acting morally is guaranteed only by the existence of freedom. Freedom need not be theoretically demonstrated since it can be derived as a necessary postulate of practical reason.

But while freedom may supply the “keystone” of the whole moral system, it does not explain the motivation one has for exercising one's freedom in the promotion of a moral world. Kant seems to think that the moral law would be empty were it not for the highest good; that is, were it not for the confidence that virtue would be systematically rewarded with happiness and moral evil would be systematically punished, the moral law would be empty, providing nothing for which moral agents could strive.<sup>163</sup> The moral law commands that all moral agents promote the highest good, but if the highest good were a practical impossibility, the moral law would be an empty command. Kant provides precious little to support this assumption, and in the context of his own conception of moral duty it is deeply problematic. After all, this seems to set up the highest good as a reason for adhering to the categorical imperative, as a consequence external to pure moral duty. Were this the case, following the moral law would be a mere *hypothetical* imperative, motivated by a desire for a certain state of affairs – I'll do my duty if I can be assured of being rewarded in the end. Kant's reply to Wizenmann is an attempt to deal with this problem.<sup>164</sup> As a counterexample to Kant's postulation of the reality of the conditions of the highest good, Wizenmann invites his reader to imagine a man in love with a mere object of his imagination, who would clearly like to conclude that the object of his love actually exists. Kant admits that such a conclusion is indefensible, but qualifies this by insisting that there is a relevant disanalogy between Wizenmann's example and his own claim that we can conclude the reality of the postulates. The postulates, Kant insists, are not arbitrarily postulated by inclination (as in Wizenmann), but rather necessarily postulated by reason. Of course one would rather that the object of one's fantasies exists in reality, but the existence of freedom, immortality and God, the very conditions for the highest good, are not something that are simply preferable. It is necessary, given that we are bound to the moral law, that the highest good is a practically possible end of human action. “It is a duty,” Kant says, “to realize the highest good to the utmost of our capacity; therefore it must be possible; hence it is also unavoidable for every rational being in the world to assume what is necessary for its objective reality. The assumption is as necessary as the moral law, in relation to which alone it is valid.”<sup>165</sup>

---

<sup>162</sup> CPrR: *Werke V*, 5n; 140n.

<sup>163</sup> CPrR: *Werke V*, 114; 231.

<sup>164</sup> See CPrR: *Werke V*, 143n; 255n.

<sup>165</sup> CPrR: *Werke V*, 143n; 255n.

A deeper response to the problem can be generated out of Kant's solution to the antinomy of practical reason, at the beginning of the *Dialectic of Pure Practical Reason*. Kant's answer here is that there are really no sensible grounds for thinking that the connection between virtue and happiness is as the highest good requires it to be. There can be no causal connection between virtue and happiness because laws of nature, on which our will has no effect, largely determine the results of our actions. It also cannot be the case that it is virtuous to strive for happiness because this is a motive external to the categorical imperative. We thus arrive at the antinomy of practical reason: happiness is not a moral reason to be virtuous and virtue cannot be the cause of happiness. Were the former the case, morality would collapse into merely utilitarian considerations of how best to promote happiness; were the latter the case, the virtuous moral agent would be acting on an empty command, on the simple imperative of duty for duty's sake with no reason for even thinking that duty fulfills some deeper purpose.

Kant's solution to this antinomy is, *in nuce*, that we must simply hope that the highest good is practically possible; we must simply have faith that our virtuous actions will eventually result in our happiness. This does not provide the kind of motivation to be virtuous that would turn the categorical imperative into a merely hypothetical one because it provides no sensible guarantees, but only a faith that maintains us on the path of a virtuous life. It is a precarious solution, but what Kant seems to be proposing is that since it is reason that points out the highest good as the end of practical striving it cannot be the kind of motivation that would taint the purity of the categorical imperative. As always, Kant's point is subtle and deeply problematic. It is plainly the case that the desire for happiness cannot ground virtue because this makes moral action into a self-interested pursuit of reward, thus making virtue into a travesty of a truly moral disposition. But, Kant thinks,

that a virtuous disposition necessarily produces happiness, is false *not absolutely* but only insofar as this disposition is regarded as the form of causality in the sensible world, and consequently false only if I assume existence in the sensible world to be the only kind of existence of a rational being; it is thus only *conditionally false*.<sup>166</sup>

In other words, it is only false to think that virtue can *cause* happiness according to natural laws; it is not false to think that there is some other realm of existence where virtue could lead to happiness. At this point, Kant begins to cash out the dividends of what he established with his argument for the existence of freedom, and we begin to see what Kant means when he says that freedom gives "stability and objective reality"<sup>167</sup> to the other two postulates of God and immortality. Kant has already established that our existence is not confined merely to the *phenomenal* realm of mechanical causality. When we feel ourselves able to submit to moral maxims that are not determined by antecedent causes, we indirectly feel the reality of *noumenal* freedom. It is this that first points us

---

<sup>166</sup> CPrR: *Werke V*, 114; 232.

<sup>167</sup> CPrR: *Werke V*, 4; 139.

towards the reality of a realm beyond the sensible, a realm in which our will is not determined and in which we are free to harmonize it with maxims of our choosing.

This realm is, of course, that of the highest good; it is a realm that consists in the harmonization of virtue and happiness, and as such it has two essential features. First, since it includes perfect virtue, it makes the rather daunting command that a moral agent strive for the successful harmonization of the free will with the categorical imperative. Second, the highest good demands that nature also cooperate in guaranteeing the happiness that must follow from such a virtuous disposition. These two central components of the highest good require two separate postulates to guarantee their reality, namely, immortality and God.

The first, immortality, guarantees that the pursuit of virtue is not in vain. It is of course impossible for anyone to harmonize every desire with the moral law (a state Kant calls “holiness”), but given immortality, we can be sure that this moral project will not be cut short by the inconvenience of finitude. Such a quest for moral perfection “can only be found,” Kant says, “in an *endless progress* [*ins Unendliche gehend*].”<sup>168</sup> One important thing to note here is that Kant does not think that immortality amounts to the promise of some “hoped-for full acquisition of holiness of will.”<sup>169</sup> The point of saying that the moral quest for holiness is an endless one is to emphasize that holiness can never be achieved by a finite creature. A truly moral person, Kant insists, “cannot hope, either here or in any foreseeable future moment of his existence, to be fully adequate to God’s will.”<sup>170</sup> Holiness is thus never to be found as a state within this series, some point that is finally reached after a lifetime of moral uprightness. It is only, somehow, found beyond time itself. Kant does not address this problem of how to properly understand the endless progress towards holiness in the second *Critique*, and my concern here is not to puzzle out what Kant may or may not intend. What I want to draw attention to is the way in which this postulate places the creation of a moral world firmly in the hands of humankind. It may be an infinite task, but the quest to bring our moral dispositions perfectly in line with the categorical imperative is precisely what Kant thinks we should be striving for in all our decisions, and is precisely this moral activity that makes all the difference to the kind of world that is created thereby.

**2.3.** Yet for all the responsibility placed on the shoulders of humankind, there still must be some guarantee that our efforts will not be in vain. There is only so much a moral agent can do; so much simply depends on the structure of the universe itself, which is not at all responsive to human moral striving. It is to solve this problem that Kant introduces the second postulate, God; for God guarantees that nature will cooperate with human virtue and reward it with appropriate happiness. God is a moral God; otherwise, there is no rational end for moral striving. Putting the two postulates together, we can see that for Kant moral success involves both the active striving of moral agents and the divine assurance that the world is structured in such a way as to be responsive to our moral

---

<sup>168</sup> CPtR: *Werke V*, 122; 238.

<sup>169</sup> CPtR: *Werke V*, 122; 238.

<sup>170</sup> CPtR: *Werke V*, 123; 239.

efforts. God only guarantees that there is a harmony between virtue and happiness. A world full of evil would thus be full of unhappiness, and the amoral person would have no need to see particular decisions in the larger context of a universe whose harmonious structure is assured by a moral God. Still required is human moral action. As moral creatures, God only shows us that our actions are not in vain; the responsibility to work within this structure to promote the highest good is a thoroughly human one.

All of this betrays Kant's desire to empower humankind, to promote freedom from superstition, dogmatic ecclesiastical authority and arbitrary laws and customs. *Sapere Aude!* The motto of the Enlightenment and Kant's famous methodological injunction prescribes a course of intellectual self-liberation that demands that one think for oneself, that one use one's reason to promote the highest good for all by finally liberating humankind from a self-imposed enslavement to external authority.<sup>171</sup> Kant's practical philosophy is an attempt to show that it is possible to use reason to empower all people to see for themselves why human freedom, faith in eternal life and God are so important. The primacy of practical reason asserts that it is finally only practical human choice that can decide between thesis and antithesis, that Buridan's ass will never be theoretically compelled to choose to eat from one hay stack rather than another.<sup>172</sup> Thus while the postulate of God guarantees a moral universe, true moral progress towards a truly moral world is left in the hands of humankind.

It is significant that Kant demands not only that a moral agent consider the consequences of his maxim being adopted by all people, but also that he consider the consequences of his maxim becoming a *universal law of nature*.<sup>173</sup> With this formulation of the categorical imperative Kant is drawing particular attention to the fact that the moral agent needs to think of himself not merely as a finite creature capable only of affecting the small moral sphere that holds his immediate concern, but rather as an agent whose actions realize the order of the cosmos itself. Imagine that the course of action you are about to take were to be a part of the natural order of things, that it happened with the same regularity with which an ideal gas obeys Boyle's law of the inverse proportionality of pressure and volume, or with which ethanol boils at seventy nine degrees Celsius. When the moral agent takes this divine perspective, it is as if the responsibility of creation itself becomes a factor in every moral decision.

It is important to notice the relationship between this last formulation of the categorical imperative and Kant's theory of the postulates. The postulate of God's existence asks us to assume that God exists in order to guarantee the harmony between human virtue and the reward of happiness. But in following the categorical imperative, we are asked to think of ourselves as gods, as able, through the sheer power of our freedom to adopt maxims for our actions, to bring about the world in which we want to live through practical action. There are thus two important sides to Kant's understanding of the relation between humankind and God; namely, 1) our inability to have knowledge

<sup>171</sup> See "What is Enlightenment?" Translated by Ted Humphrey. In *Perpetual Peace and Other Essays*. (Cambridge: Hackett, 1983). 41.

<sup>172</sup> CPR, A475/B503.

<sup>173</sup> See *Groundwork of The metaphysics of morals*: 4: 421. I refer to the English translation in *Practical Philosophy* (Cambridge 1996) 73. Henceforth *Groundwork*.

of God, and the consequent necessity of rational faith, and 2) our ability to, through such a faith, to actualize the world that only God really has the power to create. With the same force that Kant argues that our knowledge is severely limited, he reassures us that in our moral striving we can reach beyond the sensible realm. The following lines from the conclusion to the second *Critique* are quoted often enough to be cliché. I'll cite them anyway.

Two things fill the mind with ever new and increasing admiration and reverence, the more often and the more steadily one reflects on them: *the starry heavens above me and the moral law within me*. I do not need to search for them and merely conjecture them as though they were veiled in obscurity or in the transcendent region beyond my horizon; I see them before me and connect them immediately with the consciousness of my existence.<sup>174</sup>

With these lines, Kant firmly establishes his commitment to a dualism between nature and freedom, between the starry heavens that dazzle in their sublimity and the moral law that dazzles in its reaching beyond the finite considerations of inclination, utility and reward. This dualism posits a chasm constituted at once by our inability to bridge it and by the all-too-human drive to attempt to cross anyway, no matter how precarious the bridge. The postulate of immortality guarantees that continued efforts will not be prematurely cut short; the postulate of God guarantees that our efforts are not in vain. Nevertheless, the divide is insurmountable, and the striving that Kant requires of the moral agent can only be motivated by reason's need to postulate.

2.4. Now, as Lewis White Beck points out, there is a fairly serious problem with Kant's claim that the highest good and the postulates of God, freedom and immortality rest on a need of reason. For Beck, Kant's argument looks suspiciously like the pragmatist argument that there is a need to believe because reason cannot demonstrate the necessary conditions for being moral.<sup>175</sup> Kant thinks that reason becomes practical at the point where theoretical reason fails, that we can only postulate these things because human reason is limited in its capacity for theoretical demonstration. Thus it does sound as if Kant predicates his argument for the postulates on the failure of theoretical reason to rationally demonstrate the conditions upon which his moral system rests. As Beck nicely puts it, "It is therefore not a "need of pure reason" but a need of the all-too-human reason."<sup>176</sup>

This seems a bit too quick. Consider, for instance, the consequences of actually knowing God in a fully theoretical sense. Were we to have knowledge of the principles God used when creating the world, our rational action would no longer be guided by the free consideration of what *ought* to be the case, but rather by the rational calculation of what *is* the case. In other words, perfect, infinite knowledge of the structure of the

---

<sup>174</sup> CPPr: *Werke V*, 161f; 269.

<sup>175</sup> *A Commentary on Kant's Critique of Practical Reason*. (Chicago, 1960) 254.

<sup>176</sup> Beck 1960, 254.



universe and our place within it would immediately make moral action impossible. This is not only because the mystery of how to create the highest good would be solved – knowing God’s plan, we would simply need to fall in-line. More importantly, this is because the freedom that constitutes moral action would be transformed into the law-like behaviour of simply following a rule. It is important to see how this differs from following the law as dictated by the categorical imperative. When our will directs our actions according to the consideration that the maxim of our action should become a *universal law of nature*, we are imagining ourselves as co-creators of the cosmos. But when we act according to a known plan, we are merely *acting out* a role in the way a stoic acts out a role in the rational order of the universe.<sup>177</sup> Of course, we are not and could never be God. The point is that true moral action depends on the ability to deliberate about the best possible course of action, the best way to bring about the highest good. If we were living in an absolute order, moral deliberation would be futile since justice and harmony either exist in the world or they do not. Thus when Beck castigates Kant for calling “needs of reason” what are really just pragmatic needs based on an inadequate speculative faculty, he misses the point that for Kant such inadequacy is actually a constitutive feature of morality, and postulation is not some consolation prize. Our reason is, of course, “all-too-human”, but this is precisely why we are moral creatures. To want something other than the freedom for meaningful moral deliberation would be to desire the abandonment of the Enlightenment principle of the freedom of reason, which for Kant would be to abandon his entire project of critical philosophy.

But while I think that Beck’s reproach is a mistake, I think that it does point to a problem in Kant’s practical philosophy. There is no need to emphasize that there is an air of inconsistency in Kant’s double bind: our knowledge is limited, yet we are driven to transcend these limits anyway. Kant does not want to admit that God can be known, but he does require God’s existence as an assumption if moral action is to have any metaphysical significance at all. Now, it is not my intention at this point to submit Kant to any critical scrutiny. I will allow criticism to be mediated through Jacobi, whom I shall discuss in the next chapter. One thing, however, is worth pointing out in order to prepare the way for the perspective from which Jacobi will criticize Kant.

### 3. Concluding Remarks

It is hard to not to notice that there is something disingenuous in the claim that the feelings we have of the postulates are really only indirect feelings of reason. So much is sacrificed for the sake of maintaining reason as the highest court in philosophy. Kant’s argument for the reality of freedom is a case in point. Because of his commitment to the model of empirical cognition described in the first *Critique*, Kant is obliged to posit a *noumenal* realm that transcends the possibility of experience. We have a passive sense faculty out of which all empirical knowledge must flow, and all of this experience is

---

<sup>177</sup> See Epictetus, “Encheiridion” Chapter 17. Translated by Nicholas White. In *Classics of Western Philosophy*. Edited by Steven Cahn. (Cambridge: Hackett, 2007) 326.

structured in terms of determinate concepts. Freedom, because it evades the category of cause and effect, cannot find a place in *phenomenal* experience. It is thus only indirectly that we can 'know' that we are free. We feel our ability to submit to the moral law, which means that we can feel our independence from the causality of the mechanical Newtonian universe. But what is the point of passing the feeling of freedom through reason? Why is the feeling of not being determined to act by antecedent causes a feeling that can only arise in the consideration of the moral law? Kant would respond by pointing out that the moral law is the *ratio cognoscendi* of freedom, but this is clearly not a satisfactory answer. The feeling of freedom can arise in deliberating about even the most mundane actions. The fact is that because Kant is so committed to the distinction between reality and appearance, he is forced to say that anything nonconforming to conceptual processing cannot be known directly. Once again, Kant's commitment to reason seems to betray an even deeper commitment to the inclinations shaping his investigation. Like any rationalist worth his salt, Kant wants to convince us that his conclusions are reached through a careful and rigorous use of reason alone. Yet it is difficult to ignore the fact that Kant's own philosophical agenda shapes his theory of the postulates by demanding that freedom, immortality and God remain unavailable to human experience.

It is of course impossible for the reality either of an eternal life or of an eternal being to appear to theoretical consciousness; these concepts simply escape the reach of the categories. Jacobi, for one, would not disagree. But instead of reaffirming the hegemony of reason in the face of the failure of theory to deliver knowledge of the objects of metaphysics, Jacobi's strategy is to expand the account of how we know in order to explain the experiences with which we all find ourselves. Kant insists that freedom, immortality and God can be assumed since reason points them out to be necessary conditions of the highest good, the end for which all moral action is directed. But even if we accept Kant's account of the highest good as the object of all moral striving, we need not accept that its necessary conditions are unavailable to experience. The only reason Kant places the postulates out of reach of empirical experience is that he wants to prevent knowledge claims about the supersensible. And since he is committed to a model of empirical cognition that consists in the passivity of the faculty of sense and the activity of understanding and judgment, he cannot admit that there is any such thing as an experience that does not pass through human cognitive filters. It is this element of Kant's thinking that Jacobi sees as flirting dangerously with the complete collapse into subjective idealism and thus nihilism about the reality of the external world. In the following chapter, I shall turn my attention to the alternative Jacobi develops in response to his nihilistic fears.

### III

## Jacobi's Philosophy of Action

The principle of all cognition is living being.

– F.H. Jacobi

Hamann often complained to Jacobi about his insistence on the importance of a *salto mortale*. Hamann's chief complaint seems to be that Jacobi is too concerned with human activities, with the faculties for the apprehension of the divine, with the practice of faith, etc. to truly understand that faith consists in the passive reception of divine revelation.<sup>178</sup> In one letter in particular, Hamann remarks that the "knot of the disproportion [between man and God] indeed lies in our nature, but it does not come from us and no philosophical light and striving can dissolve it. *DEUS intersit – dignus vindice nodus!*"<sup>179</sup> Hamann's criticism is that Jacobi seems to think human activity can succeed in lessening the gap between God and humankind, that the terrestrial concerns of mere mortals are enough to call forth divine grace. In a sense, Hamann's complaint is entirely legitimate. Despite Jacobi's reliance on a form of intuition that allows a nonrational knowledge of God, this knowledge requires human activity, and in this sense Jacobi was certainly guilty of disregarding the element of passive receptivity that often characterizes true faith. "Help me," pleads Anselm in chapter nine of the *Proslogion*, "O just and merciful God, whose light I seek, help me to understand what I am saying."<sup>180</sup> Anselm is here passively awaiting the hand of God to point the way to understanding the paradoxes of the Christian faith, pleading with God to help him use reason to understand his faith. This, one could suggest, is not the voice of a philosopher, but of a monk; it is not, that is, the voice of a person committed to the use of his own reason in the pursuit of truth, but rather that of a man of faith devoted to understanding God and the complexities of faith. But Jacobi was no monk, and despite his resistance to the label, his thinking here is deeply philosophical. Unlike Anselm, Jacobi does not think faith is something that can be acted out in merely intellectual contemplation, guided blindly by the loving hand of the Godhead. Faith is something to be *lived*; one cannot understand God, indeed one cannot understand anything without actively living through it. Yet for all his poetic-philosophical ingenuity, Jacobi was never one to be guided by the imperative of clarity. As a result, Jacobi sent

<sup>178</sup> For this point, I am indebted to di Giovanni (1994, 86).

<sup>179</sup> 22 January 1785, *Hamann Breifwechsel*, Vol. 5 Edited by Arthur Verlag (Frankfurt, 1965) # 801, 329. "Der Knoten des Misverhältnisses liegt zwar in unserer Natur, kommt aber wie sie selbst nicht von uns, und wird durch kein philosophisches Lichten und Trachten aufgelöst werden. *DEUS intersit – dignus vindice nodus!*" The translation is mine.

<sup>180</sup> Translated by Thomas Williams. In *Classics of Western Philosophy*. (Cambridge: Hackett, 2006) 418.

mixed messages: on the one hand, he argues for a model of practical philosophy that emphasizes the centrality of human activity in the realization of the divine element of human life; on the other hand, his doctrine of immediacy seems to advocate a passive obedience to the received word of God. The *Spinoza Büchlein* closes, after all, with a passage from Lavater<sup>181</sup> encouraging a passive submission to truth: "[H]e who lets truth, or anything that appears good to him, work upon him freely without reacting to it . . . he who behaves towards truth in a merely passive way . . . *he is of the Truth*. Christ would call him a *Son of the Truth*."<sup>182</sup> Such passages only obscure Jacobi's much more interesting point. There is a sense in which feeling must, of course, be understood as a kind of aesthetic, intuitive reception of sense data, and thus as partly passive. But Jacobi does not think that belief, or even feeling itself consists in such passivity. Feeling, it is true, is the agreement of representation and represented; it is an immediate awareness of an object. But this immediacy is not founded on any kind of mystical bond between the subject and the object, be it terrestrial or divine. It is rather in action that one can have such an immediate feeling; it is, perhaps paradoxically, only in the activities of faith that one is open to the passive reception of revelation. In the last chapter, I attempted to make this argument as clear as possible in the context of the *Spinoza Büchlein*. Part of the problem in that text, aside from its complete failure to present a coherent and organized argument, was that much of the rhetoric is religious while the message is strictly philosophical. Thus the fact that Jacobi mixed company with prominent Christian mystics only served to obscure his philosophical arguments, arguments that, despite their fragmented presentation, could be quite persuasive given a generous reader.

I have already explained how one can see Jacobi's challenge to the philosophical program of the Enlightenment as an event that facilitated the emergence of the importance of practical philosophy in solving some of the most persistent problems in rationalist metaphysics. Reinhold's *Letters on the Kantian Philosophy* was instrumental in convincing a whole generation of post-Kantian idealists that the theory of practical reason articulated at the end of Kant's first *Critique* solves the main problem raised by the Spinoza controversy; namely, the justification for the belief in God and other things not amenable to rational demonstration. In demonstrating this thesis about the emergence of practical philosophy, I have also endeavored to show that despite Kant's rather opportunistic interpretation of Jacobi as a mystic, the latter needs to be understood as offering a viable, if rudimentary practical philosophy, based much less on mystical insight than on the freedom of action with which we are all intimately acquainted through feeling. What I shall do in this chapter is further explore Jacobi's emphasis on action as it develops in opposition to Kant's practical philosophy. My main concern is with exploring Jacobi's seemingly paradoxical dual commitment to faith as practical action and to feeling as passive reception. In this context, the really interesting thing about reading Kant and Jacobi together is that they are both deeply concerned with faith in relation to

<sup>181</sup> Johann Kaspar Lavater, 1741-1801. Lavater is famous for his studies in physiognomy, and he was also a prominent pastor and Christian mystic. His influence waned after 1769, the year he challenged Mendelssohn to either refute certain arguments from natural religion or convert to Christianity.

<sup>182</sup> SB: *Werke* 4.1, 252f; 250f. As noted by Di Giovanni (1994, n.112, p.605), the passage is from Lavater's *Pontius Pilatus*, vol. II, 71-72.

human action. For Kant, faith is a rationally necessary postulate that provides the metaphysical context in which human moral action can have meaning. For Jacobi, faith is a much broader category, used not only to refer to God and the supersensible objects of metaphysics; it is also the name given to the kind of epistemological conviction that arises out of being an active agent in the world; indeed, faith is something that arises out of the very structure of consciousness in general. Thus both Kant and Jacobi are committed to faith as an alternative to discursive knowledge, but where Jacobi brings into question the very value of the latter to philosophy, Kant establishes the strict division between theory and practice that constitutes his famous unbridgeable divide between freedom and nature. My specific task in this chapter is submitting Kant's theory of the postulates to Jacobi's critical scrutiny. While Jacobi never wrote a formal critique of Kant's practical philosophy, a fairly coherent picture can be cobbled together from various sources. I will focus on two texts, *David Hume* (1787) and the second, 1789 edition of the *Spinoza Büchlein*. With these two texts, it is possible to isolate a complete and compelling alternative both to Kant's model of empirical cognition and to the practical philosophy that proceeds in terms of its basic assumptions.

What Jacobi does, and this is what I want to show in this chapter, is to throw out the whole modern paradigm of knowledge as a relation between knowing subject and object known. Epistemological conviction involves not some surety about the external world as given to a passive faculty of sense from without; rather, it involves an immediate awareness of oneself in the context of a world, an awareness that is only possible through the activity of a subject. This is why the *salto mortale* is so important to Jacobi's thinking. Faith is something we choose. We make a *salto mortale* into the arms of faith, into the "system of freedom." Unlike in Lavater, there is no passivity here since passivity is only possible when one submits oneself to the force of something external. The *salto mortale* is Jacobi's recommendation for those (especially philosophers) who have a tendency to walk on their heads; to be guided, that is, by rational argumentation rather than by immediate feeling. As Lessing puts it, the leap is a movement of flipping oneself back on one's feet: "In general I do not dislike your *salto mortale*," Lessing admits, "and I understand how one can start from one's head and turn it upside-down in this way in order to move away from it."<sup>183</sup> The *salto mortale* is the active confirmation of the veracity of feeling; it is no mere conceptual shift, but rather a practical shift in how one gives assent and assigns meaning to the world into which one finds oneself thrown. There is nothing but activity in the *salto mortale*, and there is nothing but the always already active engagement of consciousness with a world.

---

<sup>183</sup> "Überhaupt gefällt Ihr *Salto mortale* mir nicht übel; und ich begreife, wie ein Mann von Kopf auf diese Art Kopf-unten machen kann, um von der Stelle zu kommen." (SB: *Werke* 4.1, 74) This is a rather confusing turn of phrase. Jacobi seems to be advocating the *salto mortale* as a movement away from a thinking enslaved to rational explanation. To take the *salto mortale* from Lessing's Spinozistic position is to cease being guided by rational argument (thus walking on one's head, as philosophers tend to do) and subordinate the head by finally walking on one's feet.

## 1. Jacobi on Kant

So what, precisely, is Jacobi's complaint about Kant's practical philosophy? First, I want to look at Jacobi's *David Hume*, without a doubt the clearest and most systematically coherent text Jacobi ever produced. I am particularly interested in the appendix, Jacobi's famous criticism of Kant's *thing-in-itself*, because it provides a fairly clear model for understanding the wider problems Jacobi sees in Kant, problems that only get repeated in the latter's practical philosophy. Beyond this, however, the *David Hume* itself provides a more or less clear picture of Jacobi's own considered philosophical outlook. This text begins to consolidate the rather disconnected ideas I explored in the first chapter. Second, I will look at the supplements Jacobi added to the *Spinoza Büchlein* in 1789, in which Jacobi deepens the arguments he makes in the *David Hume*. Until now, I have confined myself to the 1785 edition in order to present the early development of the Spinoza controversy. But as the controversy simmered on, Jacobi had a chance to make his position clearer to those who had obviously misunderstood him. For our purposes here, the most interesting progress is made in terms of how Jacobi presents the relation between faith, feeling and practice. Jacobi now presents a clearly worked out model of the structure of consciousness as consisting in an active, immediate awareness distinguished from any theoretical knowledge. Jacobi now understands feeling as grounded in action, and faith is the name for the assent we give to immediate feeling: "[...] this knowledge [immediate certainty] is only a faith, since whatever is not capable of strict proof can only be believed."<sup>184</sup> What is known through feeling can only be an object of faith because it is not conceptualized. It is certainly possible to develop concepts based on the immediate feelings of ourselves in active engagement with the world; in fact, Jacobi spends a good portion of the text deriving the necessity of certain concepts from immediate experience alone.<sup>185</sup> But Jacobi's argument attempts to establish that feeling is always the final ground on which conceptual construction rests. The force of this argument is in its attack on philosophers who would presume to expect the world to conform to our concepts, and for Jacobi in the years immediately following the Spinoza controversy Kant becomes the paradigm case. The result of this presumption is that a strict division is established between active moral agents and the metaphysical context in which their actions are meaningful. Kant begins with an account of the processes involved in experience and proceeds to cleverly devise ways to explain how the very experiences that do not conform to his account can be explained consistently in its terms. This is to begin with concepts and proceed to derive experience from them. Recall: freedom is nothing more than the ability to submit to the moral law, which itself is nothing but a command of reason; the conviction we have of God's existence is actually the exigency of reason postulating a divine creator that guarantees the universe is structured in such a way as to reward moral action. It is as if there is experience and then our interpretation of it, and the latter is granted the place of honour as the *truth* of experience. So how does Jacobi challenge this treacherous presumption?

---

<sup>184</sup> DH: *Werke* 2, 144; 265.

<sup>185</sup> See DH: *Werke* 2, 206ff; 292ff.

Jacobi does not engage with Kant's second *Critique* the way he famously did with the first, but a number of remarks permit one to reconstruct a debate, and Jacobi's criticism of the *thing-in-itself* is the basic model that gets repeated in various forms.<sup>186</sup> The first two chapters already indicate a basic point of disagreement; namely, we shall recall, the difference between Kant's rational faith and Jacobi's notion of a faith based on immediate feeling and practical action. Jacobi's more developed criticism of Kant, which I will attempt to formulate here, needs to be understood in the context of the famous and influential critique of Kant's *thing-in-itself* that Jacobi appended to his *David Hume*. In the aftermath of the Spinoza controversy, Jacobi came to regard Kant, instead of Spinoza, as the most insidious form of philosophy, leading directly to nihilism. Jacobi's charge is that if the transcendental idealist were consistent, the system would collapse into a mere construction of the human mind.

The most famous line from Jacobi's assessment of Kant's first *Critique* (possibly the most famous line from Jacobi's work in general) is the *bon mot* that without the presupposition of the *thing-in-itself* it was impossible to get into Kant's system, but that with the presupposition, one could not remain within it.<sup>187</sup> Jacobi is here pointing to an inconsistency in Kant's critical philosophy. Jacobi often confessed to being far too dim to be able to engage in the subtle discourse of the philosophers,<sup>188</sup> but he is obviously a powerful critic. The charge is that Kant assumes objects to be the *cause* of our representations, while at the same time claiming that objects *are* only representations. Kant would respond, as Jacobi allows him to in an extensive citation, by distinguishing between objects that are "*empirically external*" and "those which may be said to be external in the transcendental sense"<sup>189</sup> and claiming that it is the latter objects that cause our representations. But this cannot go anywhere either since Kant particularly denies that we can have knowledge of anything transcendent. This leads to what we might call Kant's paradox of representation. The paradox arises when one attempts to sort out what these empirical objects are. Kant claims they are representations, but this means that representations are the cause of representations, which is clearly paradoxical since what Kant requires is something external to cause a representation. To Jacobi, and indeed to many of his contemporaries, this criticism exposed a devastating inconsistency at the heart of the critical philosophy.

But this is only a logical problem. Were this all Jacobi had to say, he would be nothing more than a pedantic critic given to poking holes in the work of others. Jacobi was a polemicist, but his polemics were always driven by more than arid faultfinding. The real substance of the criticism is the claim that given his presuppositions about empirical cognition, Kant simply cannot avoid the problem of the *thing-in-itself*. "How is it possible," Jacobi asks,

<sup>186</sup> Some of Jacobi's explicit remarks about Kant's second *Critique* can be found in his *Jacobi an Fichte*, *Werke* 3, 39-42; 516-18 and the 1815 Preface: *Werke* 2, 34-45; 551-56.

<sup>187</sup> DH: *Werke* 2, 303; 336.

<sup>188</sup> See, for instance, where Jacobi recounts a conversation with his mathematics teacher, Le Sage (the physicist George-Louis Le Sage, 1724-1803). DH: *Werke* 2, 180-81; 279.

<sup>189</sup> DH: *Werke* 2, 295; 333. The reference to Kant is to CPR, A373.

to reconcile the presupposition of objects that produce impressions on our senses, and in this way arouse representations, with an hypothesis intent on abolishing all the grounds by which the presupposition could be supported?<sup>190</sup>

There are thus two central problems with Kant's critical philosophy. First, Kant assumes that we have a passive faculty of sensibility. It is the object that acts on our faculty of sense, and we have no control over how the object forces itself on us. We are passive receptacles for raw sense data, which the active cognitive faculties then process into experience that has meaning for us. Second, Kant thinks that anything that does not go through this process of cognitive interpretation simply cannot be known. The problem is not that Kant tells a story about how structures in the human mind constitute experience. The problem is rather that Kant assumes a passive faculty of sense, which forces him to posit external objects that act on it. It is impossible to avoid the assumption of a *noumenal* world if it is assumed that it furnishes the cognitive faculties with data for interpretation. Kant, of course, required this assumption in order to retain his realist strand, in order, that is, to not collapse into an idealism that would be no better than Berkeley's. As far as Jacobi is concerned, the *thing-in-itself* is nothing more than a bulwark preventing the complete collapse of the so-called "transcendental" idealism into the most nihilistic subjective idealism. Indeed, as Jacobi writes, "[t]he transcendental idealist must have the courage, therefore, to assert the strongest idealism that was ever professed, and not be afraid of the objection of speculative egoism."<sup>191</sup> Jacobi's critique thus not only reveals an inconsistency in Kant's philosophy; it also reveals that this is an inconsistency that stems from an improper understanding of its true import. This is a strong claim and whether or not Jacobi is right is certainly debatable. Still, support for his position can be found in Fichte, who developed a system of subjective idealism and claimed it to be a project of interpreting the spirit of the Kantian critical philosophy. Indeed, Jacobi would come to regard Fichte's development of Kant as the paradigm case of philosophical thinking having lost itself in the abyss of nihilism.

**1.2.** While this criticism is explicitly directed at the first *Critique*, it provides an excellent starting point for discussing the difference between Kant and Jacobi's respective concepts of faith. It is, after all, Kant's theory of empirical cognition that supplies the basic philosophical orientation shaping his model of practical philosophy. Because of this, Jacobi sees the practical postulates as nothing more than another bulwark attempting to stop the critical philosophy from sliding into subjective idealism. It is easy to see the force of this criticism when we compare Kant's and Jacobi's respective arguments for the reality of human freedom. It is here that we can see just how crippling the assumption about the passivity of sensibility was for Kant's philosophy. Recall that for Kant freedom was established in two steps, showing 1) that freedom can be legitimately assumed since it is a necessary condition for our awareness of the moral law; and 2) that in the awareness of the moral law, we become indirectly aware of freedom; these are the *ratio*

---

<sup>190</sup> DH: *Werke* 2, 307; 337.

<sup>191</sup> DH: *Werke* 2, 310; 338.



*essendi* and the *ratio cognoscendi* respectively. The difference for Jacobi is that we are *immediately* aware of our freedom. The feeling of acting without being determined by antecedent causes is an immediate intuition of freedom. In the preface to the 1789 edition of the *Spinoza Büchlein*, Jacobi argues that all people have an inner measure that allows for deliberation about competing desires.<sup>192</sup> This inner measure is a form of autonomous activity, which Jacobi calls freedom. Unlike Kant, Jacobi thinks that this freedom can be directly felt, that we all have an immediate, noncognizable awareness of this freedom and that this is the basic element of morality, of what makes us moral creatures worthy of moral consideration.<sup>193</sup> As an illustration of this, Jacobi asks us to consider that we regard one who struggles against desire, temptation and vice with contempt, but we cannot reject him altogether, for there is still something of honour in him, still something of autonomy that struggles against desire. But one who has no self-contempt, who denies all feeling of honour; this man can be rejected – “He is filth under our feet.”<sup>194</sup> The consciousness we all have of this freedom within us is for Jacobi the consciousness of the divine element in humankind. To constantly measure our actions against the inner measure of our freedom is a striving for a kind of divine virtue. We all have a sense of this striving within ourselves; in addition to its being demonstrated through action, it is immediately present to anyone who understands themselves as a creature of more than mere natural inclination. “They all want to be lovers of virtue,” Jacobi writes, “not of the advantages connected with it; and they all want to know of a *beauty* that is not just a source of *pleasure*; a joy that is not mere titillation.”<sup>195</sup> The *salto mortale* is at once an assent to the legitimacy of this feeling we all have of ourselves as free and an enactment of it. To feel free is not enough; we must act on its impulse and demonstrate its power to ourselves and to others. Jacobi and Kant can agree that freedom cannot be proven theoretically, but where Kant is forced by his commitment to the passivity of sensibility to consign freedom to the unknowable realm of *noumena*, Jacobi is free to embrace the feeling we all have (a feeling that Kant too acknowledges) that our actions are not determined by natural mechanism and claim that freedom is a real, immediately intuitable element of human experience. In a word, Jacobi is bold enough to admit that when it comes to things like freedom, we need to embrace a different kind of knowing. Kant's own move to practical philosophy betrays a tacit agreement that freedom cannot be an object of knowledge. The issue consists in the fact that Kant sets up freedom (and God and immortality too) as a static object to be known. The finitude of human cognition prevents this kind of knowledge, but were we appropriately equipped, this knowledge would, at least in principle, be possible.

In reading Kant's argument for the reality of freedom, it is difficult not to be struck by the lengths he goes both to prove the reality of freedom within the confines of what reason can demonstrate and to prevent the awareness we all have of our freedom exceeding these confines. There are two ways of understanding Kant's motivation here. Kant is committed both to the authority of reason and to the reality of freedom. The first

---

<sup>192</sup> SB2: *Werke* 4.1, 21-22; 343.

<sup>193</sup> SB2: *Werke* 4.1, 26-27; 345.

<sup>194</sup> SB2: *Werke* 4.1, 30; 346.

<sup>195</sup> SB2: *Werke* 4.1, 35; 348.

commitment compels him to deny that freedom can be known immediately; the second commitment compels him to find a way to account for the feeling of freedom we all have. I have already explained how Kant meets the requirements of this dual commitment. But does this amount to an account of the experience of freedom? Again, the structure of Kant's argument is striking. The problem is to explain how it is that we can have an experience of the reality of freedom, an experience that, based on what Kant says in the Second Analogy, expressly resists conceptual processing.<sup>196</sup> The solution is not to explain how *this* experience is possible, but rather to explain that this experience is really something else, something, namely, that can be explained in terms of Kant's rational system of morality. In concluding my discussion of Kant in the last section, I suggested that there is something disingenuous about this move since it seems to sacrifice so much only in order to save a particular theory of human experience. Jacobi's proposal is to eliminate the reliance on the notion of passive sensibility and to develop a picture of human experience based on the immediacies we encounter in our everyday lives.

## 2. Consciousness and Action

So far, aside from his critical argument about Kant's *thing-in-itself*, we have only seen Jacobi making claims, and these are not yet his arguments. In *David Hume*, Jacobi makes the important move not only of deepening his claims, but also of making explicit arguments to defend what has until now been largely polemical. It is in this text that Jacobi clarifies ideas which had not previously been made explicit. In the last chapter, I was at pains to isolate the practical elements of Jacobi's philosophy, drawing particular attention to Jacobi's argument that human action is the context in which one develops one's faith, the context in which one's faith becomes an active, living force in one's life. But in 1785, Jacobi's final position went largely undeveloped. Feeling appeared as an immediate awareness of an external object; the *salto mortale* was the way in which one embraced this immediate feeling in faith, and practical action developed this faith in the context of human life. What Jacobi does two years later in *David Hume* is develop a more complete (and consequently more persuasive) argument for what is taking shape as a unique philosophical position.

In the first edition of the *Spinoza Büchlein*, there was the issue that Jacobi seemed to be defending the (admittedly mystical) premise that the subject has an immediate awareness of an external object. This was less problematic for Jacobi's tacit argument about the immediate experience one has of one's own body, one's freedom, etc. I attempted to reconstruct Jacobi's argument in the last chapter, but it was difficult to see how Jacobi could possibly defend an immediate awareness of God without falling prey to the charge of religious *schwärmerei*. In *David Hume*, Jacobi sets himself the task of cleaning up this confusion. The basic formula can be expressed in Jacobi's claim that "I" and "Thou" are reciprocally implicating, or in Jacobi's own words,

---

<sup>196</sup> CPR: A189/B232-A211/B256.

that the *I* and the *Thou*, the internal consciousness and the external object, must be present both at once in the soul even in the most primordial of perceptions – the two in one flash, in the same indivisible instant, without before or after, without any operation of the understanding – indeed without the remotest beginning of the generation of the concept of cause and effect in the understanding.<sup>197</sup>

Initially, Jacobi had attempted to capture this idea of the immediate awareness of an other in the image of the human becoming divine and the divine becoming human. As I argued in chapter one, this seemed to be the guiding theme in the *Spinoza Büchlein*. With the contrast between the two Goethe poems we were able to frame Jacobi's argument in terms of the power of human freedom to realize the divine in the human spirit. The idea there was that the feeling of freedom was a feeling of the divine, and we have seen how Jacobi develops this position in the preface to the 1789 edition of the *Spinoza Büchlein*. The divine takes on flesh and blood by manifesting itself in human feeling, and the human takes on a divine nature by taking this feeling to be indicative of reality, by taking freedom to be indicative of divine presence and engaging in the practical activity that realizes the divine as a meaningful presence in human life. Once again, this is why the *salto mortale* is not equivalent to a blind leap into a faith contrary to reason. The *salto* is at once an affirmation of the feeling of freedom and an actualization of freedom in a significant act of freedom. In *David Hume*, Jacobi changes his approach. Jacobi does not abandon his advocacy for the *salto mortale*, but he does deepen the reasons he offers for why it is justified and necessary. Now the argument revolves around a claim about the structure of consciousness itself. It is still the case that the paradigm Thou is God, but Jacobi's argument is more than a religious one. In saying that there can be no I without a Thou, Jacobi is arguing that consciousness of oneself depends on a relationship with an other that is always already present. The world does not emerge *for* a subject with the phenomenon of consciousness. Rather, the phenomenon of consciousness is itself a product of this relationship. It is important to note the distance Jacobi establishes between himself and metaphysical arguments for the ego that turn on the definition of the ego as indivisible. Jacobi's point is rather that the conscious world of the ego is structured as encompassing a relation between itself and something else outside of it. Jacobi is, in this sense, a philosophical predecessor to later nineteenth and twentieth century thought that sees thinking not as something carried out in isolation, but rather as an agent situated in a specific (and specifically linguistic) social environment.<sup>198</sup> The paradigm case of thinking is not captured by Rodin's famous *The Thinker*, deep in contemplative isolation. This is the case, Jacobi would argue, not only because thinking is inseparably bound up with the linguistic structures that give intuitive murkiness a kind of determinate clarity, but also because consciousness itself cannot even arise for a subject without always already being able refer to itself as opposed to something that is other than itself. Consciousness must

<sup>197</sup> DH: *Werke* 2, 176; 277.

<sup>198</sup> As John McCumber nicely puts it, "This does not mean that thinking cannot be carried on in solitude. It can, just as sex can. But the public thought process is not founded on the private one, any more than making love is founded on masturbation." *Reshaping Reason*. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005) 13.

be consciousness *of* something, and this requires distinguishing between itself and something else.

"[...]the faculty of thought is always a spectator and cannot ever be a source of external actions." Jacobi has his interlocutor recall Hume's argument that we cannot understand the will as some isolated force that determines our actions.

[...] even where the will has the act in control, we still do not know how it got that control; and if we try to trace our way back to the act, moment by moment, we run into the deepest obscurities. For nobody will say that, through his will, he moves his hand or foot (let us say) *immediately*. The will must have first set the muscles and nerves in motion together with a multitude of solid or liquid parts; and this at least it did without knowing *what* it was doing [...] how can we still claim to be conscious of a power that brings acts forth, and derive the cognition of a *cause* from it?<sup>199</sup>

We cannot speak of the will as determining the actor, as if, in addition to the agent, there is some force that compels the agent to act. Hume's point, of course, pivots on his skeptical argument against the reality of cause and effect. Here, the cause of an action cannot be the result of a relation between ideas because the connection between will and action is not a necessary one. Nor can the cause be a matter of fact since it does not derive from an experience. Herein lay the heart of Hume's famous problem of induction; namely, that we need to assume a necessary connection between cause and effect if we are to make inductive arguments that purport to establish the necessity of such a connection. Jacobi's employment of Hume for his own purposes is problematic at best, and there is no exception here. For one, Jacobi rejects Hume's skepticism. It is a mistake, Jacobi thinks, even to make a distinction between self and world in the way that gives rise to Humean skepticism. "So, here is this table, there that chess-board with its pieces in place, and your humble servant speaking to you. Do we become *things in themselves* for you, *from representations*, only through an inference?"<sup>200</sup> The point is to ask whether it makes sense to speak of our awareness of the external world based on its relation to a passive faculty of sense and the ways in which the human mind cobbles together ideas based on what is given in passive sense experience. Hume's skepticism arises because there is no way to trace, for instance, the concept of cause and effect either to the operations of our mind or to the experiences we have had of the external world. In this way, Hume can doubt even the experience we have of our own selves as the originator of a will. But for Jacobi, there is no basis for such a skepticism because everything arises all at once. I am immediately aware not only of myself and a world in opposition to me, but also of myself as an agent that acts within the world that contains obstacles to my actions. Jacobi's interlocutor confirms what Jacobi has been saying:

<sup>199</sup> DH: *Werke* 2, 203-04; 291-92. As noted by di Giovanni, the reference is to Hume's *Enquiry*, section VIII.

<sup>200</sup> DH: *Werke* 2, 173; 276.

I experience that I am, and that there is something outside me, in one and the same indivisible moment; and at that moment my soul is no more passive with respect to the object than it is towards itself. There is no representation, no inference, that mediates this twofold revelation.<sup>201</sup>

So while Jacobi can agree with Hume that it is wrong to understand the will as the cause of actions, he cannot agree that this leads to skepticism about causality and about the reality of the will of the active agent. We could not even be conscious of our selves unless we were rooted in a world to which we find ourselves opposed. This means that it is impossible to doubt the reality of ourselves and of the external world because our representations require both. We cannot represent ourselves without reference to an external world; and we cannot represent an external world unless these representations are our own internal representations.

But how do we become aware of ourselves in this immediate way? What kind of relation would be able to produce this kind of knowing? The answer to this question is really where Jacobi begins to tie together the three concepts feeling, faith and practice I isolated in the first chapter. Feeling is really just the immediate awareness we have of ourselves – this much we can glean from a reading of the *Spinoza Büchlein*. What Jacobi adds to this claim is that it is in the awareness of ourselves as active subjects that we have such an immediate awareness. In the context of the discussion of the reality of the will, Jacobi makes a remarkably clear and compelling point.

Certainly, the will is not *prior* to the action and is not its efficient cause. But neither is the action *prior* to the will, and it is not *its* efficient cause. On the contrary, the same individual wills and acts simultaneously, in the same individual moment. He wills and acts in accordance with the constitution of his particular nature, and in conformity with the requirements and relations of his nature.<sup>202</sup>

The will and the act are one. The awareness we have of ourselves as agents with a free will is immediately rooted in our actions, the actions of free agents. Thus it is in acting freely that we feel freedom. And because we are active agents in a world that arise simultaneously with the consciousness of ourselves, we find ourselves constituted by obstacles that interfere with our freedom of action. “It is striking,” remarks Jacobi’s interlocutor, “how our consciousness exhibits *moments of activity and passivity, of action and reaction, that clearly involve one another.*”<sup>203</sup> We experience ourselves as active agents, yet at the same time as rendered passive by the force of the external world. Even more forcefully, we cannot have any experience of ourselves unless we also experience the external world. We thus experience the world *in itself* immediately through the

---

<sup>201</sup> DH: *Werke* 2, 175; 277.

<sup>202</sup> DH: *Werke* 2, 206; 292-93.

<sup>203</sup> DH: *Werke* 2, 206; 293.

experience of an external world as an absolute obstacle to our activity. It is in this way, finally, that Jacobi understands the simultaneous emergence of the "I" and the "Thou."

2.2. We are now in a better position to see that the criticism of Jacobi that Kant deployed in the *Orientation* essay falls flat when we consider how Jacobi develops his conception of feeling and his doctrine of immediacy in *David Hume*. Jacobi is not a *Schwärmer* because it is only as an active agent in a community with others that one feels one's freedom, and the problem with *Schwärmerei* is that it preaches a passive submission to God. The assumption that because Jacobi preaches an immediate awareness of the self and the external world he is a member of the cult of genius is thus a clear misreading, albeit a forgivable one considering Jacobi's poor presentation. In chapter one I pointed out that this misreading seems to be somewhat strategic in that Kant is setting up two poles of a debate so that he can successfully navigate them. In this sense, Kant sets up a straw man version of Jacobi in an attempt to solve the putative impasse at which Jacobi and Mendelssohn had found themselves. And it is in this sense, as I also pointed out in chapter one, that the Kant is guided by the imperative of the heart rather than reason itself.

Coming back to the matter at hand, we can summarize the main point of contention between Kant and Jacobi. Kant thinks that action is reducible to a will that acts in accordance with reason, with the universality of the categorical imperative. The freedom we have to act is only a freedom to act according to the demand of the moral law, the determining ground of the will. And the motivation we have to act is only a metaphysical edifice (God and immortality) derived from the needs of the very reason that determines our actions in the first place. Seen in this way, Kant's theory of the postulates is not an effort to account for the experience of freedom, or the conviction that people have about God and immortality. Rather, Kant is concerned to make these elusive immediacies of everyday experience part of a rational system that explains their force in the context of a metaphysical *Weltanschauung*. Jacobi's concern, on the other hand, is with everyday lived experience. In what does the feeling of freedom consist? How does the idea of God arise in us? What makes this idea such a powerful conviction? Jacobi's answer, as I have suggested above, is that these convictions arise from our immediate experience, not of the world as an objectively existing entity, but of a subject as engaged in the activity that opens up the world *qua* an object of experience. One of the biggest differences between Kant and Jacobi on this front is that for Kant freedom is a philosophical problem that requires a solution. Such a problem does not arise for people who do not philosophize, who go through their everyday lives making moral decisions and feeling themselves to be free. It is only when one comes at it with a set of philosophical commitments that freedom becomes a problem. Freedom is not a problem in this sense for Jacobi; it is something that people feel every day, and in this sense it is problem that people face in their everyday lives. Freedom, or how to understand it, embrace it and take control of it is for Jacobi a *lived* problem. Everybody has a sense of his or her own freedom; the problem is not to explain it in terms foreign to this experience, but rather to capture it in its lived everydayness. "In my judgment," Jacobi declares, "the greatest service of the scientist [*des Forschers*] is to unveil *existence*, and to reveal it [...]" His final goal is what cannot

be explained: the unanalyzable, the immediate, the simple.”<sup>204</sup> It is thus the complexity of Kant’s philosophical system that presents the greatest obstacle to understanding the immediacies vital to everyday life. It is for this reason that Jacobi is opposed to philosophical systems of all kinds.<sup>205</sup> Feeling is a kind of spiritual tonic designed to counteract the detrimental effects of too much abstraction. Feeling reconnects the subject to that which is immediately felt by removing the whole explanatory edifice that presumes to give a truer story about experience than experience itself.

### 3. The Life of Reason

With his notion of feeling, Jacobi moves us beyond the realm of truth and falsity altogether. Explanations can be verified or falsified since they either agree with what is being explained or they do not. But while we can doubt the explanations offered by reason, we have no grounds for doubting that which feeling reveals to us.<sup>206</sup> Truth and falsity no longer apply to freedom, happiness, pain, God, etc. because all these things present themselves to us at the most basic epistemic level, at the very ground upon which reason erects its explanatory edifice. On this front, Jacobi issues a challenge to epistemology and anticipates the models that would be offered later by the German idealists.<sup>207</sup> The weakness of the epistemological models of Jacobi’s time is that they set out from a separation of subject and object, and were thus stuck with the question of how knowledge of reality was possible. This was especially problematic when dealing with supersensible metaphysical objects since there are simply no corresponding sense impressions. Jacobi’s model neutralizes this problem by postulating that the object is given immediately in feeling. There is no problem of whether our representations accurately represent objects since the representing subject and its object are one in feeling. Immediate certainty, says Jacobi, “is simply and solely *the representation itself agreeing with the thing represented*, (thus has its ground in itself).”<sup>208</sup> There is thus no problem of representation for Jacobi; such a problem assumes that humans are merely thinking things in opposition to a world, *in possession of* cognitive faculties with which it can be represented. Jacobi wants to say that humans *consist* of such faculties, that there is no objective existence to represent, but rather just a living relation. If we think of human cognition as set up in opposition to a natural world, with the task of comprehending this natural existence, then everything it comprehends will always be conditioned by the limitation of cognition. If this is how we understand human thought, how absurd it is to demand a demonstration of God’s existence. Human reason is only able to follow along the series of conditions. But God is unconditioned. This means that the only knowledge

---

<sup>204</sup> SB: *Werke* 4.1, 72; 194.

<sup>205</sup> Much to his delight and, later, dismay, German idealists like Fichte and Schelling took up Jacobi’s ideas and developed (Gasp!) systems.

<sup>206</sup> Here, I am indebted to Frank Ankersmit, who makes a similar point in 2008, 230.

<sup>207</sup> Here I have in mind Schelling and Hölderlin, who both defined intellectual intuition as a kind of immediate experience, where the division between subject and object evaporates.

<sup>208</sup> SB: *Werke* 4.1: 210; 230.

we can have of God is immediate, a product not of a representational relation between subject and object, but rather of a kind of existential situation in which humankind finds itself. For Jacobi, this situation furnishes one with a consciousness of oneself that provides all that we have for making judgments about the supersensible. Our own will, our capacity for spontaneous activity is an "analogue" for the divine power of causality.

Even less can *causality in general* be conceived simply as the *result of mediation*, or as resting on mechanism. And since we do not have the slightest intimation of causality, except *immediately*, through the consciousness of our own causality, i.e. our life-principle, I don't see how anyone can avoid assuming intelligence in general as the first and single principle, as the true primordial Being.<sup>209</sup>

The point of saying that humans *consist of*, but do not *possess* reason is to make clear that reason is not applied or employed, but *lived*. Everything one knows is a result of one's own peculiar human capacities; it is derived from the immediate awareness one has of one's own self and the world that emerges in relation to it. Jacobi himself admits that this is not very satisfying: "How I wish," he laments, "I were able to make these propositions and their consequences just as comprehensible as they are evident to me."<sup>210</sup> Apparently, Jacobi thought that all great philosophical insight was not amenable to demonstration. Perhaps he is right. Perhaps philosophy itself is just the attempt to articulate what only ever becomes clear to us in the fragmented moments of intuition. The epistemological problem for Jacobi is not to explain how representation is possible, but rather to explain how one can take what is given in feeling and give it an existence that is meaningful to human life.

The distinction Jacobi makes between *having* reason and *being* reason is somewhat akin the scholastic distinction between God having being and being Being. "I am that I am," says God to Moses when he sends him to bring the Israelites out of Egypt. (*Exodus* 3:14) Existence is not something that God has, and it is not something that God might not have had; God *is* existence. There is no distance between God and existence; that is, it is not as if we can speak of God and then, separately, speak of God's existence, for they are one and the same. Similarly, we cannot speak of reason as something we simply have, like some tool we happen to have been given, and which we can use for various purposes. In this case, reason would appear as a merely contingent power; we might not have had it and life is imaginable without it. Jacobi rejects such a conception because he wants to emphasize that reason is what we are, that our faculties of interacting with our world cannot be understood as a tool we employ. The faculties I have are not employed by me because there is no distinction between my faculties and me in the way there is a distinction between my tools and me.

I have a knife, and I use it for cutting, slicing and chopping; it is a tool that I employ, that I have, not that I am. I also have a pair of running shoes that I use for running. In this

<sup>209</sup> SB2: *Werke* 4.2, 158f; 377.

<sup>210</sup> SB2: *Werke* 4.2, 156; 377.



case, it is perhaps easier to see where the line between having and being begins to blur. It is true that the shoes are simply something I have, something, indeed, that I could do without, that are not a necessary part of what I am. But also notice that when one runs, one can actually *feel* the ground through one's shoes. Every pebble, every root, every bump in the trail is felt directly with the shoes; they have become, in a sense, an extension of my body, a part of myself that is not simply some tool that I happen to be employing, but is rather a constitutive part of the experience of running itself. Here, the shoes become something that I am. It is perhaps less obvious, but a similar situation obtains when something like a knife (or any tool for that matter) is employed by a person who has mastered its use. When I separate the meat from the bone I can *feel* the hard smoothness of the bone itself, I can *feel* the flesh falling away with a single slice. My senses become so attuned to the feeling of using the knife that I can react as quickly with the knife as I could with my own hand. Indeed, the knife becomes an extension of my hand; it becomes something that I am. I think most people can probably imagine a similar example. A cyclist *feels* the road beneath her wheels; a carpenter feels the very grain of the wood through her tools; a gardener feels the soil through his gloves; and my fingers simply seem to find the keys when I type. In their masterful use, these tools all become extensions of the user, and the line between *having* something that is employed for a particular use and being the very thing one is using becomes more difficult to determine. "Use" does not really seem to capture what one does with tools in the examples I have cited. Perhaps a better way to describe this is "acting through." I act through the knife to bone the duck. The knife is not merely something I use, but something through which I act, and through which I am the chef deboning the duck. Tool use of the sort I've described here cannot be adequately explained by thinking of it as an activity of using something of which one has possession.

Jacobi is making a similar point about reason. To assume that reason is something we possess is to assume that in addition to our lives, we have a philosophical interpretation of them, and that this interpretation is the best means of access. It is to assume that reason is something external that we possess and use in order to make sense of the world. But that this is a mistaken picture is obvious to anybody who attempts to capture a particular moment when reason is being employed. We have already seen how Jacobi argues that our awareness of ourselves and of the external world arise simultaneously. If we take this seriously, then we are led to the idea that the cognitive powers that constitute our reason are only what they are in their acting in the context of an external world. As in the action of running, where the shoes becomes an inseparable part of the experience of running itself, the experience of being an active agent in a world implies a lived experience of reason as a part of this experience of existence.

**3.2.** But how does all this relate to Jacobi's critique of Kant? The central critique Jacobi makes revolves around the *thing-in-itself*. Jacobi's point is that Kant's assumption about the passivity of sense forces him to posit an external world that can act on the passive faculty of sense, which in turn gives rise to the paradox of representation. So when Jacobi says that we have an immediate, intuitive knowledge of the world and ourselves, it needs to be understood as an attempt to understand the structure of consciousness without

reference to setting up a problematic dichotomy between knower and object known. If reason is something we possess, if it is something we employ to know the world, then there will always be 1) a split between the world that I know and myself, and 2) a split between the interpretation of myself as a knower and myself. Jacobi wants to say that there are no such distinctions. The structure of my consciousness is what I am, and in so far as this structure reveals a world to me, it is a world that is mine, that arises in the very same moment that I obtain consciousness. Consciousness is not a tool employed for knowing the world; it is rather from within the structure of consciousness that I become what I am in relation to a world that I know immediately. Jacobi's commitment was always to a unified subject that cannot be analyzed into its component parts.

The difference between Kant's and Jacobi's respective approaches to practical philosophy, then, is that while for Kant faith is a rational tool for postulating a metaphysical context in which action makes sense, for Jacobi action is the context in which our faith makes sense. Kant's metaphysical context is, as it were, externally applied to action in order to motivate it and to allow it to make sense for a rational agent. It is for this reason that Kant calls his faith "rational," for it is grounded in reason's need for actions to be meaningful and rational. But it is also for this reason that the convictions that are so important for rational moral action (freedom, immortality and God) only arise externally. We do not, for instance, *feel* our freedom; we *feel* the moral law. On the other hand, Jacobi's version of what I have been calling his practical philosophy is concerned with action itself and in the kind of knowing that arises from it. We feel ourselves acting and in this we develop convictions that arise internally.

I propose that we see the significance of this argument as offering an alternative to Kant's theory of the postulate. Kant claims that the ideas of freedom, immortality and God yield no constitutive knowledge, but could be employed practically to ward off the dangers of mechanism and fatalism, thus putatively solving the problem that occasioned the Spinoza controversy and preventing philosophy from falling into the trap of dogmatic metaphysics. Jacobi wants to accomplish the same thing; that is, he wants to avoid mechanism and fatalism. But he does so not by maintaining a gap between the limits of what we know and the limitlessness of moral striving. Instead, Jacobi makes striving itself the source of the human capacity to escape the mechanical sequence of cause and effect. From Kant's theory of the postulate, Jacobi thus retains the important feature of its demand to actualize a truth that is not accessible to theoretical knowledge. The very fact that we have feelings of freedom of God, etc., impels us to actualize these ideas through the practical act of a leap of faith. The *salto mortale* is, then, an activity of postulating human freedom. Mechanism and determinism are not avoided by separating the mode of our knowing from what there is, but rather by the act of embracing the feeling of human freedom in the *salto mortale*. One has to see that the act of this leap not only embraces feeling, but also, in a sense, actualizes it. It is really only in activity that one can feel, and it is in the *salto* that one finally embraces action as a legitimate method for becoming aware of oneself and one's place in the world.

#### 4. Concluding Remarks

I would like to conclude simply by suggesting that Jacobi's great contribution in the texts that we examined above is to have worked out the implications of a truly practical philosophy. We saw that one of Kant's aims in his theory of the postulates was to give responsibility to moral agents for creating a moral world. This avoided mechanism and determinism in ethics since God's creation only guarantees a rational order that is *receptive* to moral behavior, that rewards virtue and punishes evil. Yet in this attempt to empower humankind, Kant could not grant access to the very feelings and immediacies of everyday life that motivate real moral agents to act. Kant's philosophy is only, and I feel strange even saying this, for philosophers. The significant thing about Jacobi's approach is that he is, at least to my mind, more successful in empowering humankind. In fact, one might even say that for Jacobi human action itself is the enabling power of divine grace. This was more explicit in the *Spinoza Büchlein* in the idea that free human action is the manifestation of the divine on earth. But even in Jacobi's more broadly philosophical argument about the structure of consciousness, one can see that since it is only in activity that our awareness of ourselves and our world arises at all, the human experience of God is what enables the divine here on earth. It is thus the responsibility of moral agents not merely to work within a structure that a moral God designs with us in mind; the real responsibility of moral agents is to embrace the immediate feeling we have an actually existing God by actualizing a divine order here on Earth. The task of the moral agent, that is, is to act as a co-creator of the cosmos. The world becomes meaningful to us through action; just what those actions are is the content of our moral lives.

## Part 2

### From Practice to Aesthetics

*Ehe wir die Ideen ästhetisch  
d.h. mythologisch machen, haben sie  
für das Volk kein Interesse.*

– *Das älteste Systemprogramme des deutschen  
Idealismus*

## Introductory

In the next three chapters I shall turn my attention to the way in which Jacobi's arguments and ideas exercised their influence on subsequent philosophy, especially the development of the then relatively young field of aesthetics.

The point of the first part of this thesis was to show that Kant and Jacobi are chasing a fundamentally similar philosophical ambition; namely, to shift the locus of meaning in the universe from an external pre-established order to the hearts and minds of real historical agents, acting to produce and maintain the kind of meaning that people expect out of life, and most certainly out of philosophy and its *Geisteswissenschaftlers*. I argue, however, that while the history of philosophy has generally not treated Jacobi very well, his solution to this problem – a problem he indentified at the heart of the philosophical enterprise – is ultimately the more convincing one. One of the most basic claims of Kant's practical philosophy is that while we might be subjectively aware of our freedom, it is only the practical certainty we have of our duty under the moral law that makes the subjective awareness of freedom into objective knowledge. A duty, after all, would be little more than empty hubris without the freedom to actually choose to obey the moral law or not. I pointed out in the second chapter that this seems to be an awfully strange way of capturing the feeling of freedom we all have. The source of Kant's troubles here consists in the way in which he understands all epistemological relations. Hermann Andreas Pistorius, a contemporary of Kant's and one of his earliest critics, noticed that Kant's claim that all knowledge is knowledge of appearances leads to the further claim that we can have no knowledge of ourselves as we are in ourselves. For if all we know are appearances, how do we know what it is to which things appear?<sup>211</sup> To have knowledge for Kant is always to hold something to be true (*fürwahrhalten*) on the grounds of subjective and objective sufficiency.<sup>212</sup> There can be no such knowing of freedom because freedom cannot be objectified and thus cannot be an appearance. Kant cannot see how to secure objective knowledge of freedom without the mediation of the moral law. Since our duty is rationally demonstrable and freedom is required for duty, the freedom we only feel subjectively must refer to something objectively real. But then maybe the problem is with how Kant understands epistemological relations. Ultimately, Kant remains so committed to reason that his philosophy becomes an abstraction suited only to, well, philosophers. This is Jacobi's point. Kant's objects, whether of opining, believing or knowing, never cease to be static objects; they are always considered fixed, definable, things about which there is some truth to be told. Jacobi's innovation is to understand ourselves on a wholly other model. None of us would deny the feeling of freedom, but what is the motivation behind Kant's need to objectify it? Doesn't objectifying freedom, conditioning it in relation to other objects contradict what we mean by freedom anyway? In order to capture the feeling of freedom, the feeling of not being determined, a different

---

<sup>211</sup> See Paul Franks, *All or Nothing*. (Cambridge: Harvard 2005) 93-98.

<sup>212</sup> CPR: A822/B850.

kind of knowing seems necessary. We have seen that Jacobi embraces feeling as an awareness of ourselves in action, thus solving the perceived problem in Kant by allowing the legitimacy of feeling as access to the unconditioned.

Jacobi was one of the first to propose these sorts of solutions; indeed, Jacobi's well-known significance for the development of early romanticism<sup>213</sup> can be traced to the positions he staked out over the course of the Spinoza controversy. But the arguments Jacobi made had an even wider import and his influence ran much deeper. I dedicated the first part of this thesis to showing that Jacobi is at the centre of the development of practical philosophy, and that there is a significant debate between Kant and Jacobi on matters of how understand the supersensible, of human freedom and the relationship between the human and the divine. While this debate was never explicit in the history of philosophy; that is, while Kant and Jacobi never actually engaged in an active debate, the sources I gathered allow for one to be cobbled together. But when it comes to assessing the importance of Jacobi for post-Kantian idealism, things become more complicated. On the one hand, Jacobi's ideas were explicitly taken up by Fichte and the early Schelling, and we have letters where Jacobi expresses his pride in seeing his ideas developed in ways that he could not have done himself. Arguably, Hegel too owes something to Jacobi's *salto mortale*, for we see much the same logic employed in Hegel's conception of the dialectic. Where Hegel argues that the dialectic overcomes the dualism between mind and world, Jacobi's *salto* is a leap that accepts the identity between the thing and the idea and that *enacts* ideas as things in the very act of leaping.<sup>214</sup> Jacobi's *salto* is a leap of faith in the sense that we must just take it on faith that the ideas we have about the world are indeed accurate. Jacobi's oft-cited remark from his *David Hume*, that he "cannot make do with a concept unless its object, whether external or internal, were not made graphically present [...] through sensation or through feeling,"<sup>215</sup> testifies to his deep commitment to the importance of making abstract concepts meaningful to individual people, but it is hard to not be disappointed by the fact that Jacobi seems to stop there, at the intimacy of feeling and faith.

As I have interpreted it, Jacobi's philosophy of action is an attempt to show that the immediacy of feeling is not due to some kind of mystical bond between a subject and some form of eternal truth. This is a regrettable interpretation of Jacobi that, as we have seen, garnered (far too) much credibility; but it is easy, indeed too easy to fall into this interpretive trap. If Jacobi were only to claim that feeling was some kind of mystical bond between a passive subject and the glory of eternal truth, then he would surely be guilty of

---

<sup>213</sup> See, for instance, Andrew Bowie, *Schelling and Modern European Philosophy*. (London: Routledge, 1993), "German Idealism and the Arts." In *The Cambridge Companion to German Idealism*. Edited by Karl Ameriks. (Cambridge, 2000) 339-57; Manfred Frank, *The Philosophical Foundations of Early German Romanticism*. Translated by Elizabeth Millán Zaubert. (Albany: SUNY, 2004); Dieter Henrich, "The Origins of the Theory of the Subject." Translated by William Rehg. In *The Course of Remembrance and Other Essays on Hölderlin*. Edited by Eckart Förster. (Stanford: 1997). 29-87; Jason Wirth, *The Conspiracy of Life*. (Albany: SUNY, 2003); Elizabeth Millán Zaubert. *Friedrich Schlegel and the Emergence of Romantic Philosophy*. (Albany: SUNY, 2007).

<sup>214</sup> Rolf Ahlers argues this point in his review of the first three volumes of *Jacobis Werke Ausgabe*. In *Journal of the History of Philosophy*. 43:4 (October 2005) 491-93.

<sup>215</sup> DH: *Werke* 2, 178; 278.

the reckless *Schwärmerei* of which so many of his critics accuse him. But this, as I have really only been able to intimate so far, is far from the complete picture of Jacobi's considered position. In the years immediately following the publication of the first edition of the *Spinoza Büchlein*, Jacobi had a chance to clarify. Feeling becomes the intimacy of one's self in action. Just as we have an immediate feeling of our own bodies in movement, so too do we have an immediate certainty of the convictions we develop in the context of our active engagement with the world. The innovation here is that Jacobi has completely rethought the traditional picture of epistemological relation. Our ordinary experience strongly suggests the existence of an external world that is more or less indifferent to us. But this is to settle with an awfully naive view. We have the kind of experience we have and the world has the meaning it does precisely because we are active agents in the production of this experience. When Sperchis and Bulis refuse the King's offer, they do so in the context of actions and beliefs that have for them generated a meaningful world and a meaningful place for humankind in this world. Jacobi's feeling is thus of the self in action as much as it is of the divine other. Indeed, and perhaps somewhat paradoxically, it is only in the context of action that the divine other becomes an object of faith. Jacobi's epistemology, then, consists in a harmonious balance between activity and passivity. We must be *passive* in order to be motivated to take the *salto mortale* in the first place, but the *activity* the *salto* initiates builds a deeper context for belief. Coming back to the original point, Kant cannot see this more nuanced side of Jacobi's thinking because he retains the assumption that there is an external world – albeit a transcendent one – about with there is some final truth. Today we have the gift of hindsight. But given Kant's assumption, it would have been very difficult to see what Jacobi really meant with the notion of immediate feeling, if not some mystical bond between the subject and the divine other. Poor Jacobi really only wanted to point out that if the world is to have any meaning for us at all, we must not only have had a hand in making it, we also need to allow ourselves to yield in the face of what we have made.

Over the course of the next three chapters, I shall be arguing that this Jacobian model of feeling, faith and action repeats itself in the innovations that Kant and Schelling pursue in the field of aesthetics. It would be difficult, maybe even impossible, to argue that Kant made the advances he did in his third *Critique* based on the kinds of arguments Jacobi presents over the course of the Spinoza controversy. But it is not so difficult to see that Kant does address issues in his moral religion in the context of his newly discovered faculty of reflective judgment. The problem Jacobi puts to philosophy, the problem of nihilism, of how the world can be a meaningful place, is to a large extent the problem Kant addresses in his aesthetics. Kant's practical philosophy shows that belief in God and immortality is rationally justified, even required. But his third *Critique* addresses the problem of how these transcendent concepts can be made present to us as finite, embodied creatures. If the world is really to be meaningful to us, we need to *feel* the truths it presents. I shall argue that the feeling of beauty and the theory of genius are the places Kant attempts to give the supersensible a sensible counterpart.

The historical upshot of Kant's third *Critique* was that a whole generation of German philosophers started thinking seriously about the relationship between philosophy and art. There are of course several places one could look for an indication of the importance of

aesthetics in the late eighteenth century. Figures like Goethe, Tieck, the Schlegel brothers, Novalis, Schelling and Schleiermacher, in short the whole Jena Romantic Movement is a virtual treasure trove of radical thinking about the relationship between art and philosophy. There is no shortage of sources. But in relation to the philosophical trajectories opened up by Jacobi's claims in the context of the Spinoza controversy, specifically in relation to the questions it raised about Kant's practical philosophy, Schelling's *Philosophical Letters on Dogmatism and Criticism*, couched as it is in a polemic with his teachers at the Tübingen *Stift* regarding the proper interpretation of Kant's theory of the postulates, is by far the most apt. In the fourth chapter I shall argue that Schelling's reinterpretation of the postulates forms a kind a transition from practical philosophy to aesthetics. Instead of practical reason consisting in the postulation of a metaphysical worldview to support moral action, Schelling's method of postulation involves a process of imaginative construction that approximates infinitude in the empirical realm.

My claim is not that Jacobi points the way to Schelling, nor even that Jacobi and Schelling can be reconciled in any deep and significant way. They can't.<sup>216</sup> My claim is rather that Schelling and Jacobi share a common ground against Kant in their attempt to establish a practical philosophy that generates non-abstract meaning in the lives of real people. And both Jacobi and Schelling do this by turning to intuition as a way to access the unconditioned. Throughout much of the first and third chapters I was at pains to explain that Jacobi's philosophy does not amount to a blind faith, or a simple urge to believe what we feel to be true. Truth emerges as a feeling, but this only occurs in the context of activity that opens up a world of experience to an individual. We take something to be true because we *feel* it, because our lives have unfolded in such a way as to convince us of the veracity of that conviction. But this more subtle and laudable position that I have attempted to attribute to Jacobi is, as we have seen, the result of an awfully precarious interpretive balancing act. The fact is that Jacobi's philosophy resists almost all attempts to glean from it a coherent philosophical position. Jacobi himself recognizes the limitations of his obscure style. In a letter to his friend and follower Johann Neeb, Jacobi writes: "To be a teacher, in the proper sense of the term, I am not fitted: I can only offer myself so that others may learn, not from me, but *out of me* and through me, according to the measure of their need and ability."<sup>217</sup> Jacobi had no system to teach; in fact, Jacobi seemed utterly incapable of writing a systematic treatise. For Jacobi, everything was finally rooted in the particularity of individual insight, and any attempt to develop a system out of such an insight could only end up reducing this particularity to the universality demanded of any philosophical system. Jacobi's concern was always with revealing the way in which the world emerges as meaningful to real historical agents.

But as Hegel points out in *Faith and Knowledge*, Jacobi's 'philosophy' tends to disregard the plain *fact* of my action, the sheer objectivity that congeals around it.<sup>218</sup>

<sup>216</sup> I need only mention the Pantheism controversy that erupted out of Jacobi's putative attack on Schelling's *Naturphilosophie* and Schelling's bitter reply. The relevant texts are collected in Weischedel, 1969.

<sup>217</sup> cited in Wilde, *Friedrich Jacobi: A Study in the Origin of German Realism*. (New York: AMS Press. 1966) 73.

<sup>218</sup> Translated by Walter Cerf and H.S. Harris. (Albany: SUNY Press, 1977) 143-47.



Jacobi's hostility towards any attempted claims to objectivity that are not grounded in immediate feeling meant that he was primarily, nay, exclusively focused on the subject; this to the exclusion of the way in which subjective feeling manifests itself objectively, as the product of actions guided by convictions grounded in feeling. Some readers will rightly suspect that I would contest this characterization of Jacobi. My overarching thesis about Jacobi is that his commitment to immediate feeling is profitably complimented by a rudimentary form of practical philosophy. Practical action is what constitutes the context in which feeling can emerge as meaningful. Bracketing this for a moment, we should observe that for Hegel there are two relevant moments of action, viable subjectivity and the form of objectivity. The first guarantees that objective law is not obeyed with lifeless mechanism and that the actor acts out of a kind of *élan vital*. The second, the form of objective law itself, captures the fact that when we do act, the actions themselves are rendered objective. Jacobi, Hegel alleges, almost wholly ignores this second, objective side of practical action and as a result remains trapped in a state of, as Hegel grandiloquently puts it, "reflection on one's personality, an eternally returning introspective concern for the subject which puts extreme meticulousness, nostalgic egoism and ethical sickness in the place of ethical freedom."<sup>219</sup> As an illustration, Hegel recalls Jacobi's reading of the story of Sperchis and Bulis. Hegel rightly reminds us that for Jacobi this was a story about the pure subjectivity of ethical conviction. Sperchis and Bulis serve as examples of Jacobi's claim that true ethicality resides in the heart, in our *Triebe*, in our inclinations and irreducible subjectivity of experience. But, Hegel asks, does this really account for the moral landscape portrayed in Plutarch's tale? When Sperchis and Bulis explain to Xerxes that they could not possibly accept the offer of royal hospitality because of a loyalty to their own people and country, they speak with an objective force the Persian king too can understand.<sup>220</sup> On Hegel's reading, then, the story serves to illustrate the two moments of action. Aside from the particular dispositions that prompt Sperchis and Bulis to such noble acts, their actions manifest themselves objectively as loyalty to country and people. In terms of sheer ability to illuminate the ethical landscape, Hegel's account clearly has the upper hand. The objective, conceptual moment is no less viable than the personal, subjective one. Yet just as Hegel questions the picture Jacobi paints of Sperchis and Bulis, we must question the picture Hegel paints of Jacobi. Hegel is, after all, famous precisely because of his knack for interpreting practically everything in terms of his own systematic ambitions.

It is true that Jacobi is concerned to reveal the subjective side of the ethical life (*Sittlichkeit*), but it is not so simple to dismiss his practical philosophy as devoid of all objectivity. Jacobi complains about Hegel's accusations in a letter to his friend and disciple Friedrich Köppen. Remarking on Hegel's dismissal of his philosophy as dead, Jacobi writes: "That a philosophy which is the death of philosophy is brought to death and rendered null (*vernichtet werde*) at just the right time (*zur rechten Zeit*) by philosophy is in the strictest sense philosophically just."<sup>221</sup> One can almost smell the sarcasm flowing

<sup>219</sup> Hegel 1977, 146.

<sup>220</sup> Hegel 1977, 145.

<sup>221</sup> Jacobi to Köppen, 10 August 1802. In *Schellings Lehre oder das Ganze der Philosophie des absoluten Nichts. Dargestellt von Freidrich Köppen*. (Hamburg, 1803) 224. Except where the German is indicated in

from Jacobi's pen. And understandably, despite his tone of resignation, Jacobi seems deeply offended that Hegel would regard him as of so little importance. Hegel had, after all, like everybody else at the time, been steeped in Jacobi's thinking while a student at the *Stift*. It was (and generally still is) widely maintained that Jacobi provided the most powerful early critique of Kant. To the young generation of thinkers coming of age in the wake of the critical philosophy, it was a critique that needed to be addressed. So even in the face of all that Jacobi had done for philosophy, everything he had made clear, everything he had shown to be relevant to philosophy in general – even in the face of all this, Hegel could put pen to paper and regard Jacobi's philosophy as dead. Jacobi had every right to be offended. This was 1802. Today we have the advantage of hindsight. Today we know that Jacobi could not have expected much else from Hegel and his dialectical view of history. In order to tell the kind of story Hegel wants to tell, he needs Jacobi to fulfill a certain role, never mind the facts; *umso schlimmer für die Tatsachen*, too bad for them they do not quite fit the story.

Yet despite his rather transparent agenda, Hegel does make an important point about claims to have access to the divine through intuition and immediate awareness. Indeed, it is undeniable that Jacobi is guilty of a certain lack of thorough philosophical analysis, and this makes it difficult to see the more subtle position I have attempted to attribute to Jacobi. But now that I have had the chance to spend three chapters isolating what I take Jacobi's chief philosophical contribution to be, I hope that I have convinced my reader that Jacobi cannot be dismissed as glibly as Hegel presumes to do. True, Jacobi is interested in the so-called "subjective side" of human experience, and this leads him to emphasize the contingency of something like ethical conviction. But to read Jacobi with this Hegelian agenda is to set oneself up for disappointment. One must take Jacobi's remarks to Neeb seriously – one must not read Jacobi as offering some kind of system that fails for its inattention to the objective side of ethical life. The task of the reader of philosophy is to evaluate ideas on their own terms, to learn not *from* a thinker but *through* a thinker; that is, the reader of philosophy – and this seems especially true with regard to Jacobi – must not expect a doctrine or a system that can be applied mindlessly, but rather must make the effort to see how another's ideas are relevant and useful to one's own life.

In the case of Jacobi, I've been suggesting that the emphasis on subjectivity is symptomatic of a deep desire to show that ideas must be intimately felt, that our convictions arise from an immediate experience of the world that is full of life and vivacity. It seems to me that Schelling was this kind of a reader of Jacobi. I have already mentioned that the thinking of Jacobi and Schelling cannot be reconciled in any deep way, but it is instructive to see that this very concern to imbue lifeless concepts with living vitality is, at least in part, what motivates much of Schelling's early philosophy, and is a profound theme, as we shall see in the following chapter, of Schelling's *Philosophical Letters on Dogmatism and Criticism*. This idea is also the beating heart of the *System-Programme*. Recall: "Until we make the ideas aesthetic [...] they will have no interest for

---

parentheses, I follow Diana Behler's translation in *Philosophy of German Idealism*. Edited by Ernst Behler. (Hamburg: Continuum, 1987) 149.

the people.”<sup>222</sup> Aesthetic. Sensible. The imperative here is to render the artefacts of philosophical practice sensible. The authors of the *System-Programme* think that the people should *feel* an idea not just appreciate the rational force of its logic. One might at this point inquire as to how this differs from Mendelssohn’s claim about the *Landmann* who, in hearing an argument for the existence of God, immediately assents because he *feels* the rational force of the idea. With this, Mendelssohn was attempting to make reason coextensive with common sense. Mendelssohn recognizes that in order for his rationalism to be meaningful it must be able to lay claim to more than simply the abstractions of logic; philosophy must permeate the whole of humanity and capture experience of the most basic intuitions we all share. But while Mendelssohn may have had such ambitions, his conception should not be understood as fulfilling the injunction issued by the *System-Programme*. For Mendelssohn, it is reason that is the objective feature of human nature and all of his attempts to make this more amenable to the contingency of individual feeling represent an effort only to spread reason’s domain of operation, to reveal its full universality. The authors of the *System-Programme* on the other hand do not seem to want to claim simply that reason can be felt; rather, they seem, and this is borne out in the fragment, to think that making ideas aesthetic, meaningful to people, is something that requires work. This does not mean merely that the task of philosophy is to make its concepts aesthetically appealing to people, but rather that philosophy is charged with *creating*, in an aesthetic fashion, the ideas with which to think the world. So where Jacobi had maintained that human action opens up the context in which the world makes sense to us, Schelling will come to maintain that this activity must be understood as creative insofar as it relies on the imaginative and creative capacities of the subject. The concept of God, for instance, must be felt inwardly before it can begin to have real objective relevance in one’s life. “Dogmatic systems arise,” Schelling says, “when concepts of the finite world and of finite representation are applied to the infinite [and] absolute. For Dogmatism, the absolute is always only the last inference of philosophy, and God is only the supreme but certainly not the *One*; apart from God, there still exists the world, and from this world, along a sequence of causes and effects, there proceeds a deduction that finally leads to God as the supreme and absolute cause.”<sup>223</sup> For Schelling, though, God is the first postulate; it is felt inwardly and constructed imaginatively. Consistent, then, with Jacobi’s position, Schelling argues that philosophy must begin with the immediate and unconditioned and proceed along a path of practical – and what would for Schelling come to be aesthetic – activity.

But Schelling was not the first to make this turn to aesthetics. Already in the late seventeen eighties Kant began working on his third *Critique*, a text that attempted to address the issue of how the exigencies of reason have the sensible counterpart that make them relevant to the lives of real historical agents, not just to the subtle minds of abstract philosophers. Read in this way, Kant’s third *Critique*, especially the sections on aesthetics, provides the kind of intimate experience Mendelssohn could only dream of in

---

<sup>222</sup> OSP, 25.

<sup>223</sup> F.W.J Schelling, “System of Philosophy in General and the Philosophy of Nature in Particular,” trans. Thomas Pfau. In *Idealism and the Endgame of Theory*, ed. Thomas Pfau. (New York: State University of New York Press, 1994), 150. Henceforth SPG.

imaginary discussions with ordinary peasants. Is Mendelssohn offering anything more than what Plato already offered in the *Meno*; namely, the framework for a kind of theory of knowledge as recollection in which the Truth is only waiting to be discovered by the crisp purity of discursive rationality? Kant of course offers something more; he offers a deep epistemological and metaphysical account of precisely how and why we have the kind of feelings we do. Beauty moves us because it is evidence of a miraculous harmony between my own cognitive processes and what appears to us as the mechanical necessity of the external world. But notice how this immediately propels us back to the questions that motivated the first part of this thesis. How does the world come to have meaning for us? In the wake of the Spinoza controversy, Kant was the first to formulate a (relatively) systematically coherent answer. From the level of empirical cognition to the feeling of the moral law and finally to the feeling of harmony between these two, between cognition and objective, universal law, Kant's philosophical *Weltanschauung* is always guided by the deep desire to explain the transcendental conditions of intimate lived experience. The picture Kant paints amounts to a full account of precisely how our experience is structured and what this structure implies about the kind of knowledge we are capable of. When Kant arrives at the third *Critique* his concept of reflective judgment had enabled him to see how something as intimate and subjective as a feeling of pleasure in beauty nevertheless tells us something about ourselves and our relation to the objective world, something that is universally relevant for all rational agents.

So where Kant's practical philosophy, as we saw in the second chapter, can only postulate the kind of metaphysical world picture that gives sense and meaning to the free human action and the demands of the moral law, Kant's aesthetics provides the sensible evidence that this world picture is in fact a viable picture of our real vocation (*Bestimmung*) and destiny (*Bestimmung*)<sup>224</sup> in the world that transcends our epistemic capacities. But as I shall explain in the fifth chapter despite such radical attempts to complete his system, the aesthetic dimension of all our experience ultimately escapes Kant's notice. Beauty is significant precisely because it is evidence that the world itself contains 'objects' that harmonize our cognitive powers without help from our faculty of understanding. But as in the practical philosophy, this still understands the world having a given rational order it is the job of the philosophy to probe. And this, it is worth pointing out, means that Kant is still open to Jacobi's criticism of the *ding-an-sich*. Kant makes several attempts to address the constellation of issues Jacobi's critique raises. His theory of genius, his derivation of the humankind as the ultimate purpose of nature, his notion of beauty as the symbol of morality and of the interests in disinterest, all of this is devoted to the task of showing how Kant's metaphysical picture of the universe resonates with the most intimate elements of human experience, and thus how this picture has meaning for real moral agents. Yet in the end there are still several places where Kant's bold claims fail to find equally bold philosophical commitments.

This failure of Kant's is not shared by Schelling. In fact, there is perhaps no place in the German philosophical tradition (and likely very few places in Western philosophy in

---

<sup>224</sup> The ambiguity of the German "Bestimmung" compels me to remark that no single English word seems capable of grasping the multiple senses the German.

general) where art comes to be so radically and deeply significant for philosophy. Schelling's *System of Transcendental Idealism*, published at the turn of the century, is unique in that it is the result of an extraordinary and intensely systematic mind steeped in the values and ideas of the late eighteenth century romantic poets. From the very beginning, Schelling makes art the central concern, defining, in fact, the very task of transcendental idealism as setting up a transcendental *Kunst* that imaginatively constructs the transcendental life of the subject and shows how all of our experience is an aesthetic accomplishment. I shall wait until the final chapter to explain Schelling's inimitable position in any more detail. I shall say now, however, that what one might call Schelling's aesthetic idealism needs to be read in light of the issues this thesis has been addressing throughout. I have suggested that it makes sense to locate Jacobi's philosophy along a historical trajectory that enjoys a kind of triumphant celebration in the *System Programme*. The authors of this latter text take seriously Jacobi's methodological injunction to shift philosophical attention from purely rational human capacities to immediate, pre-discursive experience and the human practices that open up these immediacies as meaningful revelations. As I have been arguing, Jacobi's position is characterized by the basic (yet not explicitly formulated) claim that meaningful experience contains elements of purely passive receptivity and human subjective action. The latter generates the context in which the former can appear to us a meaningful. So when Jacobi says that the reality of God, of ourselves and our bodies, of other people and indeed of the whole world around us can only be taken on faith, he does not mean to imply a mystical connection between subject and object; he only means that subject and object are interpenetrating, that we cannot understand one without the other. Without this kind of relation, Jacobi wants to say, the world and the human place within it collapses into an abyss of nihilism; without paying attention to the manifold ways in which we have had a part in creating the world that nevertheless appears as completely not my own, that is, we end up with a world beyond human approach and that consequently can never come to mean anything to us. The desire to 'make ideas aesthetic' is a desire, as I suggested above in the introduction to Part I, is a desire to make philosophical ideas meaningful by recognizing the human role in creating the ideas with which the world becomes meaningful for us. Schelling's aesthetics makes good on this demand of the *System Programme* for a philosophy nourished on poetry. Transcendental idealism, Schelling's chosen method, proceeds through an artistic construction of the life of the subject, systematically treating the ways in which human activity is responsible for creating the world of ordinary experience. In this way, Schelling comes to understand the world itself as a profoundly aesthetic accomplishment for which we have ultimate responsibility. But I digress. Let us back up and explore the remarkable way in which aesthetics asserts itself in the thinking of one of the German tradition's most far reaching and creative exemplars.

## IV

# Schelling's *Philosophical Letters* on *Dogmatism and Criticism*

The farther the world is from me,  
and the more I put between it and myself,  
the more my intuition of it becomes restricted  
and the less possible is that abandonment to the world,  
that mutual approach,  
the reciprocal yielding in contest  
which is the proper principle of aesthetics.

– F.W.J. von Schelling

In this chapter I need to ask my reader to turn a relatively large page in the history of classical German philosophy. In the last three chapters, I was concerned with the brief period from the publication of Jacobi's *Spinoza Büchlein* in 1785 to the publication of Kant's second *Critique* and Jacobi's *David Hume* in 1787. But in this chapter I would like to explore how this debate is picked up in the work of the early Schelling, specifically in his *Philosophical Letters on Dogmatism and Criticism* from 1795.<sup>225</sup> I have explained how the Jacobi-Mendelssohn debate established the centrality of practical philosophy as a resolution to the perceived problems in traditional rationalist metaphysics. I have also explained how Jacobi and Kant constitute two unique approaches to practical philosophy. Kant's approach is the well-known theory of the postulates; it is the suggestion that while philosophy cannot provide discursive demonstrations of the objects of metaphysics (specifically freedom, immortality and God) it can shift its efforts to the practical sphere in an attempt to show that these objects are assumptions dictated by the needs of reason, assumptions that provide a guide and a motivation for action. If we want to think of humankind as inhabiting a world where moral action makes sense, where the universe is amenable to the efforts of moral agents to be virtuous, then we need to assume that the freedom we feel via the moral law is real, that God guarantees that we will collect the rewards for virtue in the afterlife. But since reason, Kant insists, requires such assumptions in order to place rational human action in the context of a systematic *Weltanschauung*, they not only provide one way to underpin reason, they are necessary assumptions dictated by the universal structures and requirements of human reason itself.

---

<sup>225</sup> Unless otherwise indicated, references to Schelling will be to *Schellings Werke*. Edited by Manfred Schröter. (Munich: Beck, 1927).

But this kind of inference to the reality of the objects of metaphysics from the practical requirements of a faculty created problems for Kant. From Jacobi's perspective, it seemed as if Kant had made certain assumptions about the nature of human cognition. Assuming a passive faculty of sensibility, it is impossible to avoid the problem of the thing in itself. And assuming that all experience must be mediated by the conceptual and intuitive structures of cognition it is impossible to avoid the problem of explaining the relation between a fundamentally distinct knowing subject and an object known. Jacobi, we saw, was able to avoid these problems while embracing a similar move to practical philosophy. The guiding thought for Jacobi is that by embracing feeling as containing meaningful information about human experience, we can obviate the separation between knowing subject and object known, thus forestalling the Kantian problem of the thing-in-itself and the associated problems we saw emerging in the context of his practical philosophy. Here, practical action is not understood as providing something that theory cannot, but rather as being the very context in which thinking, in which consciousness itself develops and creates meaning in a world that is revealed to us in immediate experience.

Schelling's *Letters* is a natural extension of this debate between Jacobi and Kant. For it is finally in Schelling that the weaknesses of Kant's views on practical philosophy are addressed based on themes that Jacobi had been developing since 1785. There seem to be two basic concerns that motivate Schelling's *Letters*. First, Schelling wants to launch a basic criticism of the putatively Kantian, critical system of philosophy and religion that had been adopted by his teachers at the Tübingen *Stift*, the so-called Tübingen theologians. And this first concern is what occasions the second; namely, the broader goal of providing an evaluation of the legacy of the critical philosophy, one that will at once laud Kant's achievements and identify what philosophy is to do in its wake. On the first, the system Schelling was attacking was the orthodox Kantianism of the teachers at the *Stift*. I shall say more about this below, but the focus of Schelling's antagonism is the way in which Kant's theory of the postulates was exploited in order to prop up orthodox theological belief. The Tübingen theologians interpreted Kant's practical postulates not as objects of practical reason but as objects of revelation, and they extended the method of postulation to many of the revealed truths of religious orthodoxy, arguing that they are assumptions necessary for the support of traditional moral values. Though it is perhaps difficult to see why this application of Kant's theory of the postulates is illegitimate, Schelling maintains that sufficient attention to the *spirit*, not the *letter* of Kant's critical philosophy will reveal that it ignores what Kant really meant. In this sense, Schelling's *Letters* are a natural continuation of the debate I have been constructing in the last three chapters between Jacobi and Kant. Just as Jacobi is critical of Kant's reliance on external, abstract motivation to support his moral religion, Schelling is critical of the way in which Kant's text leaves the way open for the specious interpretation that had become prevalent at the *Stift*; the interpretation, namely, that proposed to use any external motivation necessary to support orthodox religion. The Tübingen interpretation of Kant's theory of the postulates employs whatever practical claims it can in order to support the religious doctrine of its choosing. On the second, while this polemical strand certainly frames Schelling's efforts in the *Letters*, his concern is with providing a definitive interpretation of Kant's critical philosophy; that is, Schelling wants to show that Kant should not be

interpreted the way the Tübingen theologians do and proposes his own reading aimed at escaping the critically reinforced dogmatism that had become so prevalent at the *Stift*.

The project of reinterpreting Kant took place for Schelling over at least a few years. Accordingly, I will consider a few texts from Schelling's early work, but my concern in this chapter is primarily his *Letters*, written to an imaginary friend in 1795.<sup>226</sup> The *Letters* are by far the crowning achievement of Schelling's early years. It is indeed remarkable that something of such argumentative force and elegance came from the pen of a young man of barely twenty years.<sup>227</sup> Schelling had already published three philosophical works, but they were either purely exegetical and thus of purely antiquarian interest or written almost entirely under the influence of Fichte. Schelling's Fichtean period is usually thought to run until 1801, but the *Letters* really mark a point where Schelling was responding in his own distinct voice to the dominant philosophical problems of his day. Indeed, Fichte's famous remark from the 1797 *First Introduction to the Science of Knowledge* that the "sort of philosophy one chooses depends, therefore, on what sort of man one is"<sup>228</sup> was also made by Schelling two years earlier in his *Letters*, with the idea that the choice between the two systems of dogmatism and criticism must be navigated practically; it is a choice that, as Schelling says, "depends on the freedom of spirit that we have ourselves acquired."<sup>229</sup> This is not to say that in 1795 Schelling came to influence Fichte more than the other way around. It is simply to point out that the *Letters* mark a point where Schelling begins to develop his own unique philosophical position and that the typical picture of Schelling as a student of Fichte becomes more difficult to defend.<sup>230</sup>

<sup>226</sup> There has been some speculation about to whom exactly Schelling addresses his letters. Franz Gabriel Nauen suggests that it is "almost certainly Hölderlin," (1971, 41) which makes sense given that Schelling was engaged in frequent discussions with Hölderlin at the same time when he would have been composing his letters. (Fuhrmans, *Briefe und Dokumente I*. 1962, 56-59) It is impossible, and probably not very important, to establish Schelling's addressee, but I take Nauen's suggestion to be an interpretively beneficial assumption. As I shall point out below, the facts simply point to Hölderlin being an important influence on Schelling at this time, and it permits one to explain the otherwise confusing references to aesthetics in the first and tenth letters. But as Annemarie Pieper points out in her Editorial Report on the *Letters* in volume three of the *Historische-Kritische Ausgabe* of Schelling's works, while the two most likely candidates are Hegel and Hölderlin, the evidence seems to point to a fictive addressee, comprised, perhaps, of all the philosophical-political-aesthetic elements that were present at the Tübingen *Stift* at the time. (Stuttgart, 1982. 29-34) Given that we know the object of Schelling's criticism is the orthodoxy at Tübingen, Pieper's suggestion is perhaps the better one. After all, Schelling was leaving the *Stift* and likely felt the need to address the problems he had come to recognize in the place he had spent his early, formative years.

<sup>227</sup> John Watson, a Canadian philosopher at Queens, who, as far as I can tell, published the first English-language book on Schelling, calls this text the "consummate flower of Schelling's period of storm and stress." See *Schelling's Transcendental Idealism*. (Chicago, 1882). 78.

<sup>228</sup> *First Introduction to the Science of Knowledge*. Translated by Peter Heath and John Lachs. (New York: Meredith, 1970) 16.

<sup>229</sup> *Werke I*, 308. I refer here to Fritz Marti's English translation in the *Unconditional in Human Knowledge* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 1980) 173. Henceforth, DC. Yet as Fritz Marti points out, these ideas were already in circulation for Fichte since 1794. See note 32 on page 207-08 in Marti 1980. Perhaps it is best to see the relationship between Fichte and Schelling as one of mutual influence.

<sup>230</sup> This is in part how I justify not treating Fichte in this thesis. A more accurate story would of course include discussion of the way in which Fichte developed Jacobi's ideas, and how Schelling broke from Fichte, but in the interest of actually completing this thesis on time, some things had to be sacrificed.



## 1. Precarious Postulates: The Tübingen Interpretation of Kant

At the beginning of *Beyond Good and Evil* Nietzsche complains – in a way only Nietzsche can – about the influence Kant had on German philosophy.<sup>231</sup> Kant's most important contribution, the one about which he was so proud and which had the most profound influence on the methodological assumptions of future German philosophy, is his table of categories. "How are synthetic judgments *a priori* possible?" Kant asks himself – and what is really his answer? "By virtue of a faculty [*Vermöge eines Vermögens*]" but not, unfortunately, in three words.<sup>232</sup> The table of the categories, Nietzsche charges, is not an answer to a question; it is the condition for the possibility of a model of judgment that Kant only ever assumes and never justifies. It is impossible to ignore Nietzsche's characteristic play on *Vermögen*. I judge through the faculty of my faculty of judgment. It is just too easy to explain the capacity for a certain ability by appealing to a faculty for this ability and then enshrining it as part of the universal structure of human cognition. When a faculty is 'discovered' it immediately answers the question that it also establishes. Nietzsche plays on the similarity of the German words *finden* (to find) and *erfinden* (to invent). How synthetic judgments are possible *a priori* is a question that already assumes there must be something like a faculty making them possible. What Kant really needs to do, and what he never does, is show why we need to think that such judgments are a legitimate account of human thought. Again, the faculty itself seems to do all the work. The distinction between *finden* and *erfinden* is meant to highlight the fact that when Kant asks after the faculties that make human thought operate the way he thinks it universally does he is not *finding* the answers in the faculties, but rather *inventing* the faculties through the very method of his philosophical questioning. Kant did not *discover* faculties but rather *invented* them to explain activities he directly experienced. Were it not for its serious consequences for the history of philosophy, this *niaiserie allemande*, as Nietzsche glibly calls it, would be funny; as it is, however, it's a really bad joke to which nobody ever understood the punch line.<sup>233</sup> Nietzsche's objection to Kant is that his motivation for the whole discourse on the faculties is internal to his own philosophical ambitions. To Nietzsche, it seems as if Kant's question about the possibility of synthetic judgments *a priori* is only asked in order to 'discover' the appropriate faculty. The question needs to be replaced, Nietzsche insists, with the

---

Besides, di Giovanni has already done much of the work in fleshing out the various and manifold ways that Fichte is indebted to Jacobi. (1994) It remains, however, to examine the way in which Schelling, in contrast to Fichte, develops Jacobi's ideas, the way in which Schelling's break from Fichte proceeds along lines Jacobi agrees with. It would be interesting, for instance, to determine whether Jacobi and Schelling share a basic disagreement in their respective criticisms of Fichte.

<sup>231</sup> My discussion of Nietzsche owes much to Wirth's similar use of Nietzsche's glib jokes about the Tübingen theologians and nearly the whole generation of post-Kantians. See *The Conspiracy of Life*. (Albany: SUNY, 2003) 104-05.

<sup>232</sup> *Jenseits von Gut und Böse*, §11. In *Werke III*. Herausgegeben von Karl Schlechta. (Frankfurt: Ullstein, 1976) 21.

<sup>233</sup> Jacobi remarks that he takes these kinds of "fancies of the mind" to be "*comme de mauvaises plaisanteries*." See DH: *Werke* 2, 179; 279.

question of why a belief in such judgments is even necessary.<sup>234</sup> We all experience ourselves as judging, thinking creatures, but the experience of these activities does not itself justify a belief in faculties that govern this experience.

Contemporary Kant scholars might object to this attack on the grounds that it pays too much attention to Kant's doctrine of the faculties, something that seems to be almost systematically dismissed in current Anglophone Kant scholarship.<sup>235</sup> As Nietzsche makes clear, there is little to love in Kant's faculty discourse. Nevertheless, the faculties are essential to Kant's account of empirical cognition. It is impossible to grasp the questions Kant asks without grasping how the doctrine of the faculties constitutes Kant's answer. In the context of our discussion here, it is relevant to recall the reliance on the passive faculty of sense that is at the centre of Jacobi's critique of Kant's doctrine of the thing-in-itself. It seems to be such a natural and innocent assumption: how do we have experience of the external world? Well, there is a faculty in us, the capacity (*das Vermögen*) of which facilitates the reception of external sense data. In this sense, Kant is still a disciple of Locke. Kant has marked up the *tabula* with all sorts of *a priori* functions, but it is still finally the external world, the elusive *ding-an-sich*, that accomplishes the function of furnishing raw sense data for intuitive and conceptual processing. Kant never asks whether it is necessary to posit a faculty of passive sensibility, and once he makes the assumption that the question concerns how we can receive impressions from the external world he has already provided an answer. If we think the external world is the absolute source of the raw data of sense, then we are forced to think that there must be something in us that can passively receive this data.

But maybe Nietzsche has just set up a straw man. For there is always, as Heidegger points out, a kind of circle involved in self-reflection, a circle that should not prevent one from making explicit what is involved in its circularity; it's just a matter of finding the right place to get into the circle. Kant does, it is true, presuppose that we make synthetic judgments *a priori* in order to give an account of how the ability that such a faculty makes possible is itself possible. But this circularity is, in a sense, not really a problem since Kant is not *deducing* anything. Rather, Kant is just making explicit what is involved in making judgments of this sort.

One might object to this (admittedly too generous) defence of Kant against Nietzsche via Heidegger. Indeed, the problem remains. Despite Nietzsche's rather cavalier interpretive style, his criticisms cannot be ignored. The problem he points to in Kant is one of 'discovering' structures to fulfill the functions that are only ever assumed to exist. In the second chapter, we saw that Kant creates the problem of the *thing-in-itself* by assuming that the subject and the object are capable of being defined in isolation. On this model, it is necessary to posit a passive faculty of sense to receive raw data that is in principle beyond the reach of knowledge. This problem continued in Kant's practical philosophy because freedom, God and immortality were themselves set up as static objects of knowledge that human cognition was too weak to apprehend. There are at least

---

<sup>234</sup> Nietzsche 1976, 22.

<sup>235</sup> Henry Allison's *Kant's Transcendental Idealism* (Yale, 2004), now a classic of modern Anglophone Kant scholarship, barely mentions the faculties at all.

two problems here. First, as I pointed out in the second chapter, Kant is so committed to reason that he cannot see any way to explain human knowledge without its mediation. This does not mean reason has no limits – Kant was, after all, the preeminent philosopher of limits – but it does mean that all of our experience can be explained as a function of reason. Nothing can be felt immediately since the limits Kant places on knowledge preclude him from claiming that we know anything but appearances. Coupled with Kant's singular philosophical ingenuity, this commitment to reason led Kant to attempt to prove that despite the impossibility of theoretical proofs of concepts like God, freedom and immortality, practical reason could locate their rationality in their necessity to human reason. Second, and arising as a consequence of Kant's unwavering devotion to reason, is the problem of an infinite regress to a final justification for his belief in the faculties he insists reason consists in. The problem here is that Kant rejects any immediate, intuitive awareness of the functionality of reason. True, my experience is structured in such a way as to suggest to me the existence of an external world. But Kant's account of this experience – that we receive data from the external world via the receptive faculty of sensibility – only names the phenomenon of which we already have an intuitive awareness. Kant accounts for the reality of freedom in a similar way. I know I'm free because reason can demonstrate that without freedom morality would be impossible. Thus in the very act of being moral, I know that I am free to take moral action. But again, this only throws a veil of Maya over the immediate awareness we all have of our freedom. I feel myself as free only through the rationality of the moral law, Kant insists. There is nothing to support Kant's belief in the moral law, yet he uses it to establish the reality of freedom, and the experience of this reality to establish the moral law – all this to avoid having to admit to the immediate certainty of something that lay beyond the confines of rational demonstrability. This is precisely the reason Jacobi sees Kant as having fallen into the same rationalist trap as Spinoza. I explained this in the third chapter, but it serves us here to underscore the force of Jacobi's claim. Both Kant and Spinoza disallow intuitive immediacy as the ground of knowledge, and this means that they both remain at the level of ever more conditions.<sup>236</sup> In this sense, Jacobi and Nietzsche point to a similar problem in Kant; they both recognize that unless we admit that there is something irreducible to reason's explanatory efforts, we will never be able to finally justify our philosophical outlook.

**1.2** But despite the problems Jacobi had attempted to make clear, Kant's new approach to the conception of the objects of metaphysics was eagerly received by the German theological orthodoxy, which had suffered several critical onslaughts at the hands of the Enlightenment's enthusiasts of the free, individual use of reason. Indeed, such onslaughts already began in the sixteenth century with the protestant reformation, and continued (to simplify a complicated history grossly) with the writings of thinkers like Bayle, Voltaire and Hume, and picked up steam in Germany with the Spinoza controversy. Things did not

---

<sup>236</sup> Herman Andreas Pistorius, an early critic of Kant, detected a similar problem in Kant's claim that the empirical self is only an appearance, that we can have no knowledge of ourselves as we are in ourselves. For if all we know are appearances, to whom does the empirical self appear? Pistorius thinks that Spinoza can help Kant out of this problem by saying that the empirical self appears to God. (Franks 2005, 93-98)

look good for traditional, orthodox faith. So when Kant showed that the Enlightenment values of freedom and reason actually dictate a rational belief in religious concepts, his thinking was eagerly exploited by the Tübingen school of theology as a method of securing the dogmas of religious orthodoxy. Led by Gottlob Christian Storr, and including figures like Karl Christian Flatt, and Friedrich Gottlieb Süskind, this school followed Kant in admitting that while the objects of faith cannot be proven theoretically, they can be assumed practically based on the need to secure the validity of orthodox religion. In applying Kant's theory of the postulates, the Tübingen school of theology employed (certain hand-picked) elements of the critical philosophy in order to further their own theological conservatism. In a word, this famous and influential school exploited Kant's philosophy by adopting two of its central theses as premises in an argument for the authority of revelation in establishing the existence of God. First, since Kant shows that knowledge of the supersensible is impossible, it has no grounds to argue against evidence of the supernatural that has accumulated through historical revelation.<sup>237</sup> Second, Kant's practical philosophy shows that the postulate of God is required to secure a world in which moral agents think happiness is possible in relation to virtue. Therefore, so the argument goes, one is obliged to acquiesce in the face of orthodox theological doctrine.<sup>238</sup> In this way, Storr was able to dismiss speculative objections to revealed religion on the grounds that Kant had shown it to be impotent in this field of inquiry. And on the basis of Kant's practical philosophy, Storr was able affirm the positive authority of biblical doctrine as a privileged form of knowledge of the supersensible based on its practical necessity for rational moral agents. Any belief not amenable to rational demonstration and that serves the practical purpose of maintaining the authority of historical revelation is thus validated within a system of dogmatic theological propositions.

It is perhaps not so easy to see that there is something devious about this interpretation of Kant. There is a very real sense in which Kant's philosophy encourages this kind of entrepreneurial development of the exaltation of the practical; it does, after all, advocate both a weakening of the powers of speculative reason and the primacy of the practical in establishing the rationality of belief. And any Kantian who argued that the needs of conservative theologians to uphold the authority of historical revelation were not legitimate needs of reason would be on very unstable ground. For Kant himself, as we saw in the second chapter, derived the so-called "needs of reason" from a deeply held metaphysical worldview that he would be the first to admit was beyond theoretical demonstration. It is only because Kant thinks that the universe must be a moral place, that he finds it necessary to postulate God as a guarantor of a moral order. It is only, that is, commitments external to Kant's actual moral system that motivate Kant to develop the system he does. The needs of reason could thus really only be construed as needs within the context of Kant's systematic ambitions.

---

<sup>237</sup> These philosophical opportunists conveniently ignore that Kant's argument also implies that the evidence stemming from revelation is illegitimate.

<sup>238</sup> Otto Pflieger. *The Development of Theology in Germany since Kant*. Translated by J. Frederick Smith. (London: Swan Sonnenschein & Co., 1893) 86.

Still, a postulate, we will recall from the last chapter, is derived from a need of *pure practical reason*; it is necessary insofar as reason simply cannot proceed without it.<sup>239</sup> And Kant does not say that any old need justifies a practical postulate. In fact, Kant explicitly addresses this in section VIII of the *Dialectic of Pure Practical Reason* by distinguishing between *hypotheses* and *postulates*. The former are only speculatively necessary; that is, we can propose certain hypotheses that explain empirical facts. Kant uses the example of presupposing the existence of God in order to explain the purposes one witnesses in nature. Such a presupposition is gratuitous insofar as it goes beyond what we can experience and it overdetermines the phenomena to be explained. Yet it is, Kant insists, “the most reasonable opinion for us human beings.”<sup>240</sup> A postulate is an entirely different kind of supposition. Because it is the duty of a rational moral agent to promote the highest good, and God and immortality are the necessary conditions for the highest good, the rational moral agent is duty bound to postulate the existence of God and the afterlife.<sup>241</sup> Picking up on a thread from the second chapter, it is interesting to notice that this is further evidence that Beck's point about Kant's “needs of reason” being only the pragmatic needs of an all-too-human reason is somewhat misguided. It is of course true that Kant thinks theoretical reason cannot furnish us with knowledge of freedom, God and immortality, but he also thinks that reason aims there, which is precisely why he turns to the postulates as a way to secure human morality. If it is in the nature of human reason to aim beyond what can be demonstrated discursively, then it is (practically) necessary to postulate something for which reason strives. Otherwise, human reason would be left adrift in a world without purpose, with nothing to give its actions a context in which they are meaningful. To say that the needs of reason are just pragmatic is to ignore the fact that for Kant reason pushes beyond the realm of appearances towards a supersensible reality that holds the meaning of the universe and the human place within it together in a single metaphysical vision of the whole. “[T]he mind,” Kant writes in the third *Critique*, “has a vocation that wholly transcends the domain of nature.”<sup>242</sup> Kant's needs of reason are thus the needs, if I may be allowed an all-too-glib response to Beck, of an *all-too-more-than-human* reason; that is, of a reason that is forever split between its inability to transcend the world of appearances via speculative reason and its need to situate this world in a metaphysical vision that, nonetheless, does transcend appearances.

Yet it is impossible to deny that Kant walks an awfully fine line between pragmatic and rational belief, a line that the letter of his philosophy does not clearly identify. As Nietzsche helps us to see, Kant cannot defend his belief in his doctrine of the faculties. This was more obvious in the context of empirical cognition, when we were dealing with the faculties of judgment, intuition and sensation, but the critique applies equally to Kant's practical philosophy. The only way Kant can defend his notion of rational belief is by assuming that reason has the structure he says it does. It is a precarious balancing act, but Kant's claim is that the duty to believe in the real existence of God is not at all based on the inclination or wish to square his system with the Enlightenment values he holds so

<sup>239</sup> CPrR: *Werke V*, 142; 254.

<sup>240</sup> CPrR: *Werke V*, 142; 254.

<sup>241</sup> See chapter 2 for a more detailed treatment of Kant's argument.

<sup>242</sup> CJ: *Werke V*, 268; 128.

dear; he wants to say that if our actions are to make sense in a wider metaphysical context, then such postulates are necessary – they are the condition for the possibility of meaning in the human moral universe. But precisely what separates Kant's systematic requirements from the systematic requirements of, say, the Tübingen theologians, is not really very clear. Once again, as we saw in the second chapter, Kant's philosophical arguments seem to be based on external convictions that provide a framework for his philosophy. Even if Jacobi's somewhat abstruse style fails to convince, it cannot be denied that if one accepts the reading of Kant I have been suggesting, one must also accept that it is a striking example of one of Jacobi's most powerful claims; namely, that it is the irrational convictions of the heart that provide the original impetus for one's philosophical convictions of the mind. Kant's desire to salvage the Enlightenment faith in reason out of the wreckage of the Leibnizian-Wolffian school is what ultimately propels his doctrine of rational faith as the meeting point of rationality and sensuous intuition. We feel, Kant insists, reason itself.

1.3. Yet none of this makes it any easier to see why the Tübingen theologians can be accused of misinterpreting Kant. In fact, I think that what this makes clear is that Kant leaves himself open for the interpretation he suffered in Tübingen. But if we also recognize that there is something wrong with this interpretation, then we thereby admit that there is something beneath the letter of Kant's philosophy, something that requires a more careful analysis. It is this insight that guides Schelling's efforts to rise to Kant's defence.<sup>243</sup> I have already noted that Schelling is of the mind that the Tübingen interpretation of Kant is deeply mistaken. Still, Schelling recognizes that the letter of Kant's philosophy itself warrants this kind of interpretation. One of the central claims of Schelling's *Letters* is that Kant's first *Critique* opens up the possibility for two possible systems of philosophy, for a system of realism (dogmatism) and for a system of idealism (criticism). "As I understand it," Schelling writes,

the Critique is destined to deduce from the essence of reason the very possibility of two exactly opposed systems; it is destined to establish a system of criticism (conceived as complete), or, more precisely, a system of idealism as well as and in exact opposition to it, a system of dogmatism or realism.<sup>244</sup>

Schelling thinks Kant put an end, once and for all, to what he calls the *dogmatizing* philosophy (*Dogmatizisms*), that old Wolffian brand of metaphysics that claimed to have theoretical knowledge of the world and everything in it. Kant's account of empirical cognition and his *Transcendental Dialectic* make it clear that modern rationalist

---

<sup>243</sup> As Dieter Henrich explains, it was actually Carl Immanuel Diez who first attempted to show that Storr's system was actually opposed to Kantianism, and certainly not a viable adoption of its principles. In this sense, as Henrich also points out, Diez's critique becomes a kind of prototype for Schelling's more sophisticated defence of the Kantian critical philosophy. See "Dominant Philosophical-Theological Problems in the Tübingen *Stift* During the Student Years of Hegel, Hölderlin, and Schelling." In *The Course of Remembrance and Other Essays on Hölderlin*. (Stanford, 1997) 41-45.

<sup>244</sup> DC: *Werke I*, 302; 169.

epistemology and metaphysics was at an end. But what remains, and what Kant had shown to be possible, is *dogmatic* philosophy (*Dogmatismus*). Dogmatism agrees with Kant that theoretical knowledge of the supersensible is impossible, and it proceeds to follow Kant in his method of postulation to set up that which cannot be proven as postulates practically necessary for the support of a moral universe. This is the system of the Tübingen theologians, the system they attempt to pass off as critical philosophy solely by virtue of the fact that it employs the method of the practical postulates. But it is not the method alone that makes critical philosophy what it is. The practical postulates can apply to both dogmatism and criticism insofar as they can set up their postulates in accordance with the demands of their systematic convictions. As realism, dogmatism sets up postulates that are assumed to be objectively real, but unknowable for finite beings. As idealism, criticism sets up postulates as ideas that motivate practical human striving for their actualization. I shall leave open for now the question of precisely why the Tübingen theologians are mistaken. It is important to see, however, that from Schelling's perspective, dogmatism is a perfectly legitimate path; one just has to be honest and clear that this is the path one has taken. As we shall see, it is only when the dogmatist is honest that it is possible to see the implicit mistake in his interpretation of Kant. When the dogmatist is clear about what his philosophy really implies, it becomes clear that it is far from the true spirit of the Kantian critical programme.

## 2. Creativity in the Early Schelling

Like so many others of his generation, Schelling saw his responsibility as one of continuing the work Kant had inaugurated. In a letter to Hegel, Schelling spells out the path philosophy must now take:

Philosophy is not yet at an end. Kant has provided the results, the premises are still lacking. And who can understand results without premises [...] Kant has cleared everything away, but how is anyone to notice? One must smash it to pieces in front of their very eyes if they are to grasp it in their hands. Everywhere, all the great Kantians are stuck on the letter [...] <sup>245</sup>

The letter of Kant's philosophy, Schelling suggests, is at a dead end. For if the old superstitions of orthodox religion can be seamlessly combined with the letter of Kant's philosophy, then surely the true Kantians must concern themselves with more than the mere letter. It is this state of affairs that occasions the *Letters*. As Schelling reflected in the same letter to Hegel, complaining about the teachers at Tübingen,

"Here the Kantians are in droves [...] They have taken some ingredients from the Kantian system (from its surface, of course) with which, as out of a machine, they concoct strong broths on no matter what theological topic so

---

<sup>245</sup> Schelling an Hegel, 6 January 1975. *Briefe und Dokumente II*, 58.

that their already sickly theology will soon be much healthier. All possible dogmas have been stamped as postulates of practical reason, and where theoretical-historical proofs are never sufficient practical (*Tübingsche*) reason chops away at the knots. It's a joy to stand by and watch the triumphs of these philosophical heroes."<sup>246</sup>

Schelling just cannot hold back the cynicism and hatred he has for this blatant disregard for the spirit of the Kantian critical philosophy. These philosophers cannot distinguish between the *language of spirit* and the *literal language* in Kant's text, betraying not their creativity in applying the philosophical advances Kant achieved but rather their own questionable philosophical talent.<sup>247</sup>

This attitude towards the orthodox teachers at Tübingen developed over the years Schelling spent at the *Stift*, to which, at the age of fifteen, he was granted a rare early admission. All the students were subject to, as Horst Fuhrmans notes, "strict, almost monastic cultivation [Zucht]": clothing was restricted to a kind of spiritual uniform, smoking, dancing and going to pubs was forbidden and participation in all academic and religious activities was obligatory.<sup>248</sup> Being so young and having already experienced a strict upbringing at the hand of his father (a respected scholar of Semitic languages and high ranking *Prälat* of the Lutheran Church), Schelling easily fit into this austere order. In fact, by any measure, Schelling was an outstanding prodigy. At the behest of his father, Schelling had already mastered several ancient languages, and by the time of his graduation he had already published three substantial works of philosophy, at least two of which were significant contributions to debates that were going on at the time. Yet despite (and perhaps because of) his precocious nature, Schelling was rather arrogant and given to rebellion against the orthodoxy (social, cultural, religious and philosophical) prevalent at the *Stift*. Add to this burgeoning liberal attitudes and the excitement and infectious enthusiasm for the political and social reforms promised by the French Revolution and one ends up with a philosophical talent capable of delivering a serious blow to the old conservative currents fighting for influence in the minds of the new generation of German thinkers.

Indeed, Schelling rebelled from the start. Drawing inspiration from Kant's sentiment, so famously expressed in the preface to the second edition of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, that one must "deny *knowledge*, in order to make room for *faith*"<sup>249</sup>, the theological faculty at Tübingen interpreted Kant's philosophy as creating an expanded realm for the faith that had suffered under the influence of powerful criticisms of dogmatic metaphysics. This offered theology a new life by providing philosophical argumentation

<sup>246</sup> Schelling an Hegel, 6 January 1775. In *Schelling: Briefe und Dokumente II*. Edited by Horst Fuhrmans. (Bonn: 1973) 56-7.

<sup>247</sup> Schelling also complains in this way about those who would attempt to refute Kant based merely on the literal letter of his text. See his *Treatise Explicatory of the Idealism in the Science of Knowledge*. In *Werke I*, 346-47. In translation in Thomas Pfau, *Idealism and the Endgame of Theory*. (Albany: SUNY, 1994) 68. Henceforth TE, followed by the German and then the English pagination.

<sup>248</sup> *Schelling: Briefe und Dokumente I*, 14.

<sup>249</sup> CPR, Bxxx.



to underpin the moral authority of the church. In his first German publication, *Über Mythen, historische Sagen und Philosopheme der ältesten Welt* (1793), Schelling takes aim at this enthusiasm by attacking the conventional approach to biblical interpretation that attempts to support Scripture with philosophical arguments and theses.<sup>250</sup> The issue here is the attempt to privilege biblical revelation as something other than the myth it really is. Schelling makes this point by comparing the Genesis myth with Hesiod's Pandora myth. Both myths, says Schelling, "portray the human ambition for a higher dignity as the chief cause of human misery."<sup>251</sup> Both myths, in other words, express something fundamental and unique about being human; both myths express the ambition of human understanding and its attendant curiosity. The object of this ambition for a higher dignity is not the important point; it is ambition itself, its concept, which is embodied in myths of this sort. Thus when one attempts, as the Tübingen theologians do, to elevate biblical myth to a revelation of truth, they embrace the mode of the primitive myth makers by confusing concept with reality. "The breath of life," Schelling writes,

"is, as all of the oldest languages in the world indicate, for primitive humankind [*kindischen Menschen*] not merely the image of the soul, but rather the soul itself. The ethereal breath of God, the spark of Prometheus is in the oldest myths the highest principle in the life of humankind."<sup>252</sup>

The primitive mythmakers invented concepts and took them to be real. The force of Schelling's interpretation lay in his recognition that since these concepts do not refer to real things, the mythmaker is actually structuring reality through the stories he tells. This means that if one is to understand oneself as free from natural exigency, as a discrete force separate from the links of nature, then one must grasp the essence of the activity of the mythmaker as *creative*, not *contemplative*. In a sense, the Tübingen theologians do just this; that is, they recognize that contemplation will never furnish the evidence required to support religious dogma, opting instead to believe in whatever object support their convictions. But the error in the way they understand their own project consists in the fact that they understand objects of faith as independently existing entities in an objective world order. The primitive mythmaker on the other hand tells stories with a clean conscience; he invents a whole world without worrying about Truth. It is this story-telling, this invention that is properly considered creative.

It is easy enough to interpret this early work of Schelling's as a rather plodding assignment of biblical exegesis and interpretation; Schelling was only eighteen at the time of its publication, and he would quickly abandon his biblical studies. Still, even at this time Schelling is isolating some of the philosophical issues that would concern him in the years to come. Indeed, this idea of the centrality of the creative activity of the primitive mythmaker is directly related to Schelling's critique of mechanism that occupies the focal point of his *Naturphilosophie*. In the introduction to his *Ideas for a Philosophy of Nature*,

<sup>250</sup> See Franz Gabriel Nauen, *Revolution, Idealism and Human Freedom*. (The Hague, 1971) 30.

<sup>251</sup> *Über Mythen, Werke I*, 81.

<sup>252</sup> *Über Mythen, Werke I*, 78.

Schelling argues that insofar as humankind is able to question its connection to nature, it must be considered as free from it, as living in a world of its own making: "So far as I am *free*, however (and I *am* free, in that I raise myself above the interconnection of things and ask how this interconnection has itself become possible), I am not a *thing* at all, not an *object*. I live in a world entirely my own," Schelling emphatically declares, "I am a being that exists, not for other beings, but *for itself*."<sup>253</sup> In order to take myth seriously, as relevant to the world and the human relation to it, the mythmaker must recognize his freedom from a mechanical order and divest himself of any presumptuous claims to Truth. This does not mean that myth is a mere fantasy land set up beside an objective reality, measured in its accuracy by the degree to which it represents the world as it really is. Myth is significant precisely because it does not trouble itself with 'reality', opting instead for an artistic vision that imbibes the world with meaning and life.

This preoccupation with creativity is also at the centre of Schelling's concerns in the *Letters*. The trouble with the Tübingen theologians is that they do not see their own activity as creative. The assumption about the reality of objects of faith is, according to the Tübingen interpretation, an assumption about a pre-existing object; it is a theoretical claim that only solicits practical viability. The only thing such an assumption does is set up a fantasy world to support whatever system of religious dogma. The novelty of Schelling's claim about primitive myth is the way in which it construes human reason as an aesthetic, creative faculty. A similar idea is echoed by Nietzsche in *The Birth of Tragedy*, where poetry is defined as a vision of life:

[...] nothing can be more certain than that the poet is a poet only in so far as he sees himself surrounded by forms which live and act before him, and into whose innermost being he penetrates [...] For the true poet a metaphor is not a figure of speech, but a vicarious image which actually hovers before him in place of a concept. To him a character is not an aggregate composed of a number of particular traits, but an organic person pressing himself upon his attention, and differing from the similar vision of the painter only in the continuousness of its life and action.<sup>254</sup>

An assumption about the existence of a particular object can never be as lively as the kind of aesthetic vision about which Nietzsche speaks here. Schelling is thus already, even when writing *Über Mythen* in the early seventeen nineties, mobilizing one of the central premises he will bring to bear on his eventual critique of the Tübingen theologians and which will play a central role in his future development. The idea is that of *creative reason*.

<sup>253</sup> *Ideas for a Philosophy of Nature*. Translated by Errol E. Harris and Peter Heath. (Cambridge, 1988) 13.

<sup>254</sup> Translated by Clifton P. Fadiman. (NY: Dover, 1995) 25-6.

### 3. The “Proper Principle of Aesthetics”

It was not long before Schelling abandoned the pedantry of biblical exegesis and interpretation for the study of the new philosophy of Kant and Fichte. By the early 1790s much of the German intellectual scene had become intoxicated with Kantianism, and Schelling sets out in the *Letters* to propose a definitive interpretation of the critical philosophy.<sup>255</sup> The discussion opens with what seems to be an appeal to the theology faculty at Tübingen, to those who postulate the existence of a moral god in order to support the moral system of their choosing. In the attempt to save morality by postulating the necessary conditions of meaningful moral action, the Tübingen theologians lose the very elements of morality they are attempting to support. For a moral God only restricts the world and the possibilities for activity in advance of experience. In Schelling’s words, “the idea of a *moral* God has no aesthetic side at all.”<sup>256</sup> From where does the idea of a moral God come? We can ask this question of the Tübingen theologians as much as we can ask it of Kant, and their answers would be the same. We will recall that for Kant, the idea comes via a practical necessity, via a need of reason to postulate a world in which moral action makes sense. But the problem we noticed there was that the systematic coherence Kant achieved with the postulates was realized through commitments that were external to Kant’s system. Postulation in the Kantian sense only presents itself as necessary when one seeks to explain how a rational agent can be duty-bound to follow the moral law. But this does not explain the moral law. This only provides the requisite metaphysical support for situating the moral law within a meaningful context. But, as we saw Nietzsche argue above, Kant provides no argument for positing the faculties of reason he does. Schelling’s solution to this problem will be to return Kant’s critical philosophy to the ground of immediate experience, what Schelling will call, with Fichte, intellectual intuition.

3.2. In the *Wissenschaftslehre* Fichte defines intellectual intuition as an immediate experience of oneself as an active agent. In a distinctive passage from his 1797 *Second Introduction to the Science of Knowledge* Fichte writes:

The intellectual intuition alluded to in the science of knowledge refers, not to existence at all, but rather to action, and simply finds no mention in Kant (unless, perhaps, under the title of *pure apperception*). Yet it is nonetheless possible to point out also in the Kantian system the precise point at which it should have been mentioned. Since Kant, we have all heard, surely, of the categorical imperative? Now what sort of consciousness is that? Kant forgot to ask himself this question [...] [t]his consciousness is undoubtedly immediate, but not sensory; hence it is precisely what I call “intellectual intuition,” and – seeing there are no canonical authors in philosophy – call it

---

<sup>255</sup> In the *Fifth Letter*, Schelling reflects on the arrogance of submitting an opinion about a philosophy that has been the object of so much controversy. (DC: *Werke* I, 301; 168f.)

<sup>256</sup> DC: *Werke* I, 285; 157.

so with no less right than Kant had in denominating something else, which does not exist.<sup>257</sup>

There are two things to notice about this passage. First, Fichte has taken up much of what we have identified as characteristically Jacobian ideas. Intuition here is an immediate awareness not of some objectively existing entity, but rather of an agent in action.<sup>258</sup> But second, and perhaps much more interesting, Fichte couches this notion of intellectual intuition in terms of Kant's practical philosophy. In chapter three I attempted to show that Jacobi's philosophy of action can be read as a response to Kant's second *Critique*, as providing the intuitive grounding for the concepts of God and freedom that Kant had only slotted into an abstract system of moral religion. In the above passage, Fichte addresses just this issue of how we are aware of ourselves as free moral agents. For Fichte, intellectual intuition names an immediate awareness of the self and its (moral) relation to the world. In this sense, Fichte addresses the issue we identified via Nietzsche; namely, that Kant's faculties were not 'discovered' (*finden*) but rather 'invented' (*erfinden*) to explain immediately experienced actions.

Schelling adopts this Fichtean model of intellectual intuition in his own attempt to provide Kant's philosophy with an intuitive grounding, but he makes an important move that Fichte did not, the move to introduce the theme of aesthetics, one of the most interesting elements of Schelling's *Letters*. Indeed, it is this element that makes them stand out as the most striking example of Schelling's early work – and maybe even of Schelling's work more generally. Schelling thinks that Fichte has shown that intellectual intuition can make Kant's practical philosophy more viable by allowing immediate intuition as a valid philosophical category. Yet Schelling also wants to go further in the description of such awareness to show that it needs to be understood on an aesthetic model. Schelling's concern – and we shall see this more clearly in the sixth chapter – is with explaining the certainty about ourselves and the external world we all find ourselves within. What must the nature of human knowledge be if the world emerges as meaningful to a subject in the way it does? Schelling's answer is that we cannot only pay attention to the processes on the side of the subject; that we must also pay attention to the way in which the object yields in the face of the subject. In this, Schelling takes up another important aspect of Jacobi's thinking; he takes up Jacobi's idea that knowledge is based on a double movement of the subject becoming the object and of the object becoming the subject, or, in Jacobi's terms from the 1785 *Spinoza Büchlein*, 'of the human becoming divine and the divine becoming human'. The immediate certainty we have of the world can only be explained by showing that there is a reciprocal yielding on the part of subject and object. The world is not lying there, inert, waiting to be discovered. It is rather through my practical, creative activity that the world opens up and *becomes* what it is for human knowledge.

---

<sup>257</sup> *Fichte: Science of Knowledge*. Translated by Peter Heath and John Lachs. (New York: Meredith, 1970) 46.

<sup>258</sup> George di Giovanni has shown how this and other important Jacobian themes are taken up by Fichte. (1994, 67-116).

We can be nearly certain these considerations were introduced under the influence of Schelling's friend and former roommate, Hölderlin. For we know that Schelling and Hölderlin had several meetings in 1795 and 1796 while the former was composing the *Letters*.<sup>259</sup> We also know that at this time Hölderlin was working out a way to conceive intellectual intuition as an "aesthetic sense."<sup>260</sup> It is of course true that there is a significant difference between the role that the aesthetic plays for Schelling and Hölderlin respectively. For the former, aesthetic intuition comes to serve a systematic function by providing the objective counterpart of an intellectual insight into the whole of nature as a unified totality; for the latter, an aesthetic intuition only reveals that such an insight is finally impossible, that there is no way to ground the totality of nature in a single intuition.<sup>261</sup> But whatever the differences between Hölderlin's and Schelling's respective views on the centrality of aesthetics, of interest to us here is the way in which Schelling subtly introduces this element into his thinking under the influence of Hölderlin's own view.<sup>262</sup>

The aesthetic dimension is introduced at the very beginning of the discussion; it is introduced in an effort to show that the idea of a moral God overwhelms the human effort to exert its freedom in the face of a world that at times seems to resist it and that provides no evidence of the meaningfulness of human action.

If we consider the idea of a moral God from this aesthetic side, we can pronounce judgment quickly: whenever we accept that idea we lose the proper principle of aesthetics. For the thought of taking a stand against the world loses all greatness the moment I put a higher being between the world and myself, the moment a guardian is necessary to keep the world within bounds.<sup>263</sup>

The problem with the idea of a moral God is that it quells the ability to exert one's own power in the face of the world, in the face of God. For if there is an absolute power that limits the world in advance of my activities, I have no freedom and thus no possibility for truly moral action. Schelling continues:

The farther the world is from me, and the more I put between it and myself, the more my *intuition* of it becomes restricted and the less possible is that abandonment to the world, the mutual approach, that reciprocal yielding in contest which is the proper principle of beauty.

---

<sup>259</sup> See Fuhrmans, *Schelling: Briefe und Dokumente I*, 56-59.

<sup>260</sup> See Hölderlin's letter to Niethammer from 24 February 1796. In *Essays and Letters on Theory*. Translated and Edited by Thomas Pfau. (Albany: SUNY, 1988) 131.

<sup>261</sup> Pfau 1988, 26.

<sup>262</sup> Besides, as I explained in the introduction, the primacy of aesthetics in German idealism has a deeply complicated genesis, the *System-Programme* having been written down in Hegel's hand but containing unmistakable traces of Schelling and Hölderlin.

<sup>263</sup> DC: *Werke I*, 285; 157.

Notice that what Schelling seems to be doing here is giving Jacobi's idea of the human becoming God and God becoming human an aesthetic spin. In the first chapter, we saw that Jacobi's rudimentary version of practical philosophy involved both the acceptance of feeling as a meaningful revelation of truth and faith and practice as the activities that establish a person in this truth. In the context of the Spinoza controversy, this amounted to the claim that while humankind must abandon itself to faith, it must also enact this faith by taking an active role where God yields to the actions of humankind. This is precisely what Schelling means to express with the idea of the proper principle of aesthetics. On the one hand, we must recognize the importance of intuition as a passive mode of access, for this allows for abandonment to the world. On the other hand, we need to dispose of the idea of a moral God since it forces a complete abandonment to its laws, and deprives humankind of the striving for the infinite that is proper to the critical philosophy.

#### 4. How to Read Kant, or, Schelling's Theory of the Postulates

Schelling shares with Jacobi the conviction that the final ground upon which all knowledge rests is not really knowledge at all, but an intuition, an insight, or, to use Jacobi's language, a feeling (*ein Gefühl*). Jacobi's intuition that "philosophy seeks to unveil and reveal that which is" is for Schelling the beginning of a second revolution in philosophy,<sup>264</sup> a revolution that will redirect philosophical efforts from the occupation with objects as principles for knowledge to the revelation of what is immediate in human experience. In *Of the I as the Principle of Philosophy*, the essay that immediately preceded the *Letters*, Schelling laments over the difficulty of expressing such an insight:

I wish I had Plato's gift of language or that of his kindred spirit Jacobi, in order to be able to differentiate between the absolute, immutable being and every kind of conditional, changeable existence. Yet I see that even these men had to struggle with their own language when they attempted to speak of the immutable and supersensuous – and I believe that this absolute in us cannot be captured by a mere word of human language, and that only the self-attained insight into the intellectual in us can come to the rescue of the patchwork of our language.<sup>265</sup>

At this point in Schelling's development, he is still very much influenced by Kant and Fichte. As Dale Snow points out, this passage is indicative of Schelling's reliance on Kant for his "understanding of the self as a unity of self-intuition."<sup>266</sup> But as Snow surely recognizes, to see Schelling as a Kantian here would be a serious interpretive error. Kant may begin with intuition as a fundamental element of human cognition, but as Schelling

<sup>264</sup> *Werke I*, 157. I refer here to Fritz Marti's translation in *The Unconditional in Human Knowledge*. (Lewistown: Bucknell University Press, 1980) 67. Henceforth I

<sup>265</sup> *I: Werke I*, 217; 110.

<sup>266</sup> 1996, 48.

points out in his *Treatise Explicatory of the Idealism in the Science of Knowledge*, “[t]his soon led to the claim that intuition was the *lowest form of cognition*.”<sup>267</sup> Schelling cannot abide this element of Kant’s philosophy. The problem is that intuition is too easily interpreted as a finished form, “ready made,” as Schelling puts it, “for the purpose of intuition.”<sup>268</sup> This brings us back to the problem we have been noticing throughout; namely, the problem of how Kant’s model of empirical cognition generates the seemingly intractable residue of the thing-in-itself. For in positing a set of powers on the side of the subject that make cognition possible, Kant cannot avoid a passive faculty of sense to deliver raw data for cognitive processing. Schelling makes the rather strange suggestion that Kant “deliberately left behind something that was to emerge later as the ultimate problem of reason,”<sup>269</sup> thus suggesting 1) that Kant somehow intended later generations of thinkers to uncover the truth of his system laying concealed behind its more problematic veneer, and 2) that Schelling is one of the privileged few who have deciphered the code of Kant’s cryptic text. I’ll ask my readers to ignore the utter indefensibility and just plain weirdness of such a claim, not to mention the dubious interpretive strategy it implies. The task for the reader of the history of philosophy requires generosity and patience, not a drive for arid faultfinding. After all, even if it betrays his own personal inclinations more than a genuine desire to find a putative core truth of Kant’s philosophy, Schelling’s point is an important and instructive one.

The fact is that sometimes Schelling does speak as if he has decoded Kant’s text, followed all of the clues and discovered the true essence of the critical philosophy. Other times however, Schelling’s claims about his interpretation of Kant are much more reasonable. The *Letters* argue quite clearly that Kant’s critique belongs to both dogmatic and critical philosophy. This means that despite the fact that the Tübingen theologians think they are embracing the true *critical* spirit when they ground their beliefs in the ‘needs of practical reason’, they are really just actualizing the possibility of a dogmatic system that Kant himself leaves open. What Kant leaves open for future philosophy is “the question concerning the origin of this faculty [sensibility, *Sinnlichkeit*].”<sup>270</sup> The problem is akin to what we saw with Nietzsche. What Kant fails to do (deliberately, according to Schelling) is answer the question of why we need to believe in the faculties he identifies. Schelling suggests that we can avoid this problem if we are willing to interpret Kant’s faculties as *modes of activity* rather than as static structures that act as filters for the raw data of sense. This complicates the problem of developing a model of empirical cognition because we are no longer looking for objects, or for anything with a stable set of properties. We are concerned, Schelling says, with “*modes of activity*.”<sup>271</sup> This activity does not, of course, produce its objects all on its own, but instead of designating a kind of filter through which raw sensation passes, it designates the state of activity in which the subject immediately experiences the world. The faculties do not

---

<sup>267</sup> TE: *Werke I*, 355; 70.

<sup>268</sup> TE: *Werke I*, 355; 71.

<sup>269</sup> TE: *Werke I*, 355; 70.

<sup>270</sup> TE: *Werke I*, 355; 70.

<sup>271</sup> TE: *Werke I*, 355; 71.

mediate the data of sense; rather, the faculties merely name kinds of subjective activity in the context of which we experience the world.

We can get a better sense of the subtle distinction Schelling is making by considering Deleuze's distinction between two senses of Kant's use of the word 'faculty' (*faculté*, *Vermögen*). The first sense names a type of relation between a subject and an object, and there are as many faculties as there are relations. The faculty of knowledge relates to objects in terms of conformity; the faculty of desire in terms of causality; the faculty of feeling in terms of intensity.<sup>272</sup> The second sense picks out faculties according to the different kinds of representations of which we are capable. We find ourselves capable of experience in terms of space and time, and this leads us to posit an appropriate faculty as the source of these experiences.<sup>273</sup> The difference is that while the first sense only picks out modes through which a subject relates to an object, the second gives the faculty an active role in the creation of experience. Interestingly, Nietzsche's critique applies only to the first sense of faculty. The problem Nietzsche identifies is one of how Kant can justify his belief in the faculties when the only evidence we have is of activities that may or may not, in themselves, refer to faculties at all. But when we interpret faculties in the second sense, we are not looking for an object for analysis but for an activity that is itself the source of experience.

As an illustration of the viability of this subtle distinction in Kant, we need only reconsider Kant's reliance on a passive faculty of sense. If we understand the faculty of intuition as a kind of immobile filter through which the raw data of sense passes, then we are susceptible both to Jacobi's famous critique of the *thing-in-itself* (as we saw in the last chapter) and to Nietzsche's critique that there is nothing to justify belief in such faculties. "Yet," Schelling implores, "who ever told us to understand Kant this way?"<sup>274</sup> Deleuze helps us see that the faculty of intuition, as he puts it, "relates *immediately* to an object of experience"<sup>275</sup>, thus making it not merely a mediating link between sense data and representation, but rather an active, immediate source of representation itself. If we understand Kant in this way, then we can achieve two things. First, we can further support Jacobi's insistence on some kind of immediate access to the world, on understanding thinking as always already an active engagement that not only interprets objects but *feels* them. Second, we can show that when Schelling speaks of the proper principle of aesthetics, he is referring to a model of cognition according to which the object yields to the activity of the subject and the subject yields to the exigency of the object.

**4.2.** Schelling develops what I will call his "aesthetic model of cognition" more deeply in the context of his explicit discussion of the difference between dogmatism and criticism. While these are both legitimate paths opened by Kant's *Critique*, there is still something wrong with the dogmatic approach that Kant seems not to have seen. One of the most

---

<sup>272</sup> Gilles Deleuze, *Kant's Critical Philosophy*. Translated by Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1984) 3-4.

<sup>273</sup> Deleuze 1984, 7-9.

<sup>274</sup> TE: *Werke I*, 355; 71.

<sup>275</sup> Deleuze 1984, 8. My emphasis.



famous themes from Schelling's *Letters* rehearses the claim that all philosophy finally rests on the free choice of the philosopher. I'll join the chorus with an oft-cited passage:

Which of the two we choose depends on the freedom of spirit which we have ourselves acquired. We must *be* what we call ourselves theoretically. And nothing can convince us of being that, except our very *endeavour* [Streben] to be just that. This endeavor brings to pass our knowledge of ourselves, and thus this knowledge becomes the pure product of our freedom. We ourselves must have worked our way up the point from which we can start. Man cannot get there by arguing, nor can others argue him up to that point.<sup>276</sup>

Commentators have often pointed to this passage as a place where Schelling is clearly taking cues from Jacobi's argument that the only way out of the rationalist addiction to proof and explanation is through a *salto mortale* into, as Jacobi calls it, the system of freedom.<sup>277</sup> Dale Snow suggests that "Jacobi's *salto mortale* is the first practical solution to the difficulty of having to choose between mutually exclusive philosophical systems."<sup>278</sup> In the sense that both Schelling and Jacobi make this kind of claim because of their mutual commitment to the validity of preconceptual intuition, this is a valid point. Yet Snow makes it seem as if both Jacobi and Schelling take the philosophical systems that free choice navigates to be equally viable. Schelling speaks like this more than Jacobi does, but it is clear that both thinkers are trying to convince their readers of the superiority of certain kind of system. For Jacobi's part, we have seen that rationalism is rejected based on the fact that it leads to nihilism. This is the claim that framed the entire Spinoza controversy. For Schelling's part, we have seen that he thinks both dogmatism and criticism are legitimate developments of the consequences of Kant's critical philosophy, but towards the end of the discussion, he reveals that his sympathies lie with the critical philosopher.

Both dogmatism and criticism are the same insofar as they both aim for the absolute: dogmatism aims for it by setting up its objective reality as a postulate that supports a system of religion thought as necessary to maintain the moral order; criticism aims for the absolute by setting up postulates as practical demands for activity, for the realization of the absolute in the finite realm. The goal for the dogmatist is to motivate the moral practice that will lead to the realization of the world order thought to exist by virtue of the omnipotence, omniscience and omnibenevolence of God. The goal for the critical philosopher is to demand the practical action that will contribute to the realization of the idea. Thus, the two systems have in common the goal of making "the absolute [...] an object of *action*, or, to *demand the action* by which the absolute is realized."<sup>279</sup> But we can distinguish dogmatism from criticism by looking at the *spirit* of their respective emphases on action. The difference is that dogmatists take their practical action to be aimed at realizing a God they have assumed has *theoretical* existence. For Schelling, this

---

<sup>276</sup> DC: *Werke I*, 308; 173.

<sup>277</sup> SB: *Werke* 4.1 147; 210.

<sup>278</sup> Snow 1996, 30.

<sup>279</sup> DC: *Werke I*, 333; 190f.

is not the spirit of the primacy of the practical that Kant's philosophy demands. For to think that God really does exist as the moral guarantor that dogmatism requires is to make practical philosophy into a mere consolation prize for a reason too weak to gain the theoretical knowledge proper to God's existence. Schelling sees the weakness of the Kantian system; he sees that Kant wants a closed system based on the assumption that the things postulated really do exist. But Schelling also sees that Kant inaugurated a project of practical philosophy that implies the continual moral struggle of a free agent against a divine power. To admit that the Tübingen interpretation is valid would be to sell Kant short. For Kant's move to practical philosophy is in part a recognition that *God can only be an object of practical striving*. The spirit of Kant's practical philosophy consists in its insistence on human striving as the method through which the idea of the absolute is realized in the infinite task of finite human action. The brilliant insight of Schelling's *Letters* is that while Kant had shown why the move to practical philosophy is necessary, he had not done enough. What Schelling sets out to do is isolate Kant's claim that the harmony between virtue and happiness that God guarantees is not something to be known or proven theoretically, but rather an object of practical striving. In this way, Schelling hopes that he can thwart the specious espousal of the principles of Kantian practical philosophy by the Tübingen theologians. If it can be shown that Kant can be interpreted as having set up the things postulated as objects of striving, then it is possible to reclaim Kant's critical philosophy on the grounds of the true spirit of criticism.

Schelling develops this point in even greater detail in an appendix to the *Treatise*. Schelling begins by pointing out that the method of postulation is actually borrowed from mathematics, where the most basic constructions are postulated rather than demonstrated. Schelling's example is that of a straight line. It is impossible to demonstrate the idea we have of a straight line. "I may be *coerced* to construct in a primordial sense," Schelling admits, "the *straight line* by the line that is drawn on paper or on a board,"<sup>280</sup> but the former is always only a product of *imagination*, of an inner sense whose direction is determined solely by the subject. Philosophy, just like mathematics – and to a greater degree, Schelling insists – demands a highly developed inner sense. For just as in mathematics it is not enough to appeal to examples of a straight line, but instead be able to imagine the line oneself, to bring it to life in one's own inner sense, so too in philosophy is it insufficient to build a system that is a mere artifice of internal coherence, something Schelling likens to how the deaf understand music, as a "vain conceptual play."<sup>281</sup> Insofar as it takes on the method of postulation, philosophy is committed to the centrality of the imagination as the method through which the most primordial construction is intuited in the inner sense. In this sense, a postulate for Schelling is, strictly speaking, a product of the imagination that can never find perfect objective expression at any one time. Predictably, Schelling thinks the most basic construction for the inner sense is the self in its primordial activity. "The postulate of philosophy, then," Schelling concludes, "is none other than this: to have a *primordial* intuition of ourselves

---

<sup>280</sup> TE: *Werke I*, 445; 133.

<sup>281</sup> TE: *Werke I*, 446; 134.

[...] to become conscious of yourself in your primordial activity.”<sup>282</sup> But because the construction is itself a product of the imagination, it is not a reflection or a contemplation of a particular state of a *noumenal* subject; rather, Schelling understands this primordial activity as itself *creative*. And the Kantian postulates need to be understood this way too. Freedom, God and immortality are not primordial postulates in the sense that the self is, but in the same way that the self as an imaginative construction is an infinite task that never resolves itself into perfect objective representation, so too are the Kantian postulates objects of practical striving. “Insofar as their object is infinite and shall be realized in an *empirical* infinitude and under empirical conditions, these [precepts] become *tasks*, indeed *infinite tasks*.”<sup>283</sup> Schelling’s reinterpretation of the Kantian postulates thus hinges on the thoroughly Jacobian idea that that which is immediately felt must be realized practically through human action. It is not correct to say that freedom, God and immortality do not exist anymore than it is correct to say that  $\sqrt{3}$  is not a real number; these things can only ever be infinitely approximated and this means that they lie in infinity. The task of the philosopher is to develop the inner sense to be able to imagine these infinite existents and creatively actualize them under empirical conditions.

4.3. On this front, Schelling’s choice to present his ideas in the form of letters is significant all on its own. The Tübingen theologians had adopted the letter of Kant’s philosophy, and there is a very clear way in which their interpretation was legitimate. But the main concern of Schelling’s *Letters* is to show that this interpretation misses the point, the *spirit*, of Kant’s critical philosophy. In order to make this point, Schelling could not just make another pedantic argument following the letter of Kant’s text – the Tübingen theologians had already done this! What Schelling needed to do was appeal to the deeper sensitivities of the prospective students of the critical philosophy; Schelling needed, in short, to show how the critical philosophy could be imaginatively constructed in the mind of the student with the right philosophical sensitivities. Schelling needed to show that even though Kant *could be* interpreted the way the Tübingen theologians suggest, a deeper look into the true spirit of the critical philosophy would convince one that there is something specious about it. By putting his ideas in the form of letters Schelling was able to circumvent the disconnected abstractions of formal philosophy and speak to his readers more directly, thereby appealing to deeper sensibilities that would be able to see past the strict, formal accuracy of the Tübingen interpretation of Kant.

In this, Schelling is clearly following Jacobi’s methodological injunction against abstract philosophizing. Jacobi’s great contribution is to have shown the German idealists what the primacy of the practical really means. It is not a consolation for a reason too weak to demonstrate the supersensible theoretically. Nor is it a method for rescuing dogma from the depths of irrelevance. It is rather an account of reason’s absorption in a world with which it arises simultaneously. It is important to see that the isolation of what Schelling takes the essence of Kantianism to be takes place along lines that Jacobi had already pursued. When Jacobi claims that faith in God can only be established through

---

<sup>282</sup> TE: *Werke I*, 448; 135.

<sup>283</sup> TE: *Werke I*, 451; 137.

the *practice* of faith,<sup>284</sup> he sets up God not as a theoretical object that can only be believed because it cannot be known, but rather as an object that can only be believed and given flesh and blood through practical action. Schelling takes from Kant the idea that it is part of the essence of humankind to strive beyond that which can be known theoretically; but if this is the essence of Kantianism, then Kant and Jacobi seem to agree after all. Against Beck, I argued that the postulates are not just consolations for a reason too weak to apprehend the supersensible. It is actually necessary to human morality that God and immortality are beyond the reach of knowledge; for if an agent knew the will of God, then moral action would only be a matter of carrying out God's will, not of struggling in the sublime attempt to realize the divinity of the highest good here on earth.

It is this that Schelling takes to be the essence of Kant's doctrine of the postulates, and it is this that trumps the attempts of the Tübingen theologians to install a 'critical' system in order to save their own moral and religious convictions. For even though these self-styled Kantians claim only to want the right to *believe* in God, not the right to claim knowledge of God's existence, their belief is still in an objectively existing entity, something in the world about which one could, at least in principle, finally discover the truth. But this is no better than the Spinozism that both Schelling and Jacobi reject. To finally discover the truth is to gain insight into my complete absorption in the objective world, in the divine order of the cosmos that guarantees that human moral action is worthwhile. Kant never claims to be able to finally apprehend such an objective order, and in this sense Schelling is indeed correct to interpret Kant in the way he does. I shall stress this once again: it is absolutely fundamental for Kant that the postulates are postulated *qua* beyond the realm of knowledge and that moral striving for the systematic harmony they guarantee is a project that could never be completed. And as we shall see in the next chapter, Kant himself will come to reject Spinoza in the third *Critique*.

Still, it is easy to see that Schelling has actually done a good deal more than merely interpreted Kant. As we saw in the second chapter, despite the fact that the unknowability of God was an essential feature of Kant's moral theory, Kant never abandons his tacit assumption that there is a preestablished order of the cosmos that guarantees the meaningfulness of human moral action. On this model, meaning – the deep kind of meaning people require to make their lives worth living – is out of the hands of humanity. So when Schelling interprets Kant's postulates not as mere assumptions about the objective order of the world, but rather as moral commands, injunctions to construct the moral universe itself, Schelling is certainly moving beyond exegesis. But he is also arguably moving beyond what could justifiably be called an interpretation of Kant. For what Schelling identifies as the meaning of practical philosophy really sounds much more like creativity.<sup>285</sup> We shall come back to this shortly. The interesting thing to note at this point is that the move Schelling makes effectively turns philosophy away from an inquiry into what is toward an inquiry in to the vocation (*bestimmung*) of humankind. Dogmatism agrees that practice is the only way to apprehend the supersensible, and so it has, in its way, made the proper vocation of humankind an issue in philosophy. Yet the dogmatists

<sup>284</sup> *Wider Mendelssohns Beschuldigungen, Hauptschriften*, 351.

<sup>285</sup> Dale Snow also makes this point. See: Snow 1996, 54.

do not recognize that the vocation their system implies presumes to be able to one day bring an end to the very thing that defines humankind as the kind of entity that inspires the system in the first place. Any system that aims at really attaining the goal of striving, any system that sets up postulated things as objectively existing betrays the very activities that define it as the very system it is. The system will always remain incomplete because an essential element of any system of philosophy is the action that opens up the subject for the revelation of truth. Notice that this is precisely what Jacobi's *salto mortale* argues; namely, that one must act in order to open up a context in which the world becomes meaningful. If we think that a philosophical system can deliver some final Truth, then we risk losing the very freedom that made the construction of the system a possibility in the first place. This insight about the impossibility of systematic completeness constitutes the germ that would eventually grow into a powerful criticism of Hegel, one that directly influenced the likes of Kierkegaard and Marx. "The whole sublimity of his science has consisted in just this, that it would never be complete. He would become unbearable to himself the moment he came to believe that he had completed his system. That very moment he would cease to be a *creator* and would be degraded to an instrument of his own creature."<sup>286</sup> "As long as we are engaged in the realization of our system," Schelling points out in a footnote, "there can be only *practical* certainty of it."<sup>287</sup> This is of course not the kind of practical certainty Kant defends; it is not, that is, a certainty derived from the conviction that if the world is a rational place, it must *be* a certain way. What Schelling means here needs to be understood in terms much closer to Jacobi's thinking. This is the certainty of a subject in action. I am certain, for instance, that I have a body because I *feel* myself *acting* through it. One can be certain that God exists not through any kind of proof, but only in the *practice* of faith. When Schelling claims that a philosophical system can only reveal itself to us as a practical certainty he embraces the Jacobian insight that it is only in practical action that the world emerges as meaningful.

## 5. Schelling's Jacobianism

As Ingtraud Görland points out, the influence of Jacobi is most clear in Schelling's development of practical philosophy.<sup>288</sup> Görland directs our attention to two important passages in order to illustrate a movement towards what are for us becoming familiar Jacobian themes. First, in *Of the I* Schelling asserts the thoroughly idealist premise that "all ideas must first be realized in the domain of knowledge before they find their realization in history, and mankind will never become one until its knowledge has matured to unity."<sup>289</sup> This passage directly contradicts Jacobi's idea that it is our history that bestows upon us the knowledge we have. Recall the story of the brothers Sperchis

---

<sup>286</sup> DC: *Werke I*, 307; 172.

<sup>287</sup> DC: *Werke I*, note to 307; note to 172.

<sup>288</sup> See his discussion in *Die Entwicklung der Frühphilosophie Schellings in der Auseinandersetzung mit Fichte*. (Frankfurt: Vittorio Klostermann, 1973) 55-60.

<sup>289</sup> I: *Werke I*, 159;68.

and Bulis Jacobi related at the end of the *Spinoza Büchli*,<sup>290</sup> and that I described above in Chapter 1. When Sperchis and Bulis refuse the offer to remain in luxury with the Persians rather than sacrificing their lives for the Spartan people, they do so out of a conviction that only a lived history can generate. All that Sperchis and Bulis know stems from their identity as Spartans, and their very existence as the people they are hangs on their commitment to the laws, customs and people of Sparta and their agreement to give their lives in its service. What Sperchis and Bulis know to be right is not, then, dependent on a knowledge that was historically actualized and unified in Spartan culture. Rather, the ideas and convictions of Sperchis and Bulis are functions of their membership in the Spartan culture, functions of the lived history they enjoyed as Spartans. There is thus very little with which Jacobi would identify in the passage from Schelling. But less than a year later, in the *Letters*, Schelling seems to be a convinced convert to Jacobi's philosophy of action:

We must *be* what we call ourselves theoretically. And nothing can convince us of that except our very endeavour to be just that [...] [w]e ourselves must have worked our way up to the point from which we want to start. Man cannot get there by arguing, nor can others argue him up to that point.<sup>291</sup>

Here, the starting point of one's thinking is the active engagement with a world into which one has always already found oneself thrown. There are no purely theoretical arguments that can convince me of my basic orientation to the world, my most basic convictions; this is only possible as an act of freedom. As in Jacobi, the decision to make the *salto mortale* is my own free decision, and in making it I enact my own freedom, realizing myself as a free agent. As I pointed out in Chapter 1, Jacobi seems to take this to be evidence for the very system of philosophy into which one takes that precarious heels-over-head leap; that is, in taking that *salto mortale*, I accept the reality of my indemonstrable feeling of freedom and choose faith over knowledge, praxis over theory. What the theoretical philosopher fails to recognize is that the very conviction that everything is amenable to rational demonstration and that the self is merely a part of the necessary order of things itself hangs on a free choice to accept this explanation of the world and one's relation to it. It is this last point that is only implied in Jacobi and that Schelling makes explicit in the *Letters*. It is thus undeniable that Görland makes an important point. The story of Schelling's early development is in many ways a story of his development of important themes from Jacobi. It is, after all, in the *Letters* that Schelling argues that the conviction that the absolute I is unconditioned (criticism) has just as much theoretical support as the conviction that the not-I is unconditioned (dogmatism). "Which of the two we choose depends," Schelling declares, "on the freedom of spirit which we have ourselves acquired."<sup>292</sup> In his move away from these familiar Fichtean theses, Schelling has thus moved closer to Jacobi's thinking.

---

<sup>290</sup> SB: *Werke* 4.1, 234; 238.

<sup>291</sup> DC: *Werke I*, 308; 173.

<sup>292</sup> DC: *Werke I*, 308; 173.

But I wonder if this is a thorough enough picture of how Jacobi has influenced Schelling. Even in *Of the I*, it is clear that Schelling takes his lead from Jacobi's basic claim that thinking must set out from the unconditioned. Following on Jacobi's argument that consciousness itself depends on a prior unconditioned certainty in existence,<sup>293</sup> Schelling first argues that all philosophy must begin from the unconditioned and then begins to wonder where this unconditioned is to be found.<sup>294</sup> In *Of the I* Schelling is still committed to the Fichtean thesis about the absolute I, and so his answer to the latter question is that the unconditioned is to be found in the realm of the I. The argument for this particular claim does not concern us here; it consists in showing that the empirical consciousness of ourselves requires an absolutely free self that persists as the ground of all the attempts to gain a better empirical understanding of ourselves. We can, however, never know this freedom because, unlike empirical consciousness, it has no structural dependence on anything external.<sup>295</sup> Schelling will quickly abandon this position of the absolute I, but it is important to notice that he has already taken on this distinctly Jacobian idea. Schelling's version of the certainty with which we are all acquainted is, of course, his well-known notion of intellectual intuition. Such an intuition is not conditioned because it does not express a cognitive relation between knower and known. Intellectual intuition has no sensible object; it is an awareness of intelligence in general, an awareness of the activities that constitute intelligence; it is an intuition of intelligence itself, of the very structure that allows for cognition more generally. Even more important – and this only further illustrates Görland's point – is that when Schelling comes to recognize that the I cannot be unconditioned because it is conditioned by the not-I, he does so by moving even closer to Jacobi's position. In *David Hume*, Jacobi argues

[t]he object contributes just as much to the perception of the consciousness as the consciousness does to the perception of the object. I experience that I am, and that there is something outside me, in one and the same indivisible moment [...] [t]here is no representation, no inference, that mediates this twofold revelation.<sup>296</sup>

Jacobi puts this statement into the mouth of his interlocutor, but he immediately declares his emphatic agreement, asking only that his interlocutor realize the most important consequence of this position; namely, that

the internal consciousness and the external object must be present both at once in the soul even in the most primordial and simple of perceptions – the two in one flash, in the same indivisible instant, without before or after, without any operation of the understanding – indeed, without the remotest

<sup>293</sup> On this point, Jacobi is most clear in the seventh supplement in the 1789 version of the *Spinoza Büchlein*. (*Werke* 4.2, 152f; 375f).

<sup>294</sup> *Materialien zu Schellings Philosophische Anfängen*. Edited by Manfred Frank and Gerhard Kurz. (Frankfurt 1975). 127.

<sup>295</sup> I: *Werke* I, 179ff; 83ff.

<sup>296</sup> DH: *Werke* 2, 175; 277.

beginning of the generation of the concept of cause and effect in the understanding.<sup>297</sup>

Jacobi's thinking is that the certainty we all have of ourselves as conscious, active agents situated in an external world set up in opposition to us is not the certainty of an isolated intelligence with all its associated activities and processes. We become aware of ourselves only as already engaged in the world and as manifestly determined by it, and it by us. Intuition, feeling, certainty, *Glaube*, in short is a relation that expresses both terms, the subject and the object, and is thus more basic, more primordial than either alone.

It is roughly this very thought that Schelling is attempting to express in the *Letters*. The idea is best expressed in Schelling definition of the "proper principle of aesthetics."<sup>298</sup> Just as Jacobi teaches us that there is an active and a passive element to human experience, Schelling teaches us that in order to apprehend the beauty of truth, we must yield in the face of a supreme power and exert ourselves in the struggle for it. As receptive to the immediacy of feeling, we are passive; as free from complete subjugation to the world, we are active. But this is still too simplistic. For it is only as active that I can be passively receptive. Jacobi captures this in his interpretation of the *salto mortale* as at once passively accepting the veracity of what is felt and *enacting* the disposition necessary to passive acceptance. For instance, accepting the feeling that I am free involves not only the passive openness to this feeling but also the free activity that gives rise to this feeling in the first place. It is only in acting freely that one can feel free; it is only in acting freely that one is free. Freedom is a revelation, but it is only revealed to us as actively free agents.

**5.2.** From this critique of dogmatism, it becomes possible to see how Schelling (and indeed Jacobi, I think we can now say) answers Nietzsche's critique of Kant. Dogmatism does not understand that it is the activity of philosophy itself that constitutes the context in which their system has meaning. If we take the weakness of theoretical reason to be the motive for the practical postulates (as the Tübingen theologians do), then we do fall into Nietzsche's critique. Significantly, if we follow Nietzsche for only a few more lines, we see that he does not stop with Kant, but extends his criticism to the other Kantians, and especially to Schelling's 'discovery' of intellectual intuition. Schelling and all the other enthusiasts of the Kantian critical philosophy run (swarm, *schwärmen*) off to the bushes in a Kant-inspired *niaiserie* to find new faculties. None of course is ever found, but this does not dissuade these *Schwärmer*s from simply inventing them. Schelling's great contribution to this swarm of foolishness is to have 'discovered' the faculty of intellectual intuition. At this point, Nietzsche's rather cavalier reading of the entire orbit of classical German philosophy begins to betray its weakness. Where Kant certainly does seem guilty of the faculty discourse and all the problems of circularity and self-service involved

---

<sup>297</sup> DH: *Werke* 2, 176; 277.

<sup>298</sup> DC: *Werke* 1, 285; 157.



therein, Schelling is not clearly so. In fact, part of Schelling's motivation seems to be to avoid the problems Nietzsche identifies in Kant.<sup>299</sup>

From the beginning, from the very moment at which Hume roused him from his dogmatic slumber, Kant's philosophical ambitions consisted both in following out the inspiration of Hume's critique of dogmatic metaphysics, and in showing why Hume's deepest sceptical intuitions were wrongheaded. "If we start from a well-founded, but undeveloped, thought, which another has bequeathed to us," Kant famously remarks in the introduction to his *Prolegomena*, "we may well hope by continued reflection to advance farther than the acute man, to whom we owe the first spark of light."<sup>300</sup> Kant agrees with Hume that dogmatic metaphysics is deeply mistaken in its attempt to make claims about things that transcend the possibility of human experience. Yet Kant does not share Hume's sceptical conclusion that the deepest human convictions rest on nothing more than habit and resultant beliefs. This commitment to the *a priori* led Kant to develop the whole faculty discourse that Nietzsche finds so problematic; for it also prevents him, as I have suggested above, from investigating the source of the belief in the faculties. Interestingly, it is precisely this problem, at least in part, with which Schelling is concerned in his *Letters*.

At the beginning of the second letter, Schelling writes:

My friend, the fight against dogmatism is waged with weak weapons if criticism rests its whole system merely upon the state of our *cognitive faculty*, and not upon our genuine essence [*ursprüngliches Wesen*] [...] I shall simply ask whether criticism could achieve its own purpose of making humanity free if its whole system rested entirely and exclusively upon a cognitive faculty of ours, different, as it were, from our very essence [*von unserm ursprünglichen Wesen*].<sup>301</sup>

Talk of faculties, Schelling wants to say, can only get us so far in philosophy since it presupposes the more important question of how we ever came to be able to speak of subject and object separately. Schelling's point here is that a philosophy that relies on faculties of cognition of which we are in possession will always assume a pre-existing separation of subject and object, which automatically creates the epistemological problems that defined modern philosophy. At the end of the modern period, we have seen Kant stuck with the intractable *thing-in-itself*, a residue of his assumption that the object furnishes the subject with raw data for processing via empirical cognition. We've seen above that Schelling does not clarify his intention until a year later in the *Treatises*, but the idea that Schelling is driving at here is that human cognitive faculties need to be

---

<sup>299</sup> Several commentators have pointed out that Schelling is in many ways an intellectual cousin of Nietzsche See: David Ferrell Krell. "Nietzschean Reminiscences in Schelling's *Philosophy of Mythology*." In *Epoché* 8:2 (Spring 2004). 181-93; Judith Norman. "Schelling and Nietzsche." In *The New Schelling*. Edited by Judith Norman and Alistair Welchman. (London: Continuum, 2004) 90-105; various references and discussions in Jason Wirth's *The Conspiracy of Life*. (Albany: SUNY, 2003).

<sup>300</sup> *Prolegomena to any Future Metaphysics. Werke IV*, 260.

<sup>301</sup> DC: *Werke I*, 291; 161.

thought of as actively structuring the world itself, not as passively filtering its data. In this sense, we embody reason in our activities. We *are* reason; we'll recall Jacobi claiming in the seventh supplement to his 1789 edition of the *Spinoza Büchlein*. Everything we know emerges out of a relation with the world that has always already determined the nature of our consciousness. If philosophy really is to be practical, then it cannot be based on a passive faculty of sense; it must be active. It is precisely this point that Schelling wants to make about the superiority of critical philosophy.

## 6. Concluding Remarks on Greek Tragedy

With this, I think we can finally begin to tie things up. For his part, Schelling concludes with a return to the theme of aesthetics through a discussion of Greek art. Schelling wants to remind his reader that criticism still needs to set up an objectively real power that threatens human freedom, a real power that looks deceptively like the assumption of the theoretical existence of God for which we have denounced the dogmatic Tübingen theologians. But there must be something to strive for, something to make human struggle a sublime contest against an infinite power that could annihilate us. Recall that it is this fight in the face of annihilation that defines the divine in art. In the first letter Schelling characterized this as a reciprocal succumbing of God and humankind. The infinite power allows human action and human action realizes the infinite power through its own infinite striving for the unconditional freedom that defines the mode of existence of the absolute. Into this context Schelling introduces the idea that Greek art is the highest form of art because it describes this sublime struggle. The Greek sense of tragedy pivoted on the idea of a struggle of the protagonist against the Moirae. Nothing, for instance, could have torn Oedipus from his terrible fate; but to simply succumb in the struggle, to refuse – as Oedipus never did! – to exert his freedom against this inexorable force; this would be to surrender his freedom to the Moirae and cease to be the kind of free being he is. This is how, as Schelling puts it, “Greek reason could bear the contradictions of Greek tragedy.”<sup>302</sup> When the Greeks see a person punished for a crime he was destined to commit and which he fought not to commit, they see a hero who never lost the freedom that defines his identity as a finite human being. “That the malefactor who succumbed under the power of fate was punished,” Schelling observes, “this tragic fact was the recognition of human freedom; it was the *honor* due to freedom. Greek tragedy honoured human freedom, letting its hero *fight* against the superior power of fate.”<sup>303</sup> Greek reason saw that there was something essential about the contest between subject and object. Greek reason saw that there cannot really be a subject at all unless it is free, and that an object is not an object if it does not present an obstacle to our actions, to our freedom. David Ferrell Krell describes this claim in his characteristically unforgettable way,

---

<sup>302</sup> DC: *Werke I*, 336; 192.

<sup>303</sup> DC: *Werke I*, 336; 193. It is worth pointing out that Jacobi maintains a similar conception of freedom as independent of and higher than any law. See *On Human Freedom*, the preface to the 1789 edition of the *Spinoza Büchlein*. (SB2: *Werke 4.1*, 26-27; 345).

[F]reedom asserts itself downgoing, welcoming the punishment that honors the hero with an uncanny obsequy: *You were destined to fail in the face of a higher power, but even so you struggled – in vain! in freedom!* For the hero and the heroine there is only an imperfect freedom, a freedom that can reply only thus: *By this you see that I, the defeated one, was free. I had freedom . . . to burn!*<sup>304</sup>

Krell points out this conception of freedom and its relevance to the tragic conception of human dignity must be understood in the context of Schelling's critique of the Tübingen theologians. The theory of the postulates is designed to keep the world confined to a morally acceptable *Weltanschauung*. But this confinement undermines what we honor most in freedom; namely, the very ability to struggle against a divine power. In his own way, Kant recognizes this problem too, for he insists that freedom within a causally determined and epistemically transparent world is meaningless. If we knew the order of the universe, there would be no moral value in tragic struggle since an action's moral rightness or wrongness could be derived from the world order. Schelling deepens this Kantian insight to show that Kant had not been clear enough in his theory the postulates.

Indeed, Krell makes an important point. Schelling follows this same line of thinking when he insists, against his teachers at the *Stift*, that active human striving is the essential element of Kant's theory of the postulates. If God were not something humankind had to strive for, God would swallow us up in divine hegemony. Yet this divine power is precisely what we strive for. Striving, then, embodies the same contradiction that Greek art exemplifies; for the object of our striving is the very thing that would annihilate our identities as precisely the kind of creatures that do strive for the realization of ideas. "I understand you, dear friend!" Schelling assures his interlocutor in the opening line of the *Letters*, "You deem it greater to struggle against an absolute power and to perish in the struggle than to guarantee one's safety from any future danger by positing a moral god."<sup>305</sup> What this means, once again following familiar Jacobian themes, is that revelation of truth about ourselves and about the world is only possible in the context of active engagement. In free action we feel ourselves as free; in taking the *salto mortale* we feel our freedom to embrace a way of life and through this we enact our own freedom. Unlike in Kant, freedom is not an object of knowledge; it is, rather, an object of practical action; it is an object for practical human striving. And just as freedom is revealed to us through free action, the divine is revealed to us through the pursuit, the striving of a divine life.

But if it is the case that divinity is realized through divine human action, that freedom is realized through free human action, then it is in the hands of humankind to create the world dictated by its ideas. Life itself becomes a work of art; it becomes a practical task of realizing the absolute in the finite human realm. In this way, Schelling reinterprets practical philosophy as the pursuit of *creative reason*. We've seen this in Schelling's *Über Mythen* with the idea that primitive mythmakers took the concepts they invented for

---

<sup>304</sup> 2005, 187.

<sup>305</sup> DC: *Werke I*, 284; 156-57.

purpose of understanding the world for the truth of world, and in this sense did not understand the distinction between knowing subject and object known. Modern mythmakers, while engaged in precisely the same activity, interpret their actions as the activity of a knowing subject aimed at describing the objective world. Both mythmakers take their myths to be truth, and neither sees that truth, as they understand it, hangs on their own creative force as an active subjectivity. Schelling wants to draw our attention to the fact that there is something to be taken from both approaches. From the primitive mythmaker we can take the insight that our own activity is itself a revelation of truth; from the modern mythmaker we can take the assumption that subject and object are discreet, that there is something about each of them that the other lacks. Schelling's unique arrangement of these two perspectives amounts to a vision of human reason as a striving that creates its object through the very creative activity of its striving.

Schelling does not have too much more to say in the *Letters* about his conception of art, aesthetics and creativity. It is unfortunate, but readers will have to wait nearly five years before Schelling will really give these aesthetic themes the central place they seem to already occupy. I hope that this investigation, however, has shown the subtle and complex ways in which Jacobi's doctrine of feeling and what I have been calling his practical philosophy act as provocations to a turn to aesthetics as mode of access to the existential situation in which humankind finds itself. Once Jacobi had revealed the deep poverty of rationalism, the search was on for new ways of knowing. Jacobi's positive proposal for a philosophy based on praxis is one of the first alternatives to rationalist decadence, and Schelling's subtle move from practical to creative reason is a clear development of this alternative.

### *Excursus: On the Letter Form in Philosophy*

I would like to offer a few words on the style of Schelling's presentation of the *Letters*. For the decision to treat the material in the form of letters is significant all on its own.<sup>306</sup> It is indeed unfortunate that this is not the appropriate platform to discuss the possibility of seeing the proliferation of the letter form as a continuation of the custom, beginning with Kant, of communicating philosophical ideas in less formal language. I shall thus confine myself to this short excursus. We should always remember that much of the difficulty of reading Kant's texts stems not from failure on Kant's part but rather from the fact that Kant was effectively inventing the vocabulary of German philosophy as he went along.<sup>307</sup> Just as Kant brought philosophy down out of the traditional authority of Latin as the unofficial language of the higher vocations of religion and scholarship, Kant's followers (and critics) exploited this new turn in mainstream philosophy in order to make a philosophical point. To really address humankind universally – as Kant wanted to do – one really needed to expose the thinker at work in the lived everydayness with which we are all familiar. Kant seemed to understand this on a profoundly philosophical level, but both his style and commitment to the mediated nature of knowledge prevent him from making the more romantic turn to letters as an appropriate philosophical platform.

Kant's followers and contemporaries embraced the letter style as a way to speak more directly to an audience. Jacobi's *Spinoza Büchlein* (1785/89), his *David Hume on Faith* (1787), his novel *Allwill* (1792), and Reinhold's *Letters on the Kantian Philosophy* (1786), most of which we have examined in some detail above, are testament to the fact that philosophy in this period found the letter form to be an effective method for communicating new, often revolutionary, ideas. Reinhold, for instance, found it to be amenable to appealing to the sensibilities of the intellectual public concerning the significance of Kant's critical philosophy, and it was finally this that succeeded in popularizing Kant, though in a manner very different than Kant had hoped. Schiller too chose this form to express his interpretation of Kant's third *Critique* in his *Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Man* (1795), which exercised enormous influence on how the significance of Kant's aesthetics were evaluated. And Hölderlin had plans to write an homage to Schiller's *Letters*.<sup>308</sup> Schelling's *Letters* are a clear contribution to this collection of late eighteenth century literature in philosophical activism. Schelling remarks that he chose to present his ideas in the form of letters since "he believed that he could present his ideas more clearly in this form than in any other. Also, in this genre he had to strive harder for clarity than he would have in any other."<sup>309</sup> There is something personal about the letter, something that allows one to break with the often-suffocating

<sup>306</sup> I am indebted to Jason Wirth's insight about the significance of the letter form, especially in Schelling and Schlegel. See his *The Conspiracy of Life*. (Albany: SUNY Press, 2003) 134-35.

<sup>307</sup> Lewis White Beck, *Forward to Kant's Lectures on Ethics*. Translated by Louis Infield. (New York: Harper, 1963) x.

<sup>308</sup> He mentions his intention to write a series of letters named *New Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Man* in a letter to Niethammer dated 2 February 1796. In: *Materialien zu Schelling's philosophischen Anfängen*. Edited by Manfred Frank and Gerhard Kurz. (Frankfurt, 1975) 143.

<sup>309</sup> DC: *Werke I*, 284; 156.

demands of formal exposition. The letter form also allows the author to speak to an audience more immediately. There is not nearly as much of a demand that readers be familiar with technical vocabulary and comfortable with the formalities of academic and scientific writing. In a letter, one can speak directly from the heart, exposing the most basic feelings that eventually give rise – though in a highly mediated way – to the formal arguments of professional, academic philosophy. One can speculate that it was for this reason that Jacobi wrote almost everything in the form of letters. His insecurities about his philosophical acumen could in this way take a back seat to the expression of the passion with which he felt the conviction of his ideas, which was Jacobi's real interest anyway. "It has been a fact about me for as long as I can remember," we'll recall Jacobi confessing, "that I could not make do with a concept unless its object, whether external or internal, were not made present to me through sensation or through feeling."<sup>310</sup> Perhaps Jacobi felt more comfortable writing in the form of letters because he felt that he could make his ideas more present, not only to himself as an author, but also to his readers. In this sense, it becomes possible to see Jacobi's style as part and parcel of his commitment to feeling as a legitimate philosophical category. The abstractions of rationalist philosophy cannot be countered merely by revolutionary ideas that appear in an equally abstract style.<sup>311</sup> It is inevitable that one's style has a direct effect on the ideas one wants to express. To see this, one need only consider how a philosophical analysis of a poem, for instance, changes the poem for its readers. Schelling seems to follow a similar maxim in choosing the letter style. "If here and there the presentation should sound too emphatic to unaccustomed ears, the author declares that the emphasis is due only to his most ardent conviction of the perniciousness of the system which he is attacking."<sup>312</sup> Schelling seems to know that there is an inherent difficulty in expressing his deepest convictions in the imperfect medium of language; he apologizes to his readers, who might be more comfortable with the veils of formal exposition. But in choosing to write in this style he acknowledges that such formalities would only be a barrier to communicating his ideas.

---

<sup>310</sup> DH: *Werke* 2, 177; 278.

<sup>311</sup> For illustration, we can compare this with Louis Althusser's notion of an "epistemological break" that happens both internal and external to a dominant ideology. New ideas remain internal to ideology insofar as "they retain a 'theoretical' meaning (the meaning in their universe of reference)." Yet they are external to ideology insofar as "their only meaning is as a *practical* signal, pointing out a direction and a destination, but without giving an adequate concept of it." See Louis Althusser. *For Marx*. Translated by Ben Brewster. (London: Penguin Press, 1969) 244.

<sup>312</sup> DC: *Werke* I, 284; 156.

## V

## Feeling, Beauty and Destination in Kant's third *Critique*

without man all of creation  
would be a mere wasteland,  
gratuitous and without a final purpose.

– I. Kant.

I have already discussed Kant's practical philosophy in relation to Jacobi and the problem of nihilism in rationalist philosophy, but his attempts to get beyond the traditional categories of eighteenth century philosophy is nowhere more emphatic than in his *Critique of Judgment*, the third *Critique*. Touted as the completion of the entire critical system, this text shows how the practical and theoretical spheres of Kant's critical philosophy fit together. Kant's problem is how the theoretical knowledge we have of the mechanism of nature can be compatible with the practical concept of freedom, how we can understand ourselves as free when all the evidence from empirical cognition points towards an indifferent, mechanical web of cause and effect. The problematic comes up in numerous places, but the most well-known is certainly the famous *Third Antinomy* from the first *Critique*, where Kant shows that nature and freedom are compatible, that is, that we cannot explain freedom through appeal to natural causes any more than we can admit its ruinous spontaneity into the regularity and uniformity of the fabric of natural necessity. In the domain of nature, understanding legislates natural law; in the domain of freedom, reason legislates the moral law. As long as neither understanding nor reason attempt to legislate to the other's domain, the structure of the critical philosophy remains intact – the natural world proceeds according to the necessary laws of Newtonian mechanics, and the human moral subject retains the freedom that makes moral choice possible. But there is simply no denying that the choices we make as free subjects affect the natural world, and so philosophy needs to be able to account for this influence. This is really the problem that occasions third *Critique*, and for that matter the second as well: the theoretical (nature) and the practical (freedom) need to be united. As Kant writes in a well-known passage from the published introduction to the third *Critique*,

an immense gulf is fixed between the domain of the concept of nature, the sensible, and the domain of the concept of freedom, the supersensible, so that no transition from the sensible to the supersensible (and hence by the theoretical use of reason) is possible, just as if they were two different worlds,

the first of which cannot have any influence on the second; and yet the second *is* to have an influence on the first, i.e., the concept of freedom is to actualize in the world of sense the purpose enjoined by its laws.<sup>313</sup>

In the first *Critique* Kant is concerned solely with the *compatibility* of nature and freedom, but in the second and third *Critiques* he is concerned with *reconciliation*. In the former text, Kant shows that though we cannot have any knowledge of the freedom of the will, we can rest confident in its existence based on our awareness that we can choose to act differently under different circumstances. Kant contrasts a man who admits that a certain object of desire is irresistible, but who at the same time would certainly resist it under possibility of execution and the same man who would consider facing execution if asked to choose between that and doing something he knows to be wrong. In the first case, the man is simply compelled by force to do the right thing; but the second case reveals a “freedom within him, which, without the moral law, would have remained unknown to him.”<sup>314</sup>

For a more genuine example, we might consider Bobby Sands, the IRA hunger striker who starved to death in a prison in Northern Ireland in 1981. Such action, taken in the name of moral principle displays a remarkable ability to exercise one’s freedom in the face of overwhelming obstacles. Recalling for a moment the discussion in the second chapter, one should notice the same idea that freedom can only be experienced in a mediate way, facilitated by the moral law. On a Kantian reading, Bobby Sands was not aware of the power of his will to follow his moral principle to the end; it was only through the mediation of the moral law that he came to know his own freedom from natural inclination, indeed from the natural inclination *par excellence*. In this case, the moral law is expressed in the perceived duty to maintain the injustice of the imprisonment of the IRA and to make this imprisonment as politically difficult as possible for Thatcher’s ruling conservatives. Sands discovered his freedom in his commitment to this moral principle. This is precisely why freedom can only be a postulate for Kant: we can never know it immediately, but we know that adherence to the moral law requires it. Freedom is the *ratio essendi* of the moral law; the moral law the *ratio cognoscendi* of freedom.<sup>315</sup> I have already explained how this, at least from Jacobi’s perspective, creates problems for Kant. It is worth noticing how these problems surface in this example of Bobby Sands. Jacobi thinks that filtering the immediate feeling of freedom through the moral law is to remove this feeling from the context in which it makes sense to a moral agent. It is not only in moments of moral resolve, after all, that we feel – nay, know – ourselves to be free. It is true that Kant thinks we know our freedom in acting on it, but this merely subjective certainty becomes objective, becomes truth in the rational knowledge of the moral law that we all, at least for Kant, must acknowledge. The issue for Jacobi is that this turns action into something oriented by the abstractions of discursive reason, rather than directed by the exigencies of immediate feeling. The feeling

---

<sup>313</sup> CJ: *Werke* V, 175-6; 14-15.

<sup>314</sup> CPrR: *Werke* V, 30; 163.

<sup>315</sup> CPrR, 5: 4n; 140n.



of freedom, for Jacobi, has epistemological priority over the abstractions that emerge from it, and this means that it is not bound to the moral law in its objectification. This is precisely the point Jacobi makes with his recounting of Plutarch tale of Sperchis and Bulis.<sup>316</sup> The freedom of the Spartan brothers manifested itself differently than their Persian hosts, which to Jacobi means that the feeling freedom is more basic than any particular system of laws. In the context of the case of Bobby Sands, one of the reasons moral deliberation is so difficult is that we are always free to do the wrong thing. Our freedom does not discriminate between right and wrong, and it is not only when we are aware of our duty that we feel the freedom to act, upon which duty as such is predicated. For Bobby Sands, the risk was not, or not only, the possibility that the strike could prove fatal; the greater risk, at least from his perspective, was in the possibility that he and several others could die for nothing, without affecting the desired changes. This ultimate statement of freedom, made precisely in the *name* of freedom, could end up falling flat against Thatcher's ruling Conservatives. Setting this aside, Kant's point is that freedom has its own legislative domain that compels agents to action along avenues that are entirely different from those of nature. It is no surprise that someone is able to control otherwise irresistible urges when threatened with severe punishment. But it is, Kant thinks, significant that one can exercise such freedom when there is no such threat, or even when the threat of punishment is directed at doing the right thing. Thus, the solution that the second *Critique* offers to the problematic of reconciling the respective realms of nature and freedom amounts to establishing empirically the actuality of freedom and its power to bring about effects in the natural world.

We have already seen how Kant develops this solution in the context of the Spinoza controversy. Theoretical reason legislates to nature, practical reason to freedom; keeping these two domains separate is one of deepest lessons Kant wanted to give to philosophy. It is in this vein that Kant rejects both Mendelssohn's and Jacobi's *schwärmerisch* attempts to respectively *know* and *feel* the supersensible. We cannot prove the existence of God and human freedom, but we can postulate their reality based on the capacity we all have to be able to determine ourselves to action along lines that are different than those of natural mechanism.

Now, we have also shown how Kant's theory of the postulates was subsequently interpreted by the Tübingen theologians and how Schelling reinterprets Kant based on themes that can be traced to Jacobi. What I propose to do in this chapter is explore Kant's turn to aesthetics in an effort to deepen his account of how the exigency of reason manifests itself in feeling, in our actual experience, and how this further addresses the threat of nihilism raised by Jacobi. If in the second *Critique* Kant deployed a metaphysical image designed to provide a free moral agent with a context in which actions are meaningful, in the third *Critique* Kant develops the conceptual apparatus that supports his metaphysical convictions and attempts shows how the world and the human place within it can become aesthetically meaningful – that is, sensible – to real moral agents. Significantly, it is in this way that Kant is able to reconcile the tension between freedom and nature. It is still the case that understanding legislates natural law and reason

---

<sup>316</sup> See Chapter 1 and the Introduction Part II.

moral law, but Kant's aesthetic theory, both in its receptive and creative modes, allows for a much stronger association. The natural world itself is now thought to give us sensible hints (*Winke*) that its structure is amenable to human moral striving. And the creative ingenuity of the artistic genius is considered to be a part of nature itself that facilitates the achievement of nature's final end.

I pointed out in the third chapter that Kant's philosophy, at least the philosophy we find in the second *Critique*, is only for philosophers. This is not to say that the insights of philosophy are *per se* not valuable. But it is to say that a lack of intuitive grounding makes it difficult to show that postulates are more than mere philosophical fantasies, more than *schwärmerische* illusions. In the last chapter, we saw how easy it was for the Tübingen theologians to interpret Kant's so-called 'needs' of reason as needs supporting a system of dogmatic religion. Schelling's solution to this problem, one that Jacobi had been trumpeting all along, was to reintroduce the viability of immediate feeling into the Kantian critical apparatus, thereby showing that a postulate is not a consolation for a reason too weak to know the supersensible, but rather a call to action, a call to make real what is immediately felt in one's own imagination.

But Kant seems to have grown aware of these problems too, at least by the time of the composition of the third *Critique*. There, Kant acknowledges, or rather, as we shall see, *wants* to acknowledge that we are not purely rational creatures, that we can feel too, and that these feelings are relevant to moral action and to the way we finally appreciate our place in the universe. It is of course far from the case that Kant simply never realized the importance of feeling and sensuality to human experience. Indeed, the very opening section of his *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View* begins with the idea that prior to any representational awareness of the self, there is always just feeling. On this, Kant cites the fact that children will always first refer to themselves in the third person before abandoning this mode of self-reference for good in the realization of the "I" that accompanies representations: "Before he merely *felt* himself; now he *thinks* himself."<sup>317</sup> Kant of course thinks that this stage of mere feeling is quickly left behind when the child develops into a *person*, and there is certainly not much in Kant that would allow us to conclude that he thinks this mere feeling (*bloß Gefühl*) remains a relevant part of personhood. Even in the *Orientation* essay, where Kant introduced the term "feeling" (*Gefühl*) to identify our awareness of reason's need to speculate about the supersensible, he was not talking about the kind of intuitive awareness we see mentioned briefly in the *Anthropology*. Kant refines his position in a footnote: "Reason does not feel; it has insight into its lack and through the *drive for cognition* it effects the feeling of a need."<sup>318</sup> Reason, Kant seems to want to say, has its own needs, its own systematic drives that generate the requirement (*Bedürfnis*) that it move beyond sensation to find the principles that complete a metaphysical vision of reality. What we feel is not reason itself; what we feel is precisely the requirement, itself legislated by reason, that despite human finitude, we can formulate an image of the whole.

<sup>317</sup> *Werke VII*, 127. I refer to Robert Louden's English translation. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006) 15. Henceforth, ANTH.

<sup>318</sup> *Orientation: Werke VIII*, 139n; 8n.

And it is precisely this requirement of completeness that was behind Kant's desire to formulate a metaphysical *Weltanschauung* generated the theory of the postulates. It only makes sense to postulate freedom, God and immortality when it is assumed that the universe is ultimately a rational place that rewards virtue with happiness. The third *Critique* takes the logic of this solution a step further to show that this *Weltanschauung* manifests itself known aesthetically, in experience. In this interpretation, I follow Paul Guyer's suggestion that the third *Critique* belongs, with the later *Religion within the Bounds of Mere Reason*, to a larger project of showing "how the morality of pure reason can be represented in our actual experience."<sup>319</sup> Thus, the reconciliation of nature and freedom offered by the third *Critique* consists in the argument that reflective judgment reveals ways that the freedom of our cognitive abilities become manifest in the experience of the beautiful. Following Guyer, even though Kant thinks that moral judgment must be disinterested insofar as it is motivated purely by duty rather than an interest in the ends to be achieved by performing one's duty, it would be unreasonable to expect any rational agent to act in accordance with duty if there was not at least some evidence that the natural world is receptive to that which we hope to achieve through performing our duty. Along these lines, Angelica Nuzzo observes that Kant abandons the attempt to access the supersensible via the postulates of practical reason and explores the possibility of a sensible experience of the supersensible itself.<sup>320</sup> I take my own position to be developing this reading of the relationship between Kant's ethics and aesthetics.

Kant's attempt to explore the aesthetic dimensions of human experience and its relation to the larger metaphysical destination of humankind thus takes several forms in the third *Critique*, and my purpose in this chapter is to explore them. How can we, at the level of sensation, become aware of the world and our relation to it as meaningful, as more than just an indifferent mechanism operating according to laws that have no particular significance to humankind? The problem for Kant, the problem passed on to him by Jacobi, is how to show that our lives are not futile, meaningless blips in the vast mechanism of the cosmos. Kant's theory of the postulates was designed to show that despite the fact of human finitude, or rather, precisely because of it, we need to postulate the existence of a rational order of the universe that makes our moral actions meaningful. With his categorical imperative, Kant asks us to image our actions as constituting not only a maxim for human action, but also a maxim for nature itself. "[T]he universal imperative of duty," Kant writes in the *Groundwork*, "can also go as follows: *act as if the maxim of your action were to become by your will a universal law of nature*."<sup>321</sup> We are asked to imagine ourselves as co-creators, working alongside God, as, in a sense, gods ourselves. The human moral universe obtains an ontological status similar to nature itself. Through our actions, we create a world. With this, our actions become meaningful; they become a real causal force in the universe. This might sound a strong claim to ascribe to Kant, and indeed, as I argued in the second chapter (and again in the fourth), this process of postulation amounts to little more than pretending. It's only by postulating a

---

<sup>319</sup> Guyer 2005, 202.

<sup>320</sup> *Kant and the Unity of Reason*. (West Lafayette: Purdue, 2005) 364-5.

<sup>321</sup> *Groundwork, Werke* 4: 421; 73.

metaphysical *Weltanschauung* beyond the realm of what we can possibly know that Kant succeeds in giving the universe the moral order he wants it to have. It is true that it is through human action that the world takes shape as a moral universe, but the metaphysical apparatus that supports this action, that postulates a context in which action is meaningful, is finally only an assumption. In the third *Critique* Kant takes his argument a step further. No longer do we have to be satisfied with mere postulation. Kant thinks he can show that the metaphysical picture he has so far only assumed can be *felt*. There is a deeper, supersensible connection between humankind and the world, one that makes itself known to us through *feeling*.

### 1. Kant's Critique of Spinoza

Before we explore Kant's argument, it is important to explain another point of context relevant to this thesis. It has been argued that Kant's critique of Spinoza is right at the centre of Kant's third *Critique*, one of the tenuous links that holds the many topics it pursues together as a unified whole.<sup>322</sup> Given that this thesis began with a discussion of some of the philosophical issues surrounding the Spinoza controversy, it will be helpful to adopt this interpretive strategy. Kant's involvement in the Spinoza controversy already provides a context for Kant's concern with Spinoza's philosophy, but it is not until the third *Critique* that Kant actually turns to treat Spinoza as a worthwhile philosophical opponent. Still, it is abundantly clear that Kant has not read *The Ethics*, and were we concerned with the proper interpretation of Spinoza, there would be plenty to reject in Kant. This, however, is only of marginal concern. Kant may have Spinoza drastically wrong, but the relevant feature of Kant's critique is the way in which it is a response to the philosophical crisis Jacobi had initiated six years earlier. Accordingly, Kant follows Jacobi's reading of Spinoza and proceeds to provide his own solution to the fatalism and nihilism implied therein. So while Kant does not agree with Jacobi's proposed solution to the crisis of incipient spinozism in the German Enlightenment, he does agree that Jacobi's diagnosis was correct, that philosophy needs to make room for faith, and that this is the only way to exorcise the spectre of nihilism.<sup>323</sup>

We have already seen how Kant attempts to reconcile faith and reason in the *Orientation* essay and in the second *Critique*, but in the third *Critique* Kant shores up his case, showing precisely how his transcendental idealism avoids the dangers of spinozism. The critique of Spinoza takes place in the context of Kant's discussion of teleological judgment, but the position Kant develops through this critique is fleshed out, as I will explain below, in the earlier discussion of aesthetic judgment. For all the apparent heterogeneity of the philosophical themes it pursues, Kant's third *Critique* is a deeply unified and harmoniously arranged discussion, and right at its centre is the critique of Spinoza.

<sup>322</sup> See: Allison, "Kant's Critique of Spinoza." In *The Philosophy of Baruch Spinoza*. Edited by Richard Kennington. (Washington: The Catholic University Press, 1980.) 219; Zammito 1992, 248.

<sup>323</sup> CPR, Bxxx.

The substance of Kant's critique only begins to take shape in §72 with his taxonomy of dogmatic attempts to account for natural purpose, a task Kant takes up in the context of proposing a solution to the antinomy of teleological judgment. This antinomy consists in the competing maxims that 1) all material things can be judged according to mechanical laws; and 2) that some material things require judgment to abandon mechanical explanation and seek final causes. From the perspective of a post-Darwinian worldview, this formulation seems almost perverse, and one commentator at least has observed that this attempt to overcome contingency in natural science could not be sustained in the face of Darwin's theory of evolution and its embrace of the ultimate contingency of life.<sup>324</sup> But even from Kant's own perspective, while we can perhaps accept the viability of the first maxim, it is not at all clear why some things demand explanation via final causes, and Kant simply assumes this is the case. "No one has ever doubted the correctness of the principle," Kant writes, "[which says] that we must judge certain things in nature (organized beings) and their possibility in terms of the concept of final causes [...]"<sup>325</sup> As a point of context, it is interesting to see that Kant here accepts the viability of final causation not on any rational argument, and not on any empirical evidence, but rather as something obvious to anyone who simply looks. I wonder what Jacobi would say. Does this not amount to accepting final causes based on immediate experience, or, in Jacobi's terms, on feeling? If Kant had said that it is *undeniable* that people *do* judge the natural world in terms of final causes, then his aim could be construed as merely a descriptive one, as an attempt to make sense of why people judge that way and what is behind it. But what Kant says is that the *correctness* of the principle (*die Richtigkeit des Grundsatzes*) of judgment according to which we judge final causes as the explanation for organized beings (*organisierte Wesen*) is *undeniable*. Kant immediately qualifies this statement with his well-known refrain that this principle is only a guide for observation, but this is not very satisfying since he has already assumed the viability of this guide (*Leitfaden*). Why should we employ this guide? What makes it a safe assumption?

Part of Kant's answer is that nature itself, as he puts it, "gives us a hint" (*von der Natur uns gleichsam gegebener Wink*) that we might be able to reach beyond "the bounds of mere cognition" and find the truly first cause, "the highest point in the series of causes."<sup>326</sup> This *Wink* is what Kant has already described in the first part of the text on aesthetic judgment. The experience of the beautiful provides just enough of a clue that beyond conceptual determination there is a unity between the processes of empirical cognition and the world itself. In this sense, since the experience of the beautiful consists precisely in the feeling of pleasure, Kant seems to agree with Jacobi that such things can only be felt, never fully conceptualized. As we shall see, this is a superficial agreement that breaks down as soon as we understand what Kant means by the beautiful. But this is to get too far ahead. In following up on this *Wink*, Kant proceeds innocently enough: "Why not stop our [empirical] investigation of nature," Kant proposes, "or at least

<sup>324</sup> Barry Allen, "The Abyss of Contingency." In *History of Philosophy Quarterly*. 20:4 (2003).

<sup>325</sup> CJ: *Werke* V, 389; 270.

<sup>326</sup> CJ: *Werke* V, 390; 271.

suspend it for a while, and try first to find out where that stranger in natural science, the concept of natural purposes, may lead?”<sup>327</sup>

At this point, Kant turns to his taxonomy of metaphysical systems. All of the systems Kant describes share the feature of being thoroughly dogmatic, that is, they all claim to be giving an account of the way the world objectively *is*. Kant claims that each system is an attempt to “explain our teleological judgments about nature,”<sup>328</sup> and he goes on to set up his classification based on the categories of *idealism* and *realism*, which each divide up into *physical* and *hyperphysical* versions. The first, idealistic, systems both maintain that any purposes in nature are unintentional; that is, that a purpose is really just part of nature’s mechanism. The *physical* version takes nature to be a blind mechanism, and so cannot explain our teleological judgments. The *hyperphysical* version refuses to even consider natural purposes as products, opting, rather, to explain them as accidents inhering in an original being. This second version is what Kant associates, rightly or wrongly, with Spinoza. One thing that should alert readers to the fact that Kant has an agenda against Spinoza is that he spends by far the greatest amount of space refuting the putatively spinozistic system. There is no reason why one dogmatic system should be more erroneous than another, and Kant does not seem to be claiming that spinozism presents any more of a challenge. The heart of Kant’s critique is that while Spinoza retains the unity of the original being that any teleological system requires, he denies contingency (*Zufälligkeit*) to natural forms and so deprives nature of an order governed by an intelligence.<sup>329</sup> Kant simply cannot abide a purposeless contingency. According to Kant, this is more than a simple dogmatic failure to meet the requirements of a teleological system. Kant goes on to say that Spinoza fails even to accomplish what he sets out to do, namely, explain everything in terms of purposes. Kant, as I’ve already mentioned, never read Spinoza’s *Ethics*.<sup>330</sup> In order to be successful, an explanation in terms of purposes must meet three requirements: 1) there must be some unity around which the purpose congeals; 2) natural forms must be thought of as effects of that unity as a cause; and 3) that unity must be an intelligent cause.<sup>331</sup> Spinoza can meet the first requirement but utterly fails to meet the second and third, and because of this cannot account for natural purposes. According to Kant, and to Jacobi for that matter, this means that Spinozism leaves the universe a meaningless abyss where all things are determined according to the indifferent mechanism of substance. The second category of systems, the realist, is also made up of its own *physical* and *hyperphysical* versions. The first posits a kind of living or at least enlivened matter that operates according to purposes. Kant’s response to this is what one would expect; namely, that such an insight into matter is impossible and that the very definition of matter (*inertia*) precludes life anyway. The final system, *theism*, or the *realist-hyperphysical*, is the one that Kant favours. For this system manages to meet all the requirements of a teleological system I identified above with its

<sup>327</sup> CJ: *Werke* V, 390; 271.

<sup>328</sup> CJ: *Werke* V, 392; 273.

<sup>329</sup> CJ: *Werke* V, 393; 274.

<sup>330</sup> It is probably impossible to defend Kant’s view with a reading of Spinoza’s text. Purposes could not be further from Spinoza’s concern.

<sup>331</sup> CJ: *Werke* V, 393; 275.

belief in an original, intelligent creator. The only failure of this system is its dogmatism, its assumption that its system is a representation of the objective order of the world itself. Again, such an insight is impossible, and the theist's claim to have some kind of epistemological access to the unity of causes beyond nature is nothing short of *schwärmerei*. Zammito castigates Kant for expressing a preference for the fourth system, the *realist-hyperphysical* system. According to Zammito, Kant goes beyond the merely epistemological concerns that arise from the antinomy to take sides in a debate between the systems of dogmatic metaphysics themselves. Here, as Zammito puts it, Kant "became but one metaphysician more."<sup>332</sup> Zammito surely has a point. To maintain that one particular brand of dogmatism is preferable is to say that one dogma is better than another, which does nothing to forward the solution to the antinomy. Still, I think Zammito's attack is somewhat cavalier. Kant clearly has no intention to defend *theism*; he only wants to point out that it contains an element that dovetails with the position he defends. After all, Kant begins his discussion the four systems by declaring that they all "try to explain our teleological judgments about nature."<sup>333</sup> It only makes sense that Kant would prefer the system that forwards, at least from his perspective, the most plausible theory, the one that retains the element of intentional, intelligent causality. Indeed, it is precisely for the same reason that Kant rejects Spinoza. I shall quote Kant at length:

So when Spinoza reduced our concepts of purposive [things] in nature to the consciousness that [these things and] we ourselves are within an all-encompassing (though not at the same time simple) being, and sought that purposive form merely in the unity of that being, he clearly must have intended to interpret the purposiveness of that form merely idealistically rather than realistically. But even that he was unable to do, because the mere presentation of the unity of the substrate cannot give rise to the idea of even so much as an unintentional purposiveness.<sup>334</sup>

Spinoza's great transgression is that he starts out with the desire to explain purposes in nature and ends up with a system of blind mechanism in which natural forms merely subsist in a meaningless way in the unity of the original being. None of these systems would seem so malicious outside of Kant's analysis strictly in terms of teleology, but Kant's point, which is what we are trying to get at anyway, is that none of these four basic systems can infuse the universe with meaning, with a purpose set out by an intelligent creator in a coherent manner. None of these systems, in short, can escape the spectre of nihilism and fatalism.

**1.2.** Everything Kant says about the dogmatic systems of philosophy, including Spinoza's, is geared towards showing how his concept of reflective judgment can accommodate final causes without collapsing into dogmatism. In the context of the

---

<sup>332</sup> Zammito 1992, 250.

<sup>333</sup> CJ: *Werke V*, 392; 273.

<sup>334</sup> CJ: *Werke V*, 394; 275.

antinomy Kant raised at the outset, the problems is to show how we can judge nature according to purposes without transgressing the transcendental box that defines the boundaries of finite human knowledge. Empirical cognition only furnishes us with mechanical principles, and this, according to Jacobi's diagnosis, is a recipe for nihilism. What remains is to explain how teleological judgment can be conceived within the confines of the critical philosophy. The relevant concept here is that of "reflective judgment." This famous and famously ambiguous concept is, in a sense, fairly straightforward. As opposed to judgment in its *determinative* capacity, the capacity of subsuming particulars under the concepts of the understanding, *reflective* judgment is charged with finding concepts and laws under which particulars can be subsumed. In short, a judgment is reflective rather than determinative when the understanding does not already have a concept for the object and so cannot prescribe a rule for judgment to proceed in terms of. Reflective judgment is relevant to teleological judgment because the limits of empirical cognition preclude us having concepts appropriate to judging nature in terms of final causes. But this does not mean that reflective judgment works blindly. Already in the *Orientation* essay, Kant argues that in the absence of sensible evidence, we can orient ourselves in terms of a subjective principle that allows reason to proceed in its theoretical and practical tasks. And in the second *Critique* Kant develops the theory of the postulates as way to guide our practical reason. In this sense, reflective judgment is a clear development of this line of Kant's thought. Reflective judgment, Kant insists, requires a *principle* by which to be able to judge at all; namely, the principle that the products of nature "have a form that is possible in terms of universal laws which we can cognize."<sup>335</sup> This principle is important because it allows judgment to proceed in terms of a basic presupposition. "[I]f we were not allowed to presuppose this [principle]," Kant insists, "and did not base our treatment of empirical representations on this principle, then all our reflection would be performed merely haphazardly and blindly."<sup>336</sup> Without such a principle, what Kant comes to term "purposiveness", there would not even be *something* that we could call nature; indeed, our empirical representations would be nothing more than a heap of unrelated data. Even calling the principle a heuristic device does not quite capture its crucial role. Kant's claim is much stronger. Natural laws, nature itself as it appears to us, can only make sense within the context of a system that is purposively organized. Without such a system, there would be no such thing as laws at all, but rather only disconnected empirical representations. As Kant nicely puts it, "nature makes its forms specific through empirical laws."<sup>337</sup> Reflective judgment here provides the basic framework within which specific laws of nature can appear to the understanding for conceptual processing.

**1.3.** In terms of the broader argument being pursued here, Kant's concept of reflective judgment is the discovery that allowed him to infuse the universe with the kind of meaning that moral agents expect out of life. The critique of Spinoza was deployed in

<sup>335</sup> *First Introduction to the Critique of Judgment: Werke* 20: 212; 400. Henceforth, FI.

<sup>336</sup> FI: *Werke* 20: 212; 401.

<sup>337</sup> FI: *Werke* 20: 216; 404.



order to show that without an intelligent causal force a meaningful purposiveness cannot be sustained. But perhaps the more important result of his fourfold typology of dogmatic metaphysical systems is the idea that no matter the content of a particular system's claims about reality, such claims can have no meaning since they always refer to a world that is to us cognitively closed. But since Kant's concept of reflective judgment allows him to avoid making determinate claims about the world as it is in itself, he is able to restrict the domain of teleological judgment to the subject.

All of this culminates in Kant's famous claim in §82, in the *Methodology of Teleological Judgment* that humankind is the ultimate purpose of nature.<sup>338</sup> Since judgment according to purposes has been rendered valid only as a *Leitfaden* for observation, Kant has shifted the source of meaning in the universe from a ready-made order of the cosmos to the cognitive capacities of the subject. It is important to pause for a moment to clarify how this escapes the nihilism of traditional rationalism. The problem Jacobi identified was that if the world is understood as having a ready-made order and human reason is capable only of conditioned knowledge, then all we are capable of is an infinite string of conditions that never reach the final structure of the cosmos, the view from nowhere. What Jacobi saw was that this entailed a deep nihilism about the universe and the human place within it; he saw that forever being confined to conditioned knowledge of a world whose order eludes us both denies the reality of human freedom (for if all we know is conditioned, how can we know ourselves as not-conditioned?) and the way in which the world comes to have meaning for us through practical action. Jacobi's solution is to shift the source of meaning from the objective world order to the immediate feeling of the subject's immersion in a world. Kant follows the basic thrust of this solution by denying the ability to know that which lay beyond the boundaries of empirical cognition and locating the teleological order we find in the world in the cognitive exigencies of the subject. If nature is to be thought as a teleological system, which Kant thinks that it must, then humankind, as the only creature able to set its own purposes, to look at the world and see purposes, to give a *telos* to the world, is its ultimate end. This claim comes as the conclusion to the well-known story – recounted briefly above – that teleology provides principles for reflective, not determinative judgment. The reflective judgment that natural science and theology must be subjectively united in a teleological approach to the explanation of nature as a whole, that is, only serves as a heuristic principle for human reason to pursue further mechanical principles for the explanation of natural forms. Still, no matter how complex our mechanical explanations become, no matter how many times we divide, subdivide, classify and postulate particles of matter, we shall never reach a final explanation of why nature should be arranged according to the mechanical principles we discover in our teleologically fuelled empirical researches. What is necessary is that natural mechanism is subordinated to an intentional cause.<sup>339</sup> There are of course a number of ways to understand the system around which organized beings are finally organized. For instance, one can consider flora to exist for consumption by herbivorous fauna and the latter to exist for the consumption of

---

<sup>338</sup> CJ: *Werke* V, 42; 314.

<sup>339</sup> CJ: *Werke* V, 422; 308.

carnivorous fauna. But one might also consider herbivorous fauna to exist for the sake of the regulation of the growth of flora, and carnivorous fauna to exist to ensure that the herbivores to not consume everything.<sup>340</sup> Any explanation provides a principle around which natural beings can congeal as a system. But without an ultimate purpose none of these systems of organization holds any priority over the others. Kant thinks the ultimate purpose of nature must be rational, that the ultimate purpose is one that can structure an aggregate of organized things into a purposive system.<sup>341</sup> The purpose of nature must thus lie within nature, yet be rational. The only candidate for the status of the ultimate purpose of nature is clearly humankind, whose rational capacities allow for the organization of organized beings into a system of nature. That is, humankind is not merely another link in the chain of nature. Kant does think that humankind is a part of the economy of natural purposes,<sup>342</sup> and from this perspective humankind can serve any number of natural purposes. But, paradoxically, it is this very natural purpose that lifts humankind out of this relentless and unforgiving economy. By virtue of the fact that humankind is naturally endowed with reason, with the natural capacity to form purposes above and beyond those that nature sets on its own, humankind is a special link in the chain of nature, a means for preserving a particular system;<sup>343</sup> by virtue of this rational capacity, that is, humankind is the ultimate purpose of nature, that natural being whose purpose it is to maintain the purposiveness of nature as a systematic whole. No longer conceived only as a *natural purpose*, then, humankind is the *purpose of nature*.<sup>344</sup> Kant does not want to claim that humankind is separated from nature, but he does want to stress its status as a special kind of link in the natural chain of the interconnectedness of things, specifically a link with the capacity to be an active agent in the realization of the purpose of nature.

It is important to notice the significance of the move Kant has just made. Kant is no longer just claiming that judging in terms of teleology is only valid from the point of view of the subject. Now Kant asserts that the human capacity to find purpose in the world is itself simultaneously the keystone and capstone of the world conceived as a teleological system – the keystone because teleology is a function of human judgment, the capstone because these rational capacities are a part of the natural system itself, the part that maintains the teleological order of the world. What Kant has done is shifted from understanding the world as a place where humankind can find meaning to finding the very destination of humankind within this world, and indeed beyond. This is a much more radical, metaphysical claim; it is a claim not only about how we know, but about our place in a world that we only know *qua* a product of our own cognitive processes. To say that humans are the only creatures capable of looking at the world and seeing purposes is to simultaneously maintain two quite different things. First, this statement claims just what we have been discussing; namely, the idea that to make teleological claims about the world is only to make claims about the cognitive capacities of the subject. But second, the

<sup>340</sup> Cf. CJ: *Werke V*, 426-427; 314, where Kant employs a similar example.

<sup>341</sup> CJ: *Werke V*, 427; 314.

<sup>342</sup> CJ: *Werke V*, 427, 430; 314, 318.

<sup>343</sup> CJ: *Werke V*, 431; 318.

<sup>344</sup> Cf. Paul Guyer, "The Unity of Freedom and Nature." In: *Kant's System of Nature and Freedom*. (Oxford, 2005) 298-302.

statement also forwards the much more radical – and therefore more interesting – position that human cognition has the capacity to see what is there. Kant’s epistemological conservatism would never permit him to say something like this, but as we shall see he flirts enthusiastically with such claims in his aesthetic theory. Where beauty gives us a *Wink* that it is amenable to our cognitive advances and our moral projects, creativity develops the idea that humankind is capable of giving the purpose of nature a distinctly human direction. The task of a free agent is not merely to follow the laws of nature in a mechanical fashion, but rather to take its proper place as the ultimate end of nature and create a second nature according to the laws of human praxis, the laws that are generated and promoted in the context of civil life and culture.<sup>345</sup> With the idea that humankind is the ultimate purpose of nature, Kant shifts from understanding the historical development of the world as merely a mechanical progression, subject, nevertheless, to an intentional cause, to seeing humankind as an agent in the actualization of nature’s ultimate purpose. Kant does precious little in the *Methodology* to flesh out this captivating claim perhaps regarding his other writings as having dealt with it sufficiently.<sup>346</sup> Strangely, it is in the theory of genius that Kant sketches out the details of this important role for humankind. When Kant says that “a genius is nature’s favourite”<sup>347</sup>, he means, or so I would suggest, that the genius can achieve the final purpose that is beyond the realm of what nature can achieve on its own.

## 2. The Miracle of Beauty

But before we can see how genius can act to fulfill the final purpose of nature – a deeply, as we shall see, problematic and underdeveloped theme – we need to understand the relationship between aesthetic and teleological judgment. The linchpin here is Kant’s definition of beauty and his concept of reflective judgment. The very first task that Kant sets himself in the *Critique of Aesthetic Judgment* is to distinguish the *agreeable* and the *good* from the *beautiful*. While the former two are connected with the faculty of desire, the latter merely pleases [*ihm bloß gefällt*], giving rise to no desire whatsoever. The precise meaning of the word *Gefallen* (pleasure) is, as Lyotard speculates, perhaps significant.<sup>348</sup> The beautiful simply befalls us; it comes unexpectedly. Since a judgment of taste is not a *determinate* judgment, it yields no *determinate* object, and so there is quite literally no concept left behind for the faculty of desire to hold on to; nothing, that is, save subjective pleasure itself. And while one may desire more of such pleasure, desire never finds anything determinate to seek, to desire. When it comes to the beautiful, we are left simply to wander, hoping perchance that the beautiful may befall us again. Things are

<sup>345</sup> CJ: *Werke V*, 431f; 318f.

<sup>346</sup> Here I have in mind especially *Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Intent*. In *Werke VIII*, 15-31.

<sup>347</sup> CJ: *Werke V*, 318; 187.

<sup>348</sup> Jean-François Lyotard, *Lesson on the Analytic of the Sublime*. Translated by Elizabeth Rottenberg. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994) 161. *Gefallen* can simply mean “fallen”, but it can also be used to indicate a liking, *das gefällt mir*, or “I like it.” As a noun it refers to pleasure (*das Gefallen*).

very different when it comes to determinate objects of desire, where the pleasure involved is in the mode either of *agreeableness* or *approval* (*billigen*).<sup>349</sup>

According to the familiar model of empirical cognition spelled out in the first half of the first *Critique*, an object is *determined* when the imagination provides a basic sensible unity to the raw data of sense and sends it off to the understanding for conceptual processing, which in turn allows the faculty of judgment to *determine* the object to be an instance of a particular concept. The *agreeable* is a case of mere physiological liking connected with a particular sensation of a determinate object of sense.<sup>350</sup> In this case, pleasure is derived from the sensible experience of the object – a delicious meal, a pleasant smell, etc. In cases of liking such as these, Kant insists, the liking is connected with an interest, namely, a desire for more of the same object. Our liking here is inextricably bound to the concept of a determinate object of sense. We say of such objects not merely that we like them, but also that they gratify us. In a different way, an interest is connected to a liking for the *good*. This time, the interest is not in the mere sensible gratification derived from the object, but rather in a determinate object that is either *good for* something, or *good in itself*. My old, worn-out wooden spoon is *good for* scraping the burnt bits off the bottom of the pan, and the morally good, or a good will, as we know from Kant's moral philosophy, is good regardless of any utility. Kant's point in this is merely to show that the agreeable and the good both contain an interest in the existence of their respective objects and as such "refer to our power of desire and hence carry a liking with them."<sup>351</sup> The agreeable is an interest of sense, while the good is an interest of will. In a judgment of taste about the beautiful on the other hand, no such liking can be connected therewith, and thus no interest in the existence of the object can arise; for it is, as Kant says, "merely *contemplative*, i.e., it is a judgment that is indifferent to the existence of the object."<sup>352</sup> This is because when we judge an object to be beautiful, we are judging form only, not content. There is no concept of the beautiful because then it would be a liking for a determinate object. But before we move to discuss this peculiar form of judgment, perhaps I will be allowed to draw some implications from Kant's distinction between the agreeable and the good, distinctions that Kant himself did not explicitly make, but that should help us to better sort out what he has in mind.

When something is agreeable there is a seamless connection between subject and object. We "dispense with all judging," Kant says, and aim at mere enjoyment.<sup>353</sup> We do not concern ourselves with what something is enjoyable for because then it would not be agreeable, but rather good. One can imagine going to a very good restaurant and disregarding all concern about health, budget, etc., thus committing oneself to pure enjoyment. But when something is good, things are quite different. Here one is motivated

<sup>349</sup> My rendering of "*billigen*" with "approval" captures, I think, both the common understanding of the word and Kant's specific use of the term to indicate both a moral approval [*billigen, dass jemand etwas tut*, to approve of somebody doing something] and a more utilitarian approval where one approves of something being utilized for a specific purpose.

<sup>350</sup> See §3 CJ: *Werke V*, 205-07; 47-48.

<sup>351</sup> CJ: *Werke V*, 209; 51.

<sup>352</sup> CJ: *Werke V*, 209; 51.

<sup>353</sup> CJ: *Werke V*, 207; 48.

either by something's utility – the fact that the food is healthy in addition to its sheer delectability, say – or by something's intrinsic worth. In both cases, we are setting purposes that are not given simply by the world as received. Where the agreeable just takes what is given, not subordinating pleasure to any further purpose, the good is always pregnant with purpose, an ulterior motive that sullies the pure enjoyment and gratification of the agreeable. The beautiful lands somewhere in the middle: a peculiar combination of sheer pleasure and purpose.

2.2. The way Kant is able to flesh out this definition of beauty is through his concept of reflective judgment. In the unpublished *First Introduction*, Kant explains that empirical cognition requires three distinct cognitive abilities (*Handlung*): 1) “*apprehension* of the manifold of intuition”, requiring *imagination*; 2) *comprehension* of this manifold in the synthetic unity of the ‘I think’, requiring *understanding*; and 3) *exhibition* of the concept, requiring *judgment*.<sup>354</sup> And Kant goes on to say that a *reflective* judgment does not deal with the *exhibition* of a particular determinate concept, and so really only involves *imagination* and *understanding* insofar as the *apprehension* of the former and the *comprehension* of the latter are in a mutual harmony “that,” as Kant says, “furthers the task of these powers.”<sup>355</sup> What is unique, then, about reflective judgment is that it does not exhibit a concept. In reflective judgment, the understanding is not employed for the purposes of concept exhibition; rather, its harmony with the imagination is simply *reflected* on. Key here is Kant’s notion of the harmonious free play of the imagination and the understanding. In reflective judgment, rather than producing a determinate object of empirical cognition, we *reflect* on the state of the cognitive faculties that make the production of objects possible. In more concrete terms, when confronted with any object, the imagination attempts to *apprehend* the object in such a way that the understanding can *comprehend* it. Under normal circumstances, this process meets with few difficulties; that is, most of what the imagination apprehends can be matched up with a concept of the understanding in a relatively unproblematic way: the lump of fur on the chair beside me is a cat; that sound I hear is the whirl of the cooling fan in my PC. In the case of a beautiful object on the other hand, no concept quite fits what makes the object beautiful, and so the imagination freely plays with the empirical data given in the senses, engaging, as Kant says, in *fiction* (*dichten*) in an attempt to find a form of the data around which the conceptual powers of the understanding can congeal. When confronted with a beautiful object there is a seemingly endless number of ways that the object is beautiful – ‘how to express’, the imagination asks itself, ‘such beauty to the understanding such that it can grasp it?’ The imagination here acts as “the originator of chosen forms of possible intuitions.”<sup>356</sup> This means that the imagination considered in its freedom is not tied to any determinate law of the understanding, but is, rather, constantly *productive* of new forms. This does not mean that the imagination is completely free from its subordination to the understanding; they retain the *lawful* relation that under normal circumstances produces a

---

<sup>354</sup> FI: *Werke XX*, 220; 408.

<sup>355</sup> FI: *Werke XX*, 221; 409.

<sup>356</sup> CJ: *Werke V*, 240; 91.

determinate object of cognition. It is for this reason that Kant describes free play as harmonious, and says that this *lawful* relation is *purposive without a purpose*; for in meeting the conceptual impediments that the beautiful introduces, something about the beautiful object still makes beautiful sense, or, in more technical language, is *purposive* for the cognitive powers in such a way that, despite its resistance to conceptualization, is consistent with the processes of empirical cognition. In some places Kant will say that the beautiful is *subjectively purposive*, meaning that inasmuch as we can talk about the beautiful object, or that which is presented in intuition, the very form that it takes is purposive for our cognitive powers. Nature, in this sense, seems ready made for the epistemic operations of reason that structure the world we experience. Beyond conceptual determination is a unity between the subjective processes of cognition and the world as given through the senses, and this unity is rendered sensible through the experience of pleasure in the beautiful.

There are two central ideas here. First, when in reflecting on the mental state of the harmonious free play of the cognitive powers and we judge something to be beautiful, we are not making a judgment about the concept of the object, but rather about the form of the object that emerges from the subjective mental state that we find ourselves in. We are left with only form because the understanding is unable to provide conceptual content, while the imagination imagines possible forms that the object can take. By saying that reflective judgment refers to a mental state rather than an object Kant establishes two important points. By referring to the cognitive powers, Kant has employed the full force of the conceptual apparatus he constructed in the first *Critique*, which allows him to claim that such a mental state must be universal since everyone is capable of it. But also, by referring *merely* to a *state* of the relation between imagination and understanding, rather than to a determinate object that is the *result* of such a relation Kant is able to claim that the judgment of such a state can be nothing more than intersubjective since it yields no determinate object. This opens up Kant's concept of disinterestedness in aesthetic judgment. We cannot be interested in the beautiful object because that which we are taking pleasure in is not a determinate object as such, but rather only the form of a mental state that is spurred on by an object that resists conceptual determination. Pleasure in the beautiful has its origin in the subjective processes of cognition itself, processes that in this case only retain their formal qualities because no conceptual content ever results. Second, and more important for the remainder of our discussion, is the idea that there is a unity between the knowing subject and the object known. Kant does not address this important point explicitly in very many places, but one remark, said as if in passing, captures Kant's conviction. The form of a beautiful object, Kant writes, even though it is not determined by the laws of the understanding, "may offer just the form in the combination of its manifold as the imagination, if it were left to itself [and] free, would design in harmony with the *understanding's lawfulness* in general."<sup>357</sup> The idea here is that in the experience of beauty there is what I will call a "cognitive fit" between mind and world. Another attempt to capture this idea can be found in the published introduction to the third *Critique*. There, Kant argues that the discovery of the order of particular natural laws is

---

<sup>357</sup> CJ; *Werke V*, 240-41; 91.

an occupation (*Geschäft*) of the understanding, one characterized by its need to unify this order of nature under principles. And he goes on to point out that since the understanding actually has no power to legislate at this level of the final unity of nature, it has no choice but to ascribe this unity of purposes to nature itself.<sup>358</sup> In this, Kant thinks, we can regard “nature as harmonizing, in the diversity of its particular laws, with our need to find universal principles for them.”<sup>359</sup>

So while in teleology we employ a guide for thinking about nature and thereby create a world that is meaningful to us, in aesthetics we are provided with the assurance that our teleological judgments might, after all, be meaningful hints about the world as it is beyond appearance. The cognitive fit we experience in beauty is evidence that the world itself is amenable to the structures reason imposes. Beauty is a kind of offering, or better, an invitation to discover “the highest point in the series of causes”; that “stranger in natural science, the concept of natural purposes”<sup>360</sup> first makes its appearance in the experience of the beautiful. Recalling Jacobi, this aesthetic experience sounds a lot like immediate feeling. On this reading, beauty, just as feeling, is the immediate sensible evidence of final causes. But this would be a hasty and ultimately misguided interpretation. Kant has already clarified his position on this in the context of the *Orientation* essay. Feeling is neither an immediate experience of the external world (contra Jacobi) nor a feeling of reason itself in its operation (contra Mendelssohn). Kant says that reason enacts the ‘feeling of a need.’ Reason has a certain exigency, certain demands of itself that it needs to fulfill. In terms of teleological judgment, this means that reason always pursues a complete explanation, which necessitates the postulation of a universe designed according to the intention of a wise creator. Readers of Kant’s practical philosophy will immediately see the relationship between this argument and Kant’s theory of the postulates, and the viability of this connection can be seen nowhere more clearly than in Kant’s theory of the *a priori* interests to be found in beauty. We shall turn to this presently, but in broad terms, the feeling of pleasure in the beautiful comes, at least in part, from the pleasure we take in achieving our cognitive aims without any conceptual effort. It is a feeling of ease that accompanies the knowledge that the world is made for my thinking. This is the *Wink* Kant speaks of in the *Dialectic of Teleological Judgment*. There it is a hint that there is something to the suspicion that mechanical causation cannot account for everything, that we need to assume an intelligent creator if we want explain our experiences as completely as possible. Kant used a similar pattern of reasoning to be able to prove the necessity of the postulates. And in the theory of beauty Kant is reestablishing the explicit moral reference. Beauty reveals to me that the world is amenable to my purposes, which gives me confidence that my moral actions really do make a difference in the world. But despite these tantalizing ideas, Kant’s assumption that the world has a definite order that has nothing to do with humankind ultimately prevents him from really making the world meaningful in the strong sense that people expect, that the *System-Programme* demands, of which Jacobi was so desirous, and that even Kant

---

<sup>358</sup> CJ: *Werke V*, 187; 26.

<sup>359</sup> CJ: *Werke V*, 186; 26.

<sup>360</sup> CJ: *Werke V*, 390; 271.

could not dismiss. For in the end, Kant constantly reminds us, the world really could be a meaningless abyss above which we are precariously suspended by a metaphysical image.

2.3. There are perhaps a few places where Kant intimates that in the aesthetic experience of the beautiful we are provided with evidence that the world simply fits in with our cognitive powers and is thus a place where we belong, where we can feel at home. All of the manifold links Kant makes between beauty and morality, for instance, are characterized by the way in which the experience of the beautiful either provides some motivation for moral action, or is isomorphic with moral obligation. This complex topic deserves far more space than is possible here.<sup>361</sup> Still, there is one link between beauty and morality that is relevant here; namely, the analysis in sections forty-one and forty-two arguing that despite the disinterestedness of aesthetic experience, we have an *a priori* interest in beauty.

Kant begins his discussion in §41 by dismissing the possibility of an empirical interest in beauty. Recall that by virtue of its connection to the cognitive apparatus Kant developed in the first *Critique*, a judgment of taste is universal, or common to all who share the same cognitive abilities. Kant accepts that we can have an empirical interest in communicating our experiences to others, something he calls a natural inclination [*Hang*] to society.<sup>362</sup> In order to really understand this idea we would need to examine Kant's discussion of the *sensus communis* and of the necessity of the education of taste.<sup>363</sup> All we need to see here is that Kant rejects the empirical interest in the beautiful because it does not have an *a priori* reference. We might want to communicate our aesthetic experiences to others, but this is contingent upon a person's empirical situation in a society and so does not inhere in the formal structure of aesthetic experience itself, this is, is not *a priori*.

But even before explaining this *a priori* interest, Kant qualifies his claim by saying that beautiful art, or artificial beauty does not qualify,

Now I am indeed quite willing to concede that an interest in the *beautiful in art* (in which I include the artistic use of natural beauties for our adornment,

---

<sup>361</sup> See §41-42 CJ: *Werke V*: 296-303; 163-70. For a good discussion of these issues also see: Allison, *Kant's Theory of Taste: A Reading of the Critique of Aesthetic Judgment*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001) Chapter 11; Anne Margaret Baxley, "The Practical Significance of Taste in Kant's *Critique of Judgment*: Love of Natural Beauty as a Mark of Moral Character." *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*. 63:1 (2005): 33-45; Rudolph Gasché. "Linking Onto Disinterestedness, or the Moral Law in Kant's *Critique of Judgment*." In *Between Ethics and Aesthetics*. Edited by Dorota Glowaka and Stephen Boos. (New York: SUNY Press, 2002); Paul Guyer. "The Ethical Value of the Aesthetic." In *Values of Beauty: Historical Essays in Aesthetics*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005). Jane Kneller "The Interests of Disinterest." In *Kant and the Power of the Imagination*. (Cambridge, 2007) 60-71.

<sup>362</sup> CJ: *Werke V*, 296-97; 163. It is beyond the immediate scope of the discussion here, but it is worth pointing out that the *sensus communis* is in part responsible for the feeling of pleasure associated with beauty. The feeling of pleasure is for Kant a consequence of universal communicability of the mental state of free play. We feel pleasure, Kant seems to want to say, in the very realization that we are part of a community of agents. See §9 (CJ: *Werke V*, 217; 61).

<sup>363</sup> The relevant sections in Kant's text are 32 and 39-40.



and hence for vanity's sake) provides no proof whatever that [someone's] way of thinking is attached to the morally good, or even inclined toward is.<sup>364</sup>

The mention of using natural beauties for adornment is crucial here. In the case of using a natural beauty – a tulip, say – for adornment, the purposiveness the form of the flower has for the mind has been co-opted for the vain personal purposes of adornment. It is no longer possible for the flower to give rise to a disinterested judgment of taste because it must be judged in terms of its new purpose. But when it comes to natural beauty, Kant is willing to make the link to morality. Kant continues,

On the other hand, I do maintain that to take a *direct interest* in the beauty of *nature* (not merely to have the taste needed to judge it) is always the mark of a good soul; and that, if this interest is habitual, if it readily associates itself with the *contemplation of nature*, this [fact] indicates at least a mental attunement favorable to moral feeling.<sup>365</sup>

What are we to make of this idea that where artificial beauty is not connected to the morally good, natural beauty has a very clear connection? To get an idea of what Kant is getting at it shall help to consider the experience of viewing one of Jackson Pollock's famous poured paintings. On the surface, the experience of viewing such a work seems to be precisely what Kant means by an experience of the beautiful. As one's eyes passes over the enormous canvas, it is nearly impossible to find something determinate to grasp. What makes the painting (putatively) beautiful is the fact that the imagination freely plays around with images, sending off possible forms of the object, forms the understanding continually rejects as inadequate for conceptual processing. This free play of the imagination and understanding is sufficient for calling something beautiful since for the purposive relation between the faculties is maintained in its harmony by the imaginations constant play with images. On this level, there is no superiority of natural over artificial beauty. A beautiful landscape is just as conceptually resistant as a Pollock. But if an interest is to arise with respect to the disinterested judgment that something is beautiful, then only natural beauty is sufficient. This seems a bit arbitrary at first, but a deeper analysis sheds some much needed light on what constitutes an interested in disinterestedness and reveals that Kant's point is actually quite rich.

The basic claim is that beautiful art does not give rise to an interest because it does not provide evidence of nature's amenability to our moral projects. Beautiful art gives rise to pleasure because it spurs on free play, but beautiful nature is beautiful on a whole other level because it shows that nature itself is fitting for our cognitive processes. Part of what defines an experience of the beautiful is the failure empirical cognition meets when it tries to fulfill its usual purpose. The *purpose* of the cognitive powers is to provide the sensible and logical material for judgment to proceed in terms of. In the experience of the beautiful this purpose fails so that what is left is just the purposiveness that the relation

---

<sup>364</sup> CJ: *Werke V*, 298; 165.

<sup>365</sup> CJ: *Werke V*, 298-99; 165-66.

between imagination and understanding has for judgment. It is in part this failure that gives rise to free play. Understanding no longer has the power to manage experience and give it a determinate order, which frees imagination from its rule. But this failure is not all that constitutes the experience of the beautiful. In addition to the pleasure that arises from free play itself, the additional pleasure that the natural world is receptive to the structures that cognition imposes is also present. Kant writes:

Reason also has an interest in the objective reality of the ideas [...] i.e., an interest that nature should at least show a trace or give a hint [*Wink*] that it contains some basis or other for us to assume in its products a lawful harmony with that liking of ours which is independent of all interest [...] hence reason must take an interest in any manifestation in nature of a harmony that resembles the mentioned [kind of] harmony, and hence the mind cannot meditate about the beauty of *nature* without at the same time finding its interest aroused.<sup>366</sup>

Kant's argument that an interest is appended to disinterested judgment's of taste shows that the operations of reason, though consisting in different and autonomous faculties, all function together in a harmonious way. When Kant speaks of the harmonious free play of the faculties, he means to describe a certain genial affinity between the faculties that surfaces in the experience of the beautiful. Imagination works in harmony with the understanding, a harmony that imitates the purposive causal relation that normally obtains between the faculties of empirical cognition. This experience might represent a cognitive failure, but the other side of the experience of the beautiful is characterized not by frustration, but by deep, metaphysical satisfaction. What Kant is trying to indicate here is that there is a miraculous connection between the processes of human cognition and the world as it is in itself. Empirical cognition might fail, but something catches it, redeems it by taking over and providing an order that cannot be comprehended by the understanding. This is what Kant means when he says, "we *linger* in our contemplation of the beautiful because this contemplation reinforces and reproduces itself."<sup>367</sup> The faculties are maintained in the state of harmonious free play because nature performs the harmonizing synthesis that under normal circumstances is performed by the rule of the understanding. Where concepts fail, the world is able to maintain and reinforce the cognitive processes in their purposive harmony. What the beautiful points to, then, is that nature itself is in harmony with the projects that reason demands. We take pleasure in the beautiful because the same conceptual ease that is associated with the agreeable obtains in the beautiful. When something is agreeable, we do not judge at all, we just enjoy; when something is beautiful, judgment reflectively turns inward and finds pleasure in the freedom from objectivity. In beauty, the order of operations in determinate judgment is short-circuited; here we can only *reflect* on the state of free play that results from the harmony between nature and human reason. With all the ease of the agreeable, the beautiful pleases us; but

---

<sup>366</sup> CJ: *Werke V*, 300; 167.

<sup>367</sup> CJ: *Werke V*, 222; 68.

since all of our cognitive faculties are engaged, this ease is evidence that nature is in harmony with the very functions of reason that structure world in a distinctly human way. Coming back to an earlier theme, disinterested judgments of taste provide a bridge from nature to freedom, showing not only that they are compatible, but also that their distinct operations overlap in aesthetic experience.

### 3. Art and the Fecundity of Nature<sup>368</sup>

The sunny optimism on such conspicuous display here is further reinforced, and in a much more radical way, by Kant's theory of genius. In the experience of the beautiful, pleasure arises from the suspicion (nature only ever gives hints [*Winke*] after all) that nature itself is actually receptive to our cognitive advances. This is so deeply pleasing because it is real sensible evidence that the world is not meaningless, that our metaphysical assumptions are not the only thing preventing us from falling headlong into the abyss of nihilism. In terms of Kant's practical philosophy, this means that the world will not resist our moral efforts, that the world itself is indeed, as was only postulated in the second critique, a moral place. But when Kant turns to discuss his aesthetics of creativity, he is compelled to entertain some even more radical speculations about how the world can take on meaning through human activity. While in the experience of beauty we may have evidence that the world is in harmony with human reason, in artistic creativity we have evidence that an intuitive grasp of nature's own productive forces is possible. Kant's teleology teaches that humankind is the purpose of nature, but Kant's theory of artistic genius teaches that humankind is able to give natural purposes a distinctly human direction. I turn now to an exploration of Kant's theory of genius.

A significant complicating factor for any interpretation of Kant's theory of genius is that there seem to be at least three central and not clearly related ways of identifying the peculiar capacities of the artistic genius. They are: 1) By the ability to create original works, the genius is characterized by the *creative* imagination, something that needs to be distinguished from the *productive* imagination; 2) genius is a talent for expressing aesthetic ideas in a way that is sensitive to the interpretive capacities of others; and 3) the genius has some mysterious connection to nature, or is the agent "that gives the rule to art."<sup>369</sup> I take it that the task for any interpretation of Kant's theory of genius is to show how, or whether, these three elements can be fitted together into a coherent position. My strategy is to use the third attribute of genius, its relation to nature, as an interpretive key. Through this, we will be able to see how the theory of genius fits in with Kant's claims about humankind being the ultimate purpose of nature, and thus how genius fits in with Kant's attempt to counter dogmatism (especially spinozism) and escape the abyss of nihilism.

<sup>368</sup> This section is a version of a paper delivered at the 11<sup>th</sup> International Kant Congress in Pisa, Italy in May 2010.

<sup>369</sup> CJ: *Werke V*, 307; 174. It is worth noting that Otto Schlapp identifies three similar axioms of genius, namely, "Originalität," "Humanität" and "Die Nature giebt durch das Genie der Kunst die Regel." *Kants Lehre vom Genie und die Entstehung der 'Kritik der Urteilskraft'*. (Göttingen, 1901), 379.

**3.2. "Genius"** Kant says in a 1772 Reflection, "is like a forest in which free and fruitful nature spreads out its riches."<sup>370</sup> Genius is a natural phenomenon, a result of nature's original productivity. Just like a forest, the genius emerges as a product in which the diversity and fertility of nature is manifest. Genius is a talent, an *ingenium*, meaning that it is something given by nature – Kant's term is "*Naturgabe*".<sup>371</sup> The simile between the genius and a forest is not a seamless one, however, since genius possesses a special kind productive capacity that other products of nature do not, namely, the capacity to produce beautiful art, not just beautiful nature. Art, Kant continues, is not just a product of free and fruitful nature; it is subject to rules and method.<sup>372</sup> As a natural product, genius is the avenue through which nature becomes subject to rules that have their origin in human reason. Kant concludes the reflection with the claim that nature provides material for genius.<sup>373</sup> Genius is an ability to employ nature as a model for the production of art. But what kind of model is nature? Is it that the genius has a special ability to follow nature's rules exactly, a good example of which is perhaps Robert Bateman's stunning wildlife realism? Despite the technical mastery and aesthetic sensitivity required for such work, it is fairly clear that this is not what Kant has in mind when he speaks of nature providing an example. There are many places where Kant makes it clear that imitation is not the method appropriate to the creation of the beauty. For instance, in §49 Kant points out that while a work of genius must be followed by others, such following does not amount to imitation; rather, following by example means deriving inspiration for one's own original creations.<sup>374</sup> On this Kant is nowhere more clear than in a 1772-73 reflection, where he says, "Not the imitation of nature, but rather the original fruitfulness of nature is the ground of beautiful art."<sup>375</sup> Rather than the wildlife realism of Robert Bateman, perhaps the abstract forms of Paul Klee are closer to what Kant has in mind. In his *Theory of Modern Art*, Klee intimates that the real focus of the painter is not *natura naturata*, but *natura naturans*, not products of nature, but nature *qua* productive; it is, Klee says, "in the bosom of nature, in the primordial dregs of creation where the keys to all things lie buried."<sup>376</sup> The goal of the artist, then, is not to *recreate* natural forms, but rather to *create* them according to patterns of natural productivity. Given Kant's rather mundane examples of beauty (flowers, landscapes, poetry by Frederick the Great), this may sound like a strange thing to say. Still, I think it is fairly clear that Kant is committed to the idea that it is nature's original productivity, not the products nature creates thereby, that the genius takes as an example for artistic creation. Instead of copying nature, the genius

<sup>370</sup> *Werke XV*, 330. I refer to the English translation in *Notes and Fragments*. Edited by Paul Guyer. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005) 497. Henceforth, REFL.

<sup>371</sup> CJ: *Werke V*, 307; 174.

<sup>372</sup> REFL: *Werke XV*, 330; 497.

<sup>373</sup> REFL: *Werke XV*, 330; 497.

<sup>374</sup> CJ: *Werke V*, 318; 187.

<sup>375</sup> REFL: *Werke XV*, 329; 497.

<sup>376</sup> Cited in Pierre Hadot, *The Veil of Isis*. Translated by Michael Chase. (London: Harvard University Press, 2006), 219.

creates as nature does. The next question concerns precisely what Kant means by this original productivity of nature.

In §58, Kant argues that natural mechanism is sufficient to account for the existence of natural forms. It may be tempting to interpret such natural forms teleologically; indeed, the complex beauty of an orchid seems to have been designed to harmonize with human cognitive powers. Yet such a teleological judgment is gratuitous; it violates the maxim that reason should not pursue the "unnecessary multiplication of principles."<sup>377</sup> Mechanical principles, Kant insists, are sufficient for the explanation of beautiful forms in nature. Kant's uncharacteristically instructive example is that of crystallization, which he explains solely in terms of mechanics, and which undoubtedly results in beautiful forms.<sup>378</sup> Thus when Kant says that the original productivity of nature is the ground of fine art he means that nature *qua* mechanically productive of beautiful forms is the model upon which the artist must base his own artistic creativity. The artist must just express, mechanically, indifferently, the idea that compels his creative exigency. It is no wonder, then, that the artist cannot give a rigorous account of the creative process. With the same necessity that water vapour forms crystals according to atmospheric conditions, the artist creates beautiful forms that are subject to indifferent mechanical processes. It is this requirement that guarantees that works of art are, as Kant states in §47, entirely different from works of science.<sup>379</sup> No matter how great we consider Newton's *Principia* to be, Kant insists, all of its insights can be learned and reproduced by the diligent efforts of any student. Things are quite different with art. One cannot learn to paint like Klee, and one cannot give an account of how Klee paints. Klee's creative process is so developed that technique and rule disappear behind the veil of necessity, behind the indifferent mechanism of the natural productivity that serves as his model and inspiration. With this natural interpretation of genius Kant teaches that great art must be bound to indifferent mechanism and appear as an *effectus* of nature. Kant demands that genius subject itself to processes that do not appear at the level of conscious intention. In short, the genius, as Kant says many times, must be a kind of vehicle through which nature acts, giving the rule the art.<sup>380</sup>

Critics like Adorno seem blind to this element of necessity in Kant's account of artistic creativity. Adorno accuses Kant of ignoring the "non-egoic quality of genius," thus missing that Kant demands a surrendering of the ego in order to allow nature to give the rule to art.<sup>381</sup> As we have seen, the genius must allow nature to give the rule for art, and this point is borne out especially in Kant's claim that the genius cannot provide an account of the creative process.<sup>382</sup> Art is produced, as Schelling would keenly recognize ten years later, unconsciously, by virtue of the natural forces acting through the subject of

---

<sup>377</sup> CJ: *Werke V*, 348; 222.

<sup>378</sup> CJ: *Werke V*, 348f; 222f.

<sup>379</sup> CJ: *Werke V*, 308f; 176f.

<sup>380</sup> See especially §46 and §49.

<sup>381</sup> Theodor Adorno. *Aesthetic Theory*. Translated by C. Lenhardt. (London: Routledge, 1984) 245.

<sup>382</sup> CJ: *Werke V*: 308; 175.

genius.<sup>383</sup> In this sense, Kant recognizes what Adorno, a couple of paragraphs later, calls "the redeeming feature of genius"; namely, "its subservience to a work of art."<sup>384</sup> Of course, we need to recognize that for Kant this subservience is probably better understood as subservience to nature's productivity, to the demands that nature in the genius makes upon artistic creativity rather than to the demands of the work of art. Still, given Kant's requirement that genius follow the example of nature's original productivity, it is clear that Kant easily fulfills Adorno's "non-egoic" requirement.

But this submission to the mechanism of natural productivity is not the full story about the creative process. The mechanical production of free beauties may be able to account for the existence of natural beauty, but it cannot account for the existence of artistic beauty. Art must fulfill the dual requirement of being both mechanically produced and the result of artistic intention. "He [the artist] neither serves nor rules," suggests Klee, "he transmits."<sup>385</sup> This is what Kant means with the famous passage from §45, where he claims that art is only fine (*schön*) if it appears as nature yet we know that it is art.<sup>386</sup> Art is natural, but it is not something that nature can produce on its own. In being a product of the intentionality of the artist, the work of art exceeds nature's own capacities for mechanical production. It is only *as genius* that *nature* gives the rule to art;<sup>387</sup> and it is only *as nature* that *genius* gives the rule to art.<sup>388</sup> What remains is to explain precisely how a rule is given. The genius is not, after all, a mere conduit for natural processes. The genius is rather a mediator through which nature transcends its mechanical productivity by being subjected to the productivity of human reason. It is in this way that Kant's theory of creative genius can be understood as the avenue along which humankind finds its destination as the ultimate purpose of nature.

**3.3.** I claimed that there are three main elements to Kant's theory of genius. I have now discussed the third element, the relationship between the genius and nature. What remains is to discuss the first two elements; namely, 1) the capacity for creativity and originality, and 2) the ability to express aesthetic ideas in a way that can be universally understood. I want to show the way in which the mysterious connection between the artist-genius and nature is implicated in the creative process. I turn now to the question of what Kant means by creativity.

Kant only uses the word "*schöpferisch*" to refer to the imagination once in the third *Critique*.<sup>389</sup> This sole instance is in §49, where Kant clearly associates the creative

<sup>383</sup> Schelling, *System of Transcendental Idealism*, Part Six. We shall have a chance to consider this text in detail in the sixth chapter.

<sup>384</sup> Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 245.

<sup>385</sup> *Theory of Modern Art*. Translated by Paul Findlay. (London: Faber and Faber, 1948) 15

<sup>386</sup> CJ: *Werke V*, 306; 173.

<sup>387</sup> CJ: *Werke V*, 307; 175.

<sup>388</sup> CJ: *Werke V*, 308; 175.

<sup>389</sup> It is no wonder, then, that there is not much discussion of creativity in the secondary literature on Kant's aesthetics. Three notable exceptions are: Donald Crawford, "Kant's Theory of Creative Imagination." In *Essays in Kant's Aesthetics*. Edited by Ted Cohen and Paul Guyer. (Chicago, 1982), 151-78; Salim Kemal, *Kant and Fine Art*, (Oxford: 1986) chapter II, especially 40-48; and Brigitte Sassen, "Artistic Genius and

imagination with the ability to go beyond what is already given in the content of a concept.<sup>390</sup> I suggest, however, that despite the fact that Kant did not employ the term systematically, it is in fact the creative imagination that Kant is talking about when he refers to the imaginative capacities of the genius. Kant also refers to the creative imagination in the *Anthropology*, where it is set apart from the more familiar 'productive' imagination. Kant says that the productive imagination is not *creative* because it only *produces* what it does by patch-working together material that has already been given to sense according to the laws of the understanding.<sup>391</sup> Several sections later Kant explicitly identifies the creative imagination as the field proper to genius.<sup>392</sup> The genius operates with the creative imagination because the genius creates works of art that exceed the conceptual grasp of the categories and expand existing concepts. Under normal circumstances the imagination comes up with presentations that exhibit the content of a concept without any excess. For instance, the imaginative presentation of my cat does not in the least exceed the content of my concept of cat. But in its creative capacity, imagination provides new content. In cases like these there is plenty of opportunity, given the right kind of creative mind, for imagination to come up with new presentations that would refer to the concept yet not be strictly bound to its content. This is indeed what sets the ingenious works of the creative imagination apart from work of the merely productive imagination. That which is *produced* is merely a patchwork of existing concepts; that which is *created* is in possession of a rule that expands an existing concept in a unique way by creating associations between it and a variety of original presentations of it. The creative imagination of the genius is not guided by determinate concepts, yet it is still *purposive*.<sup>393</sup> This is an important point. There is, of course, a sense in which one can 'create' something entirely new simply by putting together elements of sensations that one has already had. But is this really what we mean by creativity? Most of us would probably agree that the reason we hesitate to call such things creative is because they are not charged with any purpose; that is, it is hard to think of a meaningless, purposeless creativity. One speaks of a creative solution to a problem or a creative way of expressing an idea, but one does not speak of creativity as a chance occurrence. The creativity ascribed to the work of genius is not just any old patchwork; it is a special kind of productivity with specific motivating forces.

**3.4.** The emphasis in the last section was on the creative process as guided by a purpose set by the creative agent. But how, precisely, does the artist-genius achieve this aesthetic feat? Perhaps most relevant here is Kant's claim that genius is characterized by an ability to exhibit aesthetic ideas, which is in turn attributed to the principle of *Geist*. It is precisely this principle of *Geist* that "imparts to the mental powers a purposive

---

the Question of Creativity." In *Kant's Critique of the Power of Judgment: Critical Essays*. Edited by Paul Guyer (New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2003), 171-79.

<sup>390</sup> CJ: *Werke V*, 315; 183.

<sup>391</sup> ANTH: *Werke VII*: 168; 61.

<sup>392</sup> ANTH: *Werke VII*: 224; 119-20.

<sup>393</sup> CJ: *Werke V*, 317; 186

momentum.”<sup>394</sup> The purposiveness distinctive of the creative imagination is captured in this rather vague notion of *Geist*. Kant then goes on to say that there are two distinct activities in genius: 1) to come up with ideas for concepts; and 2) to *express* these ideas in a way that is amenable to universal communication; it is this second activity that Kant associates with *Geist*.<sup>395</sup> The purposive element of the creative imagination, that which gives its creativity a direction and a momentum is the drive to express a rational concept in a way that other people can understand. It is important to notice that the function Kant assigns to *Geist* is to express an idea that enables the communication of a certain concept. There is a striking similarity between this function and the function of concept exhibition that Kant assigns to judgment. Just as determinative judgment is charged with the task of exhibiting a concept that the understanding comprehends out of an apprehended manifold of imagination, the function of spirit is to exhibit a concept in an aesthetic way. The chief difference here is in the fact that in aesthetic experience the relationship between the imagination and understanding is inverted. But judgment too takes on a new relation in the creative process of what we might call aesthetic cognition. In the case of empirical cognition, the order of operations is from imagination to understanding to judgment. The process of creativity on the other hand moves from understanding to imagination to judgment. The process begins with a rational concept or an idea that needs to find expression. The first step is for the imagination to present an aesthetic idea of a concept, an idea, that is, that exceeds conceptual determination.<sup>396</sup> It is this ability to come up with an aesthetic idea that is so distinctive of the artistic mind. But this is not the end of the creative process. Once the imagination settles upon an aesthetic idea, spirit takes over to find its expression. Kant’s example here is a simile used to aesthetically express the concept of virtue: “The sun flowed forth as serenity flows from virtue.”<sup>397</sup> Here the implication of the concept of virtue is taken to be serenity, which makes a connection between the two concepts, thus adding something to the concept of virtue that is not logically contained in the concept itself. The task of spirit here is to exhibit the concept of virtue, and it is this task (concept exhibition) that requires judgment; it is a part of the creative process itself, without which the genius would have no way to express the aesthetic idea. Contrary to the purely receptive aesthetic experience of the beautiful, then, the process of artistic creation is characterized by activity and the carrying out of a purpose, namely, to exhibit a certain concept. Without judgment a work of art cannot fulfill this purpose and would thus be meaningless to others. Judgment guarantees that art fulfills the purpose of concept exhibition. It is for this reason that works of genius must, if they are to be considered works of genius at all, be products of judgment. And it is for this reason that the work of genius is a product of the *creative* imagination, rather than the *productive*.<sup>398</sup>

<sup>394</sup> CJ: *Werke V*, 313; 181.

<sup>395</sup> CJ: *Werke V*, 317; 186.

<sup>396</sup> CJ: *Werke V*, 314; 182.

<sup>397</sup> CJ: *Werke V*, 316; 184-85.

<sup>398</sup> Bradley Murray argues that genius is simply not required for the creation of beautiful objects since Kant’s formalism entails that beauty is reducible to form, which can be copied without the need for genius. See “Kant on Genius and Art.” *British Journal of Aesthetics* 47:2 (2007): 199-214. Obviously, I do not find



When we consider all of this in light of Kant's claim that the peculiar creative capacities of the artist-genius are explained by connecting them to nature's own productivity, it becomes clear that Kant thinks the genius can give nature a distinctly human direction. It is in free creative activity that nature generates new forms that its own mechanical productivity is incapable of generating. We may all be able to form rational ideas, and we may even have the imaginative capacity to come up with aesthetic ideas, but to express these ideas, to actualize them, to render them with the same air of necessity with which nature renders its forms – this is ingenious!<sup>399</sup> It is in this sense that the genius becomes an active agent in the realization of the purpose of nature.

**3.5.** It is now possible to see the significance of Kant's requirement that in some mysterious way nature speaks through the genius. The ultimate human accomplishment is to remain a creature of nature without surrendering to its purely mechanical demands. These are exciting ideas; indeed, they proved to be too exciting for old Kant. From a Kantian perspective, creative ingenuity is so remarkable because it fully realizes the supersensible destination of humankind as a point of convergence between nature's mechanical laws and the purposes of which these laws are the instruments. The reason why ingenuity is such a peculiar phenomenon is that it is both a product of indifferent mechanism and an intentional product of the artist's creative effort. The genius is a kind of schema for Kant's model for the proper place of humankind in nature. Without becoming enslaved to the patterns of natural productivity, the genius is able to create works of art that appear as necessary products of natural mechanism yet are the unmistakable result of the free creative process of concept exhibition. In the end, Kant could not sustain these claims. For all of this implies not only that human reason has the capacity to make a difference in the natural world through the development of artifice, but also that human ingenuity functions on a deep, supersensible connection between humankind and nature, one that shatters Kant's transcendental box in nearly every way imaginable. Such a connection is as mysterious as the *Winke* that nature gives in beauty are miraculous. Kant's flirtation with these enigmatic aesthetic phenomena is an

---

this line of argument very convincing given that 1) in §42 Kant explicitly denies that copies fulfill the conditions for beauty (CJ: *Werke V*: 301; 168); and 2) it requires one to ignore all those passages where Kant says that genius, along with taste, is required for the creation of fine art. It is of course true that *mechanical* art can be imitated, but *fine* (*schöne*) art is based, Kant says in §47, on genius. (CJ: *Werke V*: 310; 178)

<sup>399</sup> In this sense, it is worth noting, only art is capable of expressing aesthetic ideas. As presentations of the imagination, (CJ: *Werke V*: 314,316; 182,185) aesthetic ideas have not been subjected to the process of judgment that allows for their expression. Nature may have the capacity to trigger certain sentiments or rational ideas (CJ: *Werke V*: 168; 303), but these sentiments are not *aesthetic ideas* unless they are subject to a process of aesthetic reflection whereby an artist presents the idea in its connection with a multiplicity of aesthetic attributes, and this idea is not expressible unless the artist judges which aesthetic attributes are most suitable for its expression. Kant clearly intends this to be a process whereby the mind is able to surpass nature. For a contrary view, see Kenneth F. Rogerson's recent book *The Problem of Free Harmony in Kant's Aesthetics*. (Albany: SUNY Press, 2008), where he argues that the free harmony of the faculties is due to the expression of aesthetic ideas, both in art and nature. On Rogerson's interpretation, it is the purposive structure of the expression of ideas that allows us to judge beautiful objects to be subjectively purposive.

indication that he realized the power of aesthetics to combat the nihilism that became such a danger after Jacobi. But to make such claims required Kant to swallow far too many of his critical strictures.

#### 4. Sublime Impotence

Kant's reluctance to come out and make positive claims about the way the world is in itself suggests that he had something of a guilty conscience. For after speculating about the miraculous connection between reason and nature laid bare in the experience of beauty and about the mysterious power of the genius to harness the productive capacities of nature's original fecundity, he reminds us that the world is deeply resistant to human purpose. In the experience of the sublime, we are faced with a world that resists all of our cognitive advances and reminds us about how powerless we really are.<sup>400</sup>

When we stare up at the night sky and see clusters upon clusters of stars, the sweeping collection of nebulae, dust, particles, stars and gas that makes up the Milky Way, we cannot help but feel a sting of helpless insignificance. Such an experience has the ability to dazzle, but it also has the ability to terrorize. So much we know nothing about. Anything could swallow us whole at any moment – we would never see it coming and could not prevent it if we did. But in a remarkable gesture of consolation Kant reassures us that despite our powerlessness in the face of the vast potency of the cosmos, our powers of reason can dislodge us from its terrible reign. The sublime is representative of the power of human reason to triumph over nature despite the latter's obstacles. Kant says that the sublime is an aesthetic judgment that considers "nature as a might that has no dominance over us."<sup>401</sup> Insofar as nature is presented as a *might* it arouses fear, and this fear is, in a sense, partially definitive of the sublime, for Kant says that "the sight of [the sublime] becomes all the more attractive the more fearful it is."<sup>402</sup> Yet this fear is not alone definitive since it only feeds an ability within us to resist: "if in judging nature aesthetically we call it sublime, we do so not because nature arouses fear, but because it calls forth our strength."<sup>403</sup> Hence, the sublime not only reveals our relative insignificance when faced with the immensity of nature, but simultaneously, paradoxically, it reveals our not insignificant power; it reveals the mind's sublimity "and elevates it even above nature."<sup>404</sup> Kant says that when we are faced with the sheer power of nature our imagination fails to discover an aesthetic assessment and so reason steps in with an idea of the supersensible. Structurally, the experience is quite similar to that of the beautiful. Kant writes,

<sup>400</sup> In this reading of the sublime I follow Susan Neiman's idea that it is a "counterpart" to the miracle of beauty. *Evil in Modern Thought*. (Princeton, 2002) 83.

<sup>401</sup> CJ: *Werke V*, 260; 119.

<sup>402</sup> CJ: *Werke V*, 261; 120.

<sup>403</sup> CJ: *Werke V*, 262; 121.

<sup>404</sup> CJ: *Werke V*, 262; 121.

just as the aesthetic power of judgment in judging the beautiful refers the imagination in its free play to the *understanding* so that it will harmonize with the understanding's *concepts* in general . . . so in judging a thing sublime it refers the imagination to *reason* so that it will harmonize with reason's *ideas*<sup>405</sup>

The unique thing about the sublime is that where in the beautiful free play is entirely within the realm of the experience of nature, the experience of the sublime is characterized by the feeling that the mind has a vocation (*Bestimmung*<sup>406</sup>) that is different than nature, that surpasses simply what is given through the senses. Kant makes this clear in the following passage:

We cannot determine this idea of the supersensible any further, and hence we cannot *cognize* but can only *think* nature as an exhibition of it. But it is this idea that is aroused in us when, as we judge an object aesthetically, this judging strains the imagination to its limit, whether of expansion (mathematically) or of its might over the mind (dynamically). The judging strains the imagination because it is based on a feeling that the mind has a vocation [*Bestimmung*] that wholly transcends the domain of nature (namely, moral feeling), and it is with regard to this feeling that we judge the presentation of the object subjectively purposive.<sup>407</sup>

It is hard to imagine a more forceful connection between aesthetic experience and the feeling of being a free, moral agent. Kant only reinforces his claim in the very next paragraph: "It is in fact difficult to think of a feeling for the sublime in nature without connecting with it a mental attunement similar to that for moral feeling."<sup>408</sup> To understand the connection Kant is making here it is helpful to recall the second *Critique*, where the choice to act in accordance with duty was chosen despite the threat of punishment, and even in the face of a reward for ignoring duty. Thus, since part of what it means to act morally is to act according to one's own purposes, to pursue one's duty in the face of everything, part of this feeling is a feeling of freedom from nature. There is a vital difference between sublimity and beauty here. The beautiful is defined by 1) frustration at the resistance of beauty to conceptualization; and 2) satisfaction with the way the world seems to harmonize with our faculties anyway. The sublime is defined by 1) frustration, nay, terror at the sheer immensity and unavailability of the world to our conceptual

<sup>405</sup> CJ: *Werke V*, 256; 113.

<sup>406</sup> The German word *Bestimmung* can mean different things in different places, from destination to disposition to instruction to purpose; but Pluhar's rendering of the term with vocation is perhaps a bit misleading and requires some explanation. Pluhar seems to want to capture the idea that Kant is referring here to a certain task for which the functions human reason are destined [*bestimmt*]. In this sense, vocation seems to be appropriate, especially considering that the best German translation of "vocation" would probably be *Beruf*, which suggests the sense of a calling [*ein Beruf*] – human reason has a calling [*eine Berufung*] that the sublime makes sensible.

<sup>407</sup> CJ: *Werke V*, 268; 128.

<sup>408</sup> CJ: *Werke V*, 268; 128.

efforts; and 2) satisfaction at the power of human reason to lift itself out of the realm of natural necessity. In other words, where the experience of the beautiful gives us reason to suspect that the world really does have meaning beyond our metaphysical games, the sublime reminds us how insignificant these games really are. Kant takes back with one hand the very thing he handed to us with the other.

## 5. Concluding Remarks

In the end, Kant's answer to the nihilism implicit in Enlightenment rationalism was simply to deny the kind of knowledge that got these philosophers into trouble. In this sense, Kant's innovation is a staunch epistemological conservatism that forces one to explore the manifest ways in which our own thinking gives rise to the world of experience. Yet Kant never backs away from his commitment to the idea that while world itself, as it is in itself *qua* the elusive *ding-an-sich*, can never be known, it has a definite structure that we must nevertheless assume to exist. I've attempted to show that this wavering about the world and the human place within it is evident in Kant's practical philosophy and much more emphatically in the third *Critique*. If we take Kant at his word and accept this latter text as the completion of the critical project, then we have to take all this wavering along with it. Only freedom, God and immortality can give our moral lives a meaningful context, but these can only ever be assumed to exist. The scientific investigation of nature requires not only that we follow the trail of mechanism (doing only this would be to fall prey to the nihilism Jacobi diagnosed), but also that we assume that there is a purpose of nature, and that this purpose is us. Nature, Kant wants to say, is made for us.

But despite everything, despite the fact that beauty reveals our cognitive faculties to be at one with the world, despite the miraculous capacity of the artist-genius to employ nature as a model without reducing creative productivity to mere aping; despite this, we can never really *know* whether there is anything truly meaningful behind the veil of illusion draped over our eyes by the exigencies of reason. So in the end, Kant only retreats into the dogmatism he criticized in others. Everything we think we know about the world really only reduces to claims about our own capacities. Kant may never make positive, dogmatic claims about the supersensible, but his commitment to a strong dualism between mind and world prevents him from offering a viable alternative. Indeed, the goal with which Kant staked out his project in the third *Critique*, the goal of reconciling the realms of nature and freedom, is ultimately a failure. Beauty might give us hints, but Kant refuses to claim that these hints are genuine, immediate feelings that arise from interaction with the world itself. But isn't this at least part of what Kant sets out to do with his aesthetic theory? The doctrine of the postulates showed that a certain kind of world is necessary if moral action is to make sense, but the third *Critique* was supposed to provide the sensible evidence of this world order. It is precisely this latter that I claim Kant has failed to do. In short, the reasons for playing Kant's metaphysical game might be compelling – they are the reasons Jacobi revealed over the course of the Spinoza controversy, the dangers of fatalism and nihilism. But if what one really wants is to live in

a world one can call one's own, then Kant's metaphysical wavering may just fail to satisfy.

## VI

## The Art of Self

Art is paramount to the philosopher,  
 precisely because it opens to him,  
 as it were, the holy of holies,  
 where burns in eternal and original unity,  
 as if in a single flame,  
 that which in nature and history is rent asunder,  
 and in life and action, no less than in thought,  
 must forever fly apart.

– F.W.J. Schelling.

If in Kant we find a deep ambiguity about aesthetics and its place in philosophy, we find in Schelling an assured conviction that art is not merely an important article of philosophical scrutiny but an essential part of philosophy itself. It is significant that Kant never really seemed convinced that aesthetics had the power not only to reveal humankind's place in the world but also to make the world over in a distinctly human image. Even in his deepest, darkest reflections on the supersensible destiny of humankind, the miraculous power of revelation of beauty and the profound and ambiguous connection between the artist-genius and nature Kant remained committed to the notion of a transcendent world with a completely rational order. It is this conviction, as we have seen, that generated Kant's theory of the postulates and his conservative aesthetic theory. The result of this is that it portrays humankind as embedded in an order that we can only hope is amenable to our deepest moral convictions so that beauty becomes a function of the extent to which it reveals a harmony between human cognition and the external, *unknowable* world. The whole order of the cosmos becomes beyond approach and the place of humankind in that order loses any meaning it has for human agents.

There is perhaps no other philosopher who developed Kant in as radical a way as Schelling. All of the most far-reaching theses we saw Kant flirting with – and ultimately backing away from – are pursued with an almost dizzying enthusiasm by Schelling. We have already explored Schelling's reinterpretation of Kant's theory of the postulates; Schelling's aesthetic theory is in many ways a radicalization of Kant that proceeds according to similar principles. Why does Kant back away from his most daring claims in the third *Critique*? It was certainly not in the face of the complex analyses of the cognitive processes involved in aesthetic experience, in the experience of beauty and the creativity of the artist-genius. For this kind of examination, Kant seemed to be particularly well-suited, even born for it; as we saw in the last chapter, it was precisely at these very moments when Kant was so radical. Kant backs away only when the

conclusions come to more than his system can sustain, when he is forced to make claims about a world he has always taken to be off-limits. One of Schelling's great contributions to post-Kantian philosophy is to have shown how a philosophical system can sustain the most radical claims of Kant's third *Critique*. As I shall explain in what follows, Schelling was able to do this in part through the turn to creative reason we identified in the fourth chapter, and in part through the notion of intellectual intuition, inherited from Jacobi via Fichte.

In fact, we shall see that all of the differences that characterized the debate between Jacobi and Kant return when we compare Kant and Schelling. This does not mean that Schelling and Jacobi are up to the same thing, nor even that their respective philosophical positions can be reconciled in any deep and meaningful way. But this does mean that they share a common ground against this giant of German philosophy. This common ground is a desire to reveal the unconditioned, a point at which knowing is no longer dependant on something else but is rather a completely independent, unmediated certainty in what is immediately felt (Jacobi) or intuited intellectually (Schelling). It is, however, important to not go too far in this identification of Jacobi and Schelling. Emil Fackenheim remarks that what the German romantic poets had “embraced only as a matter of romantic faith”, Schelling had attempted to give a rigorous philosophical explanation.<sup>409</sup> I think this is exactly right. I would only like to explicitly include Jacobi as a relevant (at least proto-) romantic thinker in Fackenheim's characterization. For where Jacobi simply advocated an active resignation to the feelings and certainties with which we all find ourselves, Schelling – and this betrays his deeply held Kantianism – wants to explain how it is that we find ourselves with these certainties, the transcendental story behind the human existential situation. Yet unlike Kant, Schelling will embrace and thematize the idea that a good honest look at ourselves inevitably reveals processes at work that are not our own, that cannot be fully mastered by any transcendental story but that are part and parcel of our own free activity. And here is where the characteristic differences between Kant and Jacobi return in Schelling. Contra Kant, Jacobi insists that the rational postulation of an objective world order is not enough to explain the deep conviction with which people embrace their beliefs. The *salto mortale* allows for the kind of passivity to an objective world order that really is out of the hands of human agents, while Jacobi's philosophy of action argues that an objective world order only becomes meaningful in the context of the activities and practices of faith that are freely undertaken. Indeed, as I have argued in the first and third chapters, the *salto mortale* must itself be understood as an action freely undertaken that initially orients an agent to the passive acceptance of an objective order that is nevertheless a product of activity. Similarly, Schelling will claim that the processes through which we actively, creatively realize the world are always at the same time passively receptive of the world's irreducible otherness. Appropriately, this idea finds its clearest expression in Schelling's theory of genius as the unity of the conscious and unconscious elements of creativity. But Schelling also applies this aesthetic model to human experience in general, insisting, very much in the same vein as Jacobi, that in

---

<sup>409</sup> *The God Within*. Edited by John Burbidge. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996) 61.

order for the world to be meaningful it must exhibit an order that is not our own, yet with which we are inextricably bound up.

My purpose in this chapter is to show that Schelling's escape from the nihilistic consequences of Enlightenment rationalism involves a move to aesthetics that follows Jacobi's initial attempts at an alternative. In the fourth chapter I explained that Schelling's move from practical to creative reason ultimately takes place along lines Jacobi had already forged. In the fifth chapter, I endeavoured to show that Kant's own aesthetic theory addresses issues in his practical philosophy that Jacobi can help us to see. In this chapter, I shall develop this thesis further, showing that while Schelling's development of incipient themes in Kant's aesthetics undeniably fleshes out Jacobian theses in ways Jacobi himself never endorsed, such developments retain key elements of Jacobi's doctrine of feeling and philosophy of action. Manfred Frank identifies the close relation between Jacobi and Schelling, saying that "Schelling's 'intellectual intuition' connects seamlessly with Jacobi's 'feeling'."<sup>410</sup> But Frank goes on to say that Schelling differs from Jacobi in that he "does not settle beyond consciousness with a 'salto mortale'."<sup>411</sup> Insofar as we confine the comparison to Jacobi's notion of feeling and Schelling's notion of intellectual intuition, I think Frank is perfectly correct. But if one accepts the reading of Jacobi I defend in the first part of this thesis, then it becomes possible to see a deeper affiliation between Jacobi and Schelling. But let set this aside for now and turn our attention to the details of Schelling's Jacobian sympathies.

## 1. Transcendental Idealism and Natural Prejudice

Testifying to Schelling's commitment to art and aesthetics is his most famous work, the *System of Transcendental Idealism*, published in 1800. This work, considered by Schelling as an elucidation of Fichtean idealism that in the end leaves Fichte behind,<sup>412</sup> proceeds through a 'history' of self-consciousness in a series of epochs that mediate the original contradiction between subject and object, finally culminating in aesthetic intuition where all contradiction is eliminated. In this final stage, the product of aesthetic intuition is art, the objective evidence of the identity between free human subjectivity and the mechanical exigencies of nature. Such evidence the philosopher can only intuit intellectually, but the artist-genius can reveal in the full light of aesthetic intuition – in objectivity – through the creative activity of artistic production.

It is easy – indeed too easy – to interpret this move to aesthetics at the end of the *System of Transcendental Idealism* as external to the system itself. It is as if philosophy is a kind of failure that, in the end, has to abandon its enterprise and hand the reigns to art. But this interpretation, however tempting, is clearly false. The philosophy of art, says

---

<sup>410</sup> *The Philosophical Foundations of Early German Romanticism*. Translated by Elizabeth Millán Zañibert. (Albany: SUNY, 2004) 82.

<sup>411</sup> Frank 2004, 82.

<sup>412</sup> Schelling makes this remark in his lectures *On the History of Modern Philosophy*. Translated by Andrew Bowie. (Cambridge 1994). 111.



Schelling, is “the universal organon of philosophy.”<sup>413</sup> What does Schelling mean by this? An organon is just a set of principles. Hence Samuel Hahnemann, the father of Homeopathy and himself influenced by Schelling’s *Naturphilosophie*, named his famous and definitive manual explaining the nature of health and disease the “Organon of Medicine.” Hahnemann’s use of the word is meant to indicate that the text encompasses all that basic truths of medicine, the entirety not of medical *knowledge* but of medical *know how*, the principles of medicine. Schelling clearly means the same: the word is meant to indicate that the philosophy of art comprises all that philosophy is and does. In a single stroke, art intuitively everything that philosophy has to work so hard for. It is for this reason that Schelling famously calls the philosophy of art the “keystone” (*Schlußstein*) of the whole arch of philosophy proper. This is now an extremely strong claim. Not only does *art-as-organon* embrace all the principles of philosophy, *art-as-keystone* is that element without which the whole arch of philosophy would collapse into nothing. If it were not for such emphatic language, one might reasonably conclude that Schelling takes art simply to be an advance beyond philosophy. But art is no mere *capstone*. Art is the key. Without art, there is no philosophy.

What is it about art that is so important for Schelling? We have seen that the aesthetic dimension had concerned Schelling since at least 1795 (and even as early as 1792), and his involvement in the Romantic circle in Jena in 1799-1800 made an unmistakable mark on his thinking from around this time. Schelling was also in regular correspondence with Hölderlin, which had a profound effect on his outlook.

These are historical contingencies – albeit importantly relevant ones – and they express themselves in Schelling profound commitment to aesthetics not merely as a particular part of a philosophical system, as something philosopher does with some free time on a sunny Sunday afternoon, but rather as a necessary element in the philosophical enterprise itself. Yet the question before us concerns not only Schelling’s involvement with poets and other romantics, but also the deeper convictions that propelled him to the centre of these social and academic circles in the first place. I hope that by now my motives are clear. The second part of this study aims to show how innovations in aesthetics were pursued as solutions to the problem of nihilism and fatalism raised by Jacobi over the course of the Spinoza controversy. The question before us is how the role that art plays in Schelling’s text provides an answer to Jacobi’s concerns. And the answer, at least part of it, can be found in Schelling’s understanding of just what a system of transcendental idealism ought to be.

**1.2.** Schelling’s text begins with a detailed analysis of the starting point of transcendental idealism, the basic structure of knowledge. The *System* should be understood as part of what we might call Schelling’s two-systems approach to philosophy, an approach that preceded his more famous identity philosophy that occupied him almost from the time immediately after the publication of the *System* in 1800 until around 1809 with the

---

<sup>413</sup> *System des transzendentalen Idealismus*. (Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 2000) 19. In English: *System of Transcendental Idealism*. Translated by Peter Heath. (Chalottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1978) 12. All references to Schelling’s *System* will refer to the German pagination followed by the translation.

publication of his *Philosophical Investigations into the Essence of Human Freedom*. This two-systems approach was characterized by the conviction, first sketched in the *Letters*, that the philosophical enterprise is ultimately contingent upon the personality of a particular philosopher. We shall recall that Schelling claimed that dogmatism and criticism are both viable options opened up by Kant's critical philosophy. One can strive for the purely objective (dogmatism), or for the purely subjective (criticism). Schelling's deepest philosophical concern is to explain the complex relationship between knower and known, between subject and object, freedom and nature, etc. Schelling thinks there are two ways of approaching this question, hence the term "two-systems approach." First, we can begin with the objective world and attempt to explain the emergence of conscious life from it. This is the approach of *Naturphilosophie*; it's the approach that attempts the construction of the philosophical categories with which to think of the natural world and the human place within it. Second, we can begin with the subjective, with the basic existential situation in which a human knower finds himself. This is the approach of transcendental philosophy; it is the approach that concerns the *System*, and it attempts to derive the natural world from the activities of consciousness.

The opening move of the *System* is one that should strike the modern reader as quite strange. Schelling begins by couching his problem, the problem of how a human subject can have knowledge of an objective world external to it, in terms of the correspondence theory of truth. Schelling takes it as a simple fact that the way knowledge appears to us is as a correspondence between subject and object. "All knowledge," Schelling declares, "is founded upon the coincidence of an objective with a subjective."<sup>414</sup> Truth, then, is going to be found in this correspondence (*Übereinstimmung*), and knowledge, if it is to mean anything at all, is going to consist in this concord between the presentational capacities of the subject and the object as that which is presented. Notice that this is to reduce knowledge to truth - "For we *know* only what is true."<sup>415</sup> If truth is correspondence, then knowledge without correspondence becomes unthinkable. Knowledge and truth are here conceived as necessarily connected. What could we possibly mean by knowledge if not truth? But Schelling's question does not concern the definition, or the criterion of truth. These questions, justificatory questions about ideas in the mind, questions about the existence of other people and the external world, even questions about one's own existence - these questions, arguably not really philosophical questions at all, do not occupy Schelling. What difference does it make in the lives of people, in the lives of undergraduate students who sit through lectures that cast doubt on that which is most immediately certain only in order to employ the power of philosophical reasoning to clear up the confusions that it created? What a state philosophy has found itself in if in order to convince students of its relevance, it first needs to create the problems to which it miraculously provides answers. Schelling was not concerned with such questions. When he begins his *System* with the declaration that knowledge is based on a correspondence between subject and object, Schelling's concern is rather to explain this correspondence, how it is the most common and basic understanding of knowledge and truth. That

---

<sup>414</sup> *System*, 9; 5.

<sup>415</sup> *System*, 9; 5.

knowledge claims concern the correspondence of subject and object is simply a fact; "the problem," Schelling proclaims, "is to explain this concurrence."<sup>416</sup>

Thus, in a move reminiscent of Jacobi, and that betrays Jacobi's deep influence on the course of German philosophy after Kant, Schelling begins his *System* with an observation about the way in which knowing as a relation between subject and object presents itself to ordinary consciousness:

In knowing as such – *in the fact of (indem)* my knowing – objective and subjective are so united that one cannot say which of the two has priority. Here there is no first and no second; both are simultaneous and one.<sup>417</sup>

Recall that for Jacobi the structure of consciousness was such that subject and object (I and Thou in Jacobi's language) emerged simultaneously, that it was not even possible to refer to the inner life of an isolated subject without at once referring to an object that emerges internal to and simultaneously with the subject. Schelling's point is, to be sure, not quite the same. Jacobi takes this to be evidence of the fact that it is only in feeling that we can have any kind of epistemological access to the world, that we need to attend to the inner feeling of the subject in order to understand the basis of the relationship between humankind and the external world. Schelling on the other hand uses this observation not merely to show that objects can finally not be discursively verified, but rather to open up the question about how we come to have knowledge at all. Schelling indeed agrees that the immediate feeling of ourselves and the external world is a central philosophical category. Schelling also agrees that feeling needs to be accounted for in terms of activity on the part of the subject – it is only in acting that I open myself up for experience at all. Yet Schelling will take Jacobi's position further and attempt to explain the constitution of the self and the world in of a series of subjective acts. There was always a kind of limit to Jacobi's thinking, always a point at which Jacobi would simply sit back, throw up his hands and shout "belief", claiming that there are some things that simply cannot be understood through reason. Schelling, however, is a part of a generation of profoundly systematic philosophers, which means, above all else, that to him the philosophical enterprise consists in constructing a system that accounts for the world and human experience, for the relation between self and world. Yet as we shall see Schelling and Jacobi have more in common than is immediately obvious. For at the very end of Schelling's grand systematic efforts, he too will abandon the philosophical approach to explaining the activities of the self that give rise to a world of experience and move to

---

<sup>416</sup> *System*, 5; 9.

<sup>417</sup> *System*, 5; 9. In an illuminating interpretive manoeuvre, Paul Franks argues that one of Jacobi's most influential legacies is to have drawn attention to the way in which Kant and Spinoza fail to account for viability of ordinary experience as an immediate revelation of individual objects. On this account, Jacobi's charge of nihilism stems from the idea that the abstractions of philosophy are necessarily ungrounded in real, individual experience. "δοξ μοι που στῶ" (give me a place to stand), Jacobi pleads on the title page of the *Spinoza Büchlein*, thus demanding a ground upon which to base his existence. Franks takes it that the German idealists inherit a tension between philosophy and ordinary experience based on Jacobi's admonition that all philosophy leads to nihilism. (2005, 154-76) I take my own interpretation of the relation between Jacobi and Schelling to be following Franks' lead on this point.

aesthetics, to the claim that the final explanation of the self as an active agent can never be grasped by discursive reason, but can rather only be comprehended in a single aesthetic vision that grasps the self in its entirety.

1.3. But what, then, is left for Schelling after he has defined his project in opposition to both traditional epistemological questions about the justification of ideas in the mind and Jacobi's basic insight that there is no way to rationally ground knowledge claims with an explanation of the mechanism of knowing? On the surface of things, in what Schelling calls ordinary cognition (*gemeinen Wissen*), there simply seems to be an immediate certainty about ourselves and our world; in ordinary consciousness, that is, there is no need to question the relationship between knowing subject and object known. The fact that I exist, that I have the feelings I have, that the world exists and that it is the way in which it seems to me to be is not questionable. We are conscious of ourselves and we are conscious of a world, and there seems to be a correspondence between them. Truth, in its everyday meaning, is nothing but this correspondence, and when we do not reflect on it, there simply seems to be an immediate certainty about ourselves and our world – this much, it is worth pointing out, Jacobi reveals to us. And in this sense, Schelling agrees with Jacobi's polemic against the rationalist desire to ground knowledge in discursive reason. But there is still the problem of how to explain this correspondence.

Schelling identifies two basic differences between transcendental and ordinary cognition. 1) Transcendental cognition regards certainty about the existence of an external world to be a mere prejudice (*bloßes Vorurteil*), a natural and necessary prejudice (*Grundvorurteil*), but a prejudice nonetheless. Again, it is helpful to notice the way in which Schelling is taking up Jacobi's claim regarding the certainty of that which is given in feeling. There is no denying the reality of the external world, but there is no proving it either. "Nature," we shall recall Jacobi saying (citing Pascal),

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 [...] We find ourselves situated on this earth, and as our actions become there, so too becomes our cognition.<sup>418</sup>

Schelling echoes this sentiment with a Latin proverb: "*naturam furca expellas, tamen usque redibit.*"<sup>419</sup> Schelling thus agrees with Jacobi that we simply find ourselves in a certain existential situation that furnishes us with a certain kind of knowledge. And just as Jacobi takes his lead from this existential orientation and proceed to develop a philosophy of action that takes human praxis as the context in which our existential situation becomes meaningful, Schelling accepts the prejudice of the reality of the external world and attend to the *acts* of cognition that lay behind this prejudice, giving it the existential significance we all feel at the most intimate level. 2) Transcendental cognition also differs from ordinary cognition in that the former makes a separation between the existence of

---

<sup>418</sup> SB: *Werke* 4.1, 230; 237.

<sup>419</sup> *System*, 13; 8. "You can drive nature out with a fork, but it will always return."

the self and the external world, two things that are fused together in *felt immediacy* in ordinary cognition. Schelling takes it that his task as a transcendental philosopher is to reveal the immediate connection that is only felt in ordinary cognition, and in this he is, once again, following a clearly marked Jacobian path. Indeed, Schelling himself already revealed his allegiance to Jacobi on this point in 1795, in his *Of the I as Principle of Philosophy*. I shall quote the relevant passage at length since it is particularly germane for our discussion here. Schelling writes:

A philosophy which is based on the nature of man himself could not aim at dead formulae, which would function as just so many prisons of man's mind, nor could it aim at being a philosophical artifice which, by deducing current concepts from apparently superior ones, would bury the living work of the mind in dead mental faculties. If I may speak in the words of Jacobi, philosophy seeks to unveil and reveal that which is [Dasein], so that the nature or spirit of philosophy cannot lie in any formula or letter; its highest topic must be what is immediate in man and present only to itself, and cannot be what is mediated by concepts and laboriously recapitulated in concepts. The aim of philosophy is no mere reform of its discipline but a complete reversal of its principles, that is, a revolution which one can view as the second possible revolution in its field.<sup>420</sup>

In the larger context of this thesis it is important to point out Schelling's implicit attack on Kant's cognitive apparatus that stabilizes the living activity of the mind and in dead mental faculties. We have already seen how Schelling takes Kant and his dogmatic interpreters in Tübingen to task for understanding the subject as a dead filter through which data from the external world is processed. By assuming a purely passive faculty of sensibility, Kant left intact the dogmatic allegiance to an external world about which some truth can be discovered. The Tübingen theologians exploited this dogmatic assumption in order to 'postulate' the objective existence of a moral world order that supported the principles of their religious orthodoxy. But the most striking thing about this passage is that Schelling turns to Jacobi in order to understand how to develop Kant's critical philosophy in the direction Schelling thinks Kant always intended anyway. From Kant, Schelling takes the whole framework of transcendental philosophy as a way to reveal the structures at work in the subject that make experience possible; from Jacobi, Schelling takes the conviction that these structures cannot be conceptualized, for only objects can have concepts. On the surface of things, Schelling's Kantianism ends up trumping his allegiance to Jacobi, for he thinks that the transcendental philosopher must do away with objectivity and instead make the subject the only *object* of his investigations. "[T]he objective will become an object for him indirectly only," Schelling declares, "and whereas in ordinary cognition *the knowing itself* (the act of knowing) vanishes into the object, in transcendental cognition, on the contrary, the object *as such*

---

<sup>420</sup> *Of the I: Werke I*, 156; 67.

vanishes into the act of knowing.”<sup>421</sup> But one need only read into this passage a little to see that Schelling’s line is not the Kantian one. Schelling may be concerned with the transcendental processes of knowing, but he is also intimating a deep unity between subject and object, something Kant considers – save, as we have seen in Chapter V, in his more radical aesthetic speculations – to be off limits. Appropriately, it is at this very moment when Schelling introduces the necessity of an aesthetic perspective on the philosophical enterprise itself. If we want to get a grip on how the natural prejudice of ordinary cognition arises, then we are going to have to understand how subject and object become so united. How is it that I take my experiences to immediately refer to an external world? By holding apart what is normally united, Schelling is creating something that is in no way natural; that is, transcendental cognition differs from natural, or ordinary cognition in the sense that it separates what is normally united and develops what Schelling calls a “transcendental artifice [*Kunst*]”<sup>422</sup> that consists in a *mimesis* of the acts of ordinary cognition. This transcendental *Kunst* is the *bringing-to-consciousness* of all the subjective acts that under normal circumstances escape consciousness.

Schelling’s language here is significant. The transcendental story to be told about ordinary cognition is a result of *Kunst*. The job of the philosopher is not to observe, categorize and tell some Truth about the world, or in Schelling’s case, about the self; this is not the job of *mimesis*, or at least, as Plato has shown us, if *mimesis* takes itself to be revealing Truth, then it is deeply mistaken.<sup>423</sup> *Mimesis*, as Aristotle argues, is an imaginative construction that allows one to get a better grip on the human psychological landscape;<sup>424</sup> it is an imitation of an original that is no less valuable for being an imitation.<sup>425</sup> So too with Schelling: the truth of ordinary cognition is the natural prejudice that there is an intractable division between self and world. What Schelling aims to do with transcendental cognition is not reveal the truth behind the perspective of ordinary cognition.<sup>426</sup> Rather transcendental philosophy is considered a work of the imagination, an aesthetic accomplishment that sheds light on what is normally buried in the depths of our unconscious:

[T]his coming-to-be-reflected (*Reflektierwerden*) of the absolutely non-conscious and non-objective is possible only through an *aesthetic act* of the imagination [...] [t]hus philosophy depends as much as art does on the

---

<sup>421</sup> *System*, 14; 9.

<sup>422</sup> *System*, 15; 9.

<sup>423</sup> See *Republic III*, where Plato famously derides poetry as useless to the pursuit of Truth.

<sup>424</sup> See *Poetics*.

<sup>425</sup> One might recall here Borges’ famous reversal of the notion of mimetic fidelity, where the original is taken to be unfaithful to the translation. One way of understanding Borges’ point is by noticing the creative effort involved in translation. A good translator must internalize the language and imaginatively produce something new. Schelling is not, to be sure, suggesting the same, but he is emphasizing the aesthetic ingenuity required in the act of *mimesis* and thus destabilizing the dogmatic assumption that it can be adequately captured with the idea of imitation.

<sup>426</sup> *System*, 21; 14.

productive capacity, and the difference between them rests merely on the direction taken by the productive force.<sup>427</sup>

The philosopher, just as the artist, must rely on the capacity to imaginatively construct a transcendental story that inwardly reflects that which is manifest externally in ordinary cognition. While we normally take experience to be of an external world, the transcendental philosopher suspends this conclusion in order to reveal the activities of the self that make ordinary cognition such a natural and inescapable prejudice. In this way, Schelling uses transcendental cognition in order to see that ordinary cognition hypostatizes subjective acts as external processes, and in this way uses transcendental cognition to reveal ordinary cognition to be a kind of art. “For whereas in art the production is directed outwards so as to reflect the unknown by means of products, philosophical production is directed immediately inwards, so as to reflect it in intellectual intuition.”<sup>428</sup> In ordinary cognition, everything is directed outwards, producing the external world *qua* separate from the self; in transcendental cognition, everything is directed inwards, producing a transcendental *Kunst* that reveals the external world as a product of a series of subjective acts.

In this Schelling makes good on the methodological injunction of the *System-Programme* to make philosophical ideas aesthetic, to demand an aesthetic sense from philosophers. Grasping the fundamentally aesthetic nature of our experience requires an aesthetic sensitivity, not a pedantic drive for logical rigor. It is for this reason that Schelling concludes with the centrality of art to philosophy: “The proper sense by which this type of philosophy must be apprehended is thus the *aesthetic* sense, and that is why the philosophy of art is the true organon of philosophy.”<sup>429</sup> In this way, Schelling can be read as taking Jacobi’s nihilistic fears to heart and insisting that philosophy, if it is to retain the ability to reveal meaning in the universe and our place within it, must resist the hegemony of conceptual analysis, for the “unconditioned cannot be sought in any kind of thing.”<sup>430</sup> To this, Schelling adds the explicit claim that the unconditioned is the self, meaning that the source of all meaning in the universe is to be found in the aesthetic capacities of the subject. Now on the surface at least this last claim sounds awfully anti-Jacobian; indeed, it is precisely this move to privilege the self over all else that Jacobi identified in Fichte as a new, more insidious form of nihilism in philosophy.<sup>431</sup> But as we shall see, Schelling is doing something that Fichte is not, and in so doing moves closer to Jacobi’s initial insight. I shall come back to this difference between Fichte and Schelling presently.

1.4. When Schelling finishes the Introduction to his *System* with a move to privilege the philosophy of art, it is precisely because in the attempt to imaginatively construct the transcendental life of the subject, the transcendental philosopher reaches a point where

<sup>427</sup> *System*, 20; 13-14.

<sup>428</sup> *System*, 20; 14.

<sup>429</sup> *System*, 20; 14.

<sup>430</sup> *System*, 37; 26.

<sup>431</sup> See Jacobi’s *Briefe an Fichte: Werke III*; 495-536.

only aesthetic intuition is appropriate. This is something that Fichte never does and the reasons for Schelling's move are deeply telling of their unique approaches to transcendental philosophy. Schelling reveals art to be the method through which the distinction is made between inner and outer, between subject and object, I and Thou. The philosopher can never reveal this deepest truth about human reason; namely, that it is aesthetic, creative, not merely theoretical nor merely practical. Philosophy can attend to the activities of the self, but their philosophical reconstruction is only a *mimesis*; it's a *Kunst* nonetheless, but insight can never be mimesis; it has to be an aesthetic intuiting of unity. Schelling ends his system with a discussion of art because it is only aesthetically that the final vision of the creative powers of the self can be laid bare, expressed objectively in the sensuous world. It takes an aesthetic perspective to recognize art.

Schelling's aesthetics thus has a double significance. First, it is the intuitive capacity that finally proves able to access, if only for a moment, the self as a whole. But second – and this is perhaps the most important and most radical element of Schelling's aesthetic theory – the very activities of the self that transcendental philosophy reveals and that aesthetic intuition renders objective are to be understood as creative, as artistic activities. “The objective world is simply the original, as yet unconscious, poetry of the spirit; the universal organon of philosophy – and the keystone of its entire arch – is *the philosophy of art*.”<sup>432</sup> The reason art is the keystone, then, is that only an aesthetic sense is capable of grasping the fundamentally creative activities of the self. Everything we think we know about the world and the human connection to it is a result neither of a seamless representation of an external world in a passive consciousness, nor of an active consciousness that compels the external world to yield to our subjective presentations. Schelling is careful not to dismiss either of these fundamental convictions about how we are related to the world. One conviction states that there is an external world that is indifferent to our knowing; the other states that our ideas have real objective effects in the external world. We cannot think of both of these convictions as absolute at once, for the one contradicts the other. But we can understand how these convictions can be compatible. Schelling's proposal here is the root of his famous distinction between the conscious and the unconscious. Schelling suggests we see that these two contradictory convictions can be reconciled by seeing them as separate moments of the same activity; namely, as unconscious and conscious elements of our experience of the world. We can no more deny that nature seems to proceed according to blind mechanism, than we can deny that our own free activity has an effect on the way the world appears to us. Experience, Schelling concludes, must be a product of these passive and active elements. And this is precisely why the final move of transcendental idealism is the claim that only aesthetic insight can grasp the fundamentally aesthetic nature of our experience. It is aesthetic because art is characterized by a union of active and passive processes: art is both the conscious product of the artist and the result of an unconscious process that the artist can never fully understand. Out of this union of active and passive in the conscious process of artistic creation something objective emerges, something that reflects these precariously balanced moments of creativity. But in the case of ordinary experience, we

---

<sup>432</sup> *System*, 19; 12.



are not aware of the aesthetic process. It takes the transcendental *Kunst* of philosophy to make us so aware. And from the perspective of this artifice of transcendental philosophy we are finally able to see that "[t]he ideal world of art and the real world of objects are therefore products of one and the same activity; the concurrence of the two (the conscious and the unconscious) *without* consciousness yields the real, and *with* consciousness the aesthetic world."<sup>433</sup> Art comes about consciously, and its products are such that we can recognize the conscious labour of the artist; but we are not conscious of the real world in this sense. In order to be so conscious, we need to employ the apparatus of transcendental philosophy to exhibit the aesthetic achievement of the real in consciousness. "What we speak of as nature," Schelling famously remarks, "is a poem lying pent in a mysterious and wonderful script."<sup>434</sup> In order to fully understand Schelling's model of nature as poetic, we would need to explain his *Naturphilosophie* as an attempt to show that nature and the self cannot be thought as thoroughly separate any more than they can be thought as thoroughly unified. Schelling's point in the system, and the reason he finds it necessary to end with art as the keystone to the entire system of philosophy, is that only an 'aesthetic sense' can fully grasp the activities of a fundamentally creative imagination at work. Schelling seems to want to say that the whole world is an artistic creation of a community of subjects. In this way, it becomes impossible to understand aesthetics as somehow outside of the system; for it is only aesthetics that is able to finally present the self a creative force that generates meaning through its own activities.

1.5. Before we move on to explore the more concrete ways in which Schelling fleshes out his idea of the activity and passivity involved in ordinary experience and in art, I would like to remark that the preceding allows us to profitably connect Jacobi and Schelling along a trajectory that attempts to shift meaning in the universe from pre-established cosmic structures ready to be discovered to the activities of a subject that finds itself inexplicably bound up with a world. In *The Birth of Tragedy* Nietzsche tells of the old legend of king Midas who hunted Silenus, the companion of Dionysus, and finally made the catch. Midas asked Silenus, this drunken, prophetic demigod, what was the best thing for man. After remaining silent for a long time, Silenus finally answered, laughing, that the best thing for man is to never have been born; but save that, to die as quickly as possible.<sup>435</sup> Now, neither Jacobi nor Schelling can share in this emphatic statement of pessimism, yet there is something to take from it. Silenus recognizes that we have no power over the contingency of our existential situation. Being human? Nothing worse. But since you are, you might as well do something about it. Even Nietzsche's pessimism would never go this far. But what Nietzsche takes from Silenus' council is that there is nothing out there that will reward us in the end, no order of the universe to which someone might have access. Whatever meaning there is will not be found through the hubris of reason. The Greeks, Nietzsche suggests, suspected as much, and their effort to cope with their situation honestly found its best expression in Attic tragedy. For

---

<sup>433</sup> *System*: 19; 12.

<sup>434</sup> *System*: 299; 232.

<sup>435</sup> 1995, 8.

Nietzsche, then, Silenus makes a more or less accurate diagnosis of the natural state of humankind, and he sees in it the significance of the Greek attempt to deliver themselves from this terrible lot through art. But for Jacobi, such a diagnosis is a fundamental existential fear. It was against the nihilism implicit in Silenus' diagnosis that Jacobi first took up his call to arms, and it is this same fear – or at least the philosophical trajectories opened up by it – that is driving Schelling to deny philosophy access to the certainty that comes from aesthetic experience. "Conviction by proofs," we'll recall Jacobi saying, "is certainty at second hand. Proofs are only indications of similarity to a thing of which we are certain. The conviction that they generate originates in comparison, and can never be quite secure and perfect."<sup>436</sup> Logic, argument, definition, proof – all these things that philosophy is so sure of, so dependent on, can only ever bring us part of the way to true conviction. Schelling's move to privilege aesthetics over philosophy is a clear development of this same theme.

Philosophy attains, indeed, the highest, but it brings to this summit only, so to say, the fraction of a man. Art brings *the whole man*, as he is, to that point, namely to a knowledge of the highest, and this is what underlies the eternal difference and the marvel of art.<sup>437</sup>

Coming back to a much earlier point from Chapter One, I would like to observe that it is the depth of aesthetic insight that Mendelssohn covets with his notion of common sense. Mendelssohn wants to say that the whole being of the *Landmann* is engaged when he recognizing the inner rationality of the ontological proof. The *Landmann* feels the force of these ideas and assents not on the grounds of discursive reason (the whole point is that a common peasant would never be able to follow the complex logic of a proof of God existence), but rather on the grounds of a felt intuition of truth, something we all share. Mendelssohn thought that common sense could bring "the whole man" to the summit of knowledge, not just the philosopher trained in the subtleties of rational argumentation. I point this out now because it seems to me that what Schelling is accomplishing with his exaltation of the aesthetic is precisely what Mendelssohn and other apostles of discursive reason wanted so deeply to be able to lay claim to; namely, the hearts and minds of people. But until ideas become aesthetic, we shall recall the *System-Programme* dramatically proclaiming, they will mean nothing to people – they will be ideas suited only to the philosopher, and such ideas, perhaps paradoxically, are not ones worthy of philosophical scrutiny.

## 2. Activity and Passivity in the Self

At the ground of Schelling's new conception of philosophy as an aesthetic undertaking is his ever-changing understanding of the self, and the concept, inherited from Fichte, of

---

<sup>436</sup> SB: *Werke* 4.1, 210; 230.

<sup>437</sup> *System*, 301; 233.

intellectual intuition. We have already noted that Schelling understands transcendental philosophy as an imaginative effort to construct a transcendental *Kunst*, a mimetic transcendental story that attempts to grasp the unconscious elements of ordinary cognition. We have also noted that the reason Schelling thinks transcendental philosophy must be aesthetic is that he understands the achievement of ordinary cognition as an artistic one, an achievement that consists in the unity of the active and passive elements of an objective product. What remains now is to explore the manifold ways in which Schelling sees these aesthetic processes at work.

As a place to begin, it is important to see that the very way in which Schelling conceives transcendental philosophy is already indicative of his commitment to an aesthetic model of consciousness. In the very short second part of the *System*, Schelling ‘deduces’ the general approach of transcendental idealism, the idea that, as Schelling puts it, “*Through the act of self-consciousness, the self becomes an object to itself.*”<sup>438</sup> It is important to understand the logic of this act of self-consciousness. “Self-consciousness,” Schelling says, “is the lamp of the whole system of knowledge, but it casts its light ahead only, not behind”<sup>439</sup> Self-consciousness is the very first step of philosophy. “The self simply *has no existence, prior* to that act whereby thinking becomes its own object, and is thus itself nothing other than thinking becoming its object, and hence absolutely nothing apart from the thought”<sup>440</sup> We have already isolated this idea above: it is only from the perspective of transcendental *Kunst* that we can see the aesthetic character of ordinary experience. Now Schelling is deepening his claim. The self as such is nothing outside the structure that recognizes it as an active member, itself an object in relation to an external world. Self-consciousness is the way we objectify the self, determining it to be the very thing that it is. We cannot, of course, speculate about what the self was before it was illuminated by self-consciousness – this would be to shine the light backwards. But one thing we can – indeed, must – do is postulate the original act whereby the self takes itself as object, the very opening gesture of philosophy itself. If we want to be able to understand the natural prejudice we identified in the last section, we have to postulate a point at which such a separation of subject and object did not exist, a point at which it was only a self, not even a self identical with itself since this implies parts to be identical. And just as Schelling understood the postulate of God as a demand for infinite construction (Chapter 4), he now understands the postulate of the original self as a task of philosophical construction, a transcendental *Kunst* in the terms of transcendental idealism.

This original act of self-consciousness is a *double act*. In the first place, it is an original opposition of subject and object because it is prior to the objectification of self-consciousness. In the second place, it is an original union because knowledge depends on a coincidence of subject and object. Once again, as is common with Schelling, we find ourselves in another contradiction. Schelling uses these points of conflict to propel his investigation to deeper levels, and the next level of depth here is the combination of

---

<sup>438</sup> *System*, 49; 34.

<sup>439</sup> *System*: 27; 18.

<sup>440</sup> *System*: 36; 25.

opposition and union. The self can only be understood as objectively what it is, a union of opposing parts, if there are parts of the self to unify. For this reason, Schelling claims that the original act of self-consciousness must be both a *synthetic* combination of opposed terms and *identical* statement of the simple fact that self=self. According to the *identical* element of the self-consciousness, the original act is an absolutely free and unconditioned one because it is the absolute basis for all knowledge. This is something that is absolutely immediate since it cannot be conditioned or mediated by anything other than itself. But according to the *synthetic* element, the original act enacts a combination of subject and object. And once again we find ourselves with a contradiction. The self is what it is simply according to its own absolute freedom and it can only be what it is by becoming an object. The self is thus characterized by a simultaneous immanence and transcendence, a kind of *immanent transcendence* that embraces both the objective *products* of self-consciousness and the subjective *producing* behind them.

The eternal, timeless act of self-consciousness which we call *self*, is that which gives all things existence, and so itself needs no other being to support it; bearing and supporting itself, rather, it appears objectively as *eternal becoming*, and subjectively as *producing without limit*.<sup>441</sup>

Of concern to us here is the way in which self-consciousness is both a recognition of the process of the self, a recognition that can never fully objectify the self and its productive activity (eternal becoming) and a recognition of the actual objective products that result from this process (infinite production). In the course of transcendental philosophy, the self is pushed to ever-greater depths in the recognition of its own activities and the objective products it produces thereby. But the very first, most basic form of the knowledge that ensues from this transcendental *Kunst*, the one that characterizes self-consciousness is what Schelling calls intellectual intuition. As the most primordial form of knowledge it has to be unconditioned since to make it conditioned would be to imply a more primordial form of knowing. It is important to notice that this unconditioned is quite different from the unconditioned with which Jacobi was so intoxicated. It is for this reason that Manfred Frank, while noting the similarity between Schelling and Jacobi on the point of intuition and feeling, was careful also to note that what for Jacobi is beyond consciousness in the supersensible external world is for Schelling part of the structure of consciousness itself.<sup>442</sup> Again, I think Frank is mostly right; I will postpone for a moment the way in which I think his conception misses something important about Jacobi, something that can help both to understand Jacobi and the aesthetic significance of Schelling's conception of intellectual intuition.

The first thing to see here is that since intellectual intuition is an *unconditioned act*, it is absolutely free; it is, as Schelling puts it, "freely productive in itself, in which producer and product are one and the same."<sup>443</sup> This means that the self = self formula of self-

---

<sup>441</sup> *System*, 45; 32.

<sup>442</sup> Frank 2004, 82.

<sup>443</sup> *System*: 38: 27.

consciousness is actually the source of all productivity, for it is only in intellectual intuition that the whole artifice of transcendental philosophy is laid bare as the structure of knowledge. Schelling continues,

The *self* is such an intuition, since it is *through the self's own knowledge of itself* that that *very self* (the object) first comes into being. For since the self (as object) is nothing else but the very *knowledge of itself*, it arises simply out of the fact *that* it knows itself; the *self itself* is thus a knowing that simultaneously produces itself as object.<sup>444</sup>

At this point it becomes possible to see what Schelling is doing differently from Fichte. Recall that for Fichte intellectual intuition is the awareness of an agent in action; it is understood on the model of Kant's practical philosophy in that it is not theoretical knowledge but practical action. While Schelling agrees with all of this, he wants to add one important feature. For Fichte, intellectual intuition is completely confined to the side of the subjective; it is an immediate awareness of the self in action. And in the act of intellectual intuition, the self is defined over against the objective world. Fichte's self is thus bounded by something external to it, namely, the objective. But for Schelling on the other hand, every boundary is immanent to the subject since it actually creates the objective through the act of intellectual intuition itself. Schelling's self is, recall, characterized by an *immanent transcendence* that is at once limited by its very nature as self and unlimited in its movement to objectify itself. "[T]hus," Schelling writes, "the self is to be limited without ceasing to be unlimited."<sup>445</sup> In this way, Schelling has identified the self as originally a part of the whole of nature, not as an isolated unit that interacts with the world. In language more familiar to this thesis, however, with his notion of intellectual intuition Schelling has combined the two elements of passivity and activity in a single 'act' of the self that constitutes ordinary experience of ourselves in an external world. Intellectual intuition is at once passive with respect to the world that bounds it, defines it as a subject and not an object and active with respect to the processes involved in creating the objective world by transcending the boundaries of subjectivity.

Schelling's idea is that what we call knowledge is better described as an *involvement with* a world rather than as a representation, or *knowledge of* a world. It is this latter conception, that, as we have seen, gets Kant into so much trouble in his practical philosophy and that ultimately sabotaged his most strenuous efforts to think past this dualism in his aesthetics. We have also seen that Jacobi's philosophy of action escapes this problem by indentifying practical action as the context in which life becomes meaningful, in which the objective world takes on the significance it does. On the surface of things, Jacobi too is guilty positing an absolute division between subject and object since he identifies what is felt with the transcendent, with what is beyond conceptual knowledge. This is Manfred Frank's point about the difference between Jacobi and Schelling. On my reading, however, Jacobi actually shares a good deal more with

---

<sup>444</sup> *System*: 38: 27.

<sup>445</sup> *System*: 52: 37

Schelling. In what is perhaps a risky interpretive gesture, I have attempted to read Jacobi's *salto mortale* as the original 'act whereby the immediate feelings we all find ourselves with are accepted as meaningful revelations of the objective world itself. But once we see that this is what is behind Jacobi's conviction about the importance of a *salto mortale*, it is possible to see it not as a blind acceptance of the truth of an external world, but rather as an *active involvement* that opens up the world as meaningful. For this reason, I think Frank's characterization of Jacobi as 'settling beyond consciousness with a *salto mortale*'<sup>446</sup> is a bit too quick. Jacobi does understand feeling as an immediate connection between subject and object, but what is felt is always of an active subject. Thus activity in the subject is the necessary condition for the passivity involved in representing and external world. No doubt, this is not nearly as radical or innovative as Schelling's aesthetic idealism, whereby the world itself is a product of a ceaseless aesthetic, albeit unconscious production. Still, by reading Jacobi with Schelling's help it is possible to see that both thinkers are deeply concerned with the problem of nihilism and of how the world becomes meaningful to real human agents. And this reading of Jacobi also has the benefit of having couched Schelling's *System* in the wider philosophical context of late eighteenth century Germany. Schelling, just like Jacobi, is driven by his times to develop a philosophy that connects people to their world in an intimately aesthetic way. For Jacobi, this takes place through the practices of faith that progressively, ceaselessly make the world a meaningful place; for Schelling, this takes place through the very project of transcendental philosophy that creates a transcendental *Kunst* as a model of the process by which the self produces the objective world by infinitely transgressing its subjectivity. The respective approaches of both thinkers are motivated by a deep dissatisfaction with the traditional rationalist addition to reason and logical demonstration. And further, for both thinkers, the process involved in the world becoming meaningful are characterized by a unity of the activity that makes the world something we have had a hand in making and the passivity that makes us receptive to the objectivity the world has taken on through our activity. We should note that such a unity of activity and passivity is perhaps *the* paradigmatic late eighteenth-century model of aesthetic experience and creativity. In Chapter Four we saw that Schelling's 'proper principle of aesthetics' is characterized by the reciprocal yielding on the part of subject and object. And in the last chapter we saw that Kant's notion of artistic genius amounted to the blurring of the distinction between the *opus* conscious agency and the *effectus* of natural mechanical production. I turn now to an examination of how Schelling develops this aesthetic model.

### 3. Practical Philosophy and the Moral Order of the World

This section will develop Schelling's point about the mutually implicating nature of the active and passive elements of experience in critical dialogue with Kant's practical philosophy and the metaphysical apparatus underpinning his teleology and aesthetics. At the end of his deduction of the principles of transcendental idealism, Schelling remarks

---

<sup>446</sup> Frank 2004, 82.

that the task of theoretical philosophy is to show how the original limitation of freedom becomes a boundary for knowledge and that the task of practical philosophy is to show how this limitation then becomes a real, objective boundary for action. Given the context of this thesis, I will leave aside Schelling's theoretical philosophy. My concern from the beginning has been how the problems Jacobi identified with Enlightenment rationalism involved a move to practical philosophy and, in relative short order, to aesthetics. More specifically, my goal in this whole chapter on Schelling is to show how Schelling is able to achieve the goal of giving ideas, beliefs and concepts a real sensible, aesthetic life. So far, I have described Schelling's philosophy as through and through an aesthetic undertaking. The stated goal of transcendental idealism is to develop a transcendental *Kunst* that understands the subject as at once an active agent in the creation of the world and a passive observer of the objectivity created thereby. As we shall see in the next section, this model of experience is further developed by Schelling as a model of aesthetic experience and creativity.

Schelling sees the problem of practical philosophy as involving the problem of how we can understand an objective moral world as developing out of the free actions of human moral agents. The first and most important point on this front is that freedom cannot be understood as opposed to natural necessity. We have seen how Kant does this; namely, we have seen how for all the importance Kant assigns to freedom (it is the keystone of the entire critical system), it is only ever assumed to be real in a world order that is finally beyond all human approach. Especially troubling for Kant was the way in which his epistemological commitments precluded any account of freedom as an immediate experience. One of the most important things that Schelling takes from Jacobi is the conviction that there is such thing as immediate, unconditioned experience. Schelling, like the whole of his generation of post-Kantian idealists and romantics, is driven by the desire, nay, absolute necessity to get past this entrenched metaphysical dualism that pervades even Kant's most radical moments. Schelling begins with the claim – seemingly paradoxical from the perspective of the traditional distinction between freedom and necessity – that freedom actually requires a universal, objective world order for it to make any sense at all. Schelling writes,

For freedom that is not guaranteed by a universal order of nature exists only precariously, and – as in the majority of our contemporary states – is a plant that flourishes only parasitically [...] That is not how it should be. Freedom should not be a favour granted, or a good that may be enjoyed only as a forbidden fruit. It must be guaranteed by an order that is as open and unalterable as that of nature.<sup>447</sup>

Freedom must thus be a part of the natural order of things. Our freedom is at once an active determination and a passive reception of the order with which it is inevitably bound up. But once we see this interpenetration of freedom and necessity, we are compelled to see it from the other side too. For if freedom is not to be swallowed up by

---

<sup>447</sup> *System*: 263-64; 203.

the natural order, the natural order too must be thought of as a part of freedom. Schelling continues, "But now this order can in fact be realized only through freedom, and its establishment is entrusted wholly and solely to freedom."<sup>448</sup> We come now to a contradiction, the very engine of Schelling's *System*. It is impossible, Schelling recognizes, that a causally determined objective order exists at the same time as a freedom exempt from this order; yet in the face of apparent contradiction, Schelling maintains that a good honest look at freedom will reveal necessity therein. Schelling calls this the "supreme problem of transcendental philosophy,"<sup>449</sup> it is the problem of how to understand the relationship between our immediate awareness of freedom and the causal necessity that governs the external world and to which we are undeniably subject. Schelling's answer to this problem consists in his famous distinction between the conscious and unconscious elements of existence. Schelling makes the uncontroversial assumption that what we call necessity is characterized by the fact that it is involuntary and the slightly more controversial assumption that freedom is characterized by its volitional nature. With this, Schelling proposes his solution to the above contradiction; namely, we can understand how freedom can contain necessity if we recognize that the very thing we value in freedom, a capacity for free moral action, is only possible on the condition that an external order exists to insure that actions undertaken freely do not simply disappear in a meaningless chaos. "There must be something here that is higher than human freedom," Schelling writes, "and on which alone we can reckon with assurance in doing and acting."<sup>450</sup> This formulation of the necessary condition of morality is what is expressed in tragic drama. Actions freely undertaken by the protagonist come to reveal a terrible necessity that laughs in the face of the impotence of freedom to escape fate. Recall Schelling's reading of Greek tragedy from the *Letters*. The reason tragedies are, well, so tragic, is that the protagonist is a hero; Oedipus never succumbs to blind fate; he maintains his freedom until the horrible end and gauges out his eyes in an attempt to blind himself to the reality that was working through his free actions from the beginning. On Schelling's reading, the tragic is in a sense characterized by the hubris in the tendency to believe that our freedom is absolute. But this play of freedom and necessity is also evident in our daily lives. If we thought that our freedom was completely unconstrained by an objective order, then we really would be setting ourselves up for tragedy. Besides, and this is Schelling's more important point, morality as such would be impossible without the knowledge that my free action will yield certain consequences, consequences that have nothing to do with my free, consciously chosen actions. These consequences are something like the objective order that emerges as a result of the transcendental *Kunst* we explored above in that they are both objective and a result of our own activity. Through free, conscious activity, something objective emerges unconsciously in the face of which we are rendered passive. To ignore this unconscious aspect of our free action would be to assume the fate of Oedipus, whose excessive pride in his own power of reason (demonstrated by his defeating the Sphinx) blinded him to the dark reality operating

---

<sup>448</sup> *System*: 264; 203.

<sup>449</sup> *System*: 264; 203.

<sup>450</sup> *System*: 265; 203.



beneath his consciousness. But to embrace the interplay of freedom and necessity is to take one's place in the objective order that emerges not only beyond and beneath my freedom, but precisely as a result of it. For through consciously chosen actions something necessary emerges, namely, the moral order. Basically, Schelling claims that the conscious and the unconscious are only mutually implicating aspects of a single totality. Whatever is beyond our consciousness is really a part of its nature; likewise, the unconscious is infused through and through with consciousness. Put another way, the objective world is part and parcel of our conscious lives and whatever it is we call objective is actually the result of our own free, conscious deliberation.

The consequences of this radical view for how we understand morality run very deep. There is no such thing as an external, moral world order that guarantees that certain actions, dispositions or virtues will be rewarded in the end. But this does not mean that there is no moral order at all: "The moral world-order," Schelling declares, "exists as soon as we establish it."<sup>451</sup> All of our free actions are actually a constitutive part of such an order, so much so that God is actually understood as contingent upon the free choices of finite human agents. Thus in creating the world, as Schelling will speculate years later in his *Freedom* essay and various versions of his unpublished drafts of the epic *Weltalter* project, God's very existence is at stake. God depends on us! So once again, in a move reminiscent of Jacobi and that betrays his deep influence on the course of post-Kantian idealism, Schelling moves to understand morality historically. Sperchis and Bulis have the convictions they have, they live in the objective world they do precisely because of their actions and their history. We have seen that Jacobi takes this to be indicative of the contingency of moral conviction and concludes that morality can take different forms in different places at different times for different people. Schelling agrees with Jacobi's contingency thesis, but he certainly does not agree that morality has no objective side to it. Schelling thus agrees with Hegel's critique of Jacobi that I explained in the introduction to Part II – Jacobi's is a one-sided view of morality. But again, I feel the need to remind myself and my reader of my own conviction that philosophy cannot proceed through fault-finding. Jacobi undoubtedly has something to offer; I take it that my task as a philosopher and historian is to be sensitive to it. I have suggested that Jacobi's positive claim is that immediate feeling is only possible in the context of action, which means that we only have immediate access to an objective world insofar as we have had a hand in creating it. It does not take much to see that that this idea is remarkably similar to Schelling's idea that consciousness pervades the objective world. "If we think of history as a play," Schelling proposes, "in which everyone involved performs his part quite freely and as he pleases, a rational development of this muddled drama is conceivable only if there be a single spirit who speaks in everyone [...]"<sup>452</sup> Yet this single spirit is not some independently existing dramatist, constructing a vast performance using us as passive actors. Schelling writes,

---

<sup>451</sup> *System*: 267; 206.

<sup>452</sup> *System*: 272; 210.

Now if the playwright *were to exist* independently of his drama, we should be merely the actors who speak the lines he has written. If he *does* not exist independently of us, but reveals and discloses himself successively only, through the very play of our own freedom, so that without this freedom even he himself *would not be*, then we are collaborators of the whole and have ourselves invented the particular roles we play.<sup>453</sup>

The moral order of the world is not, then, something static, and Providence is, perhaps paradoxically, something we have a part in creating.

**3.2.** Schelling's shift to understand Providence as a *history* in which moral agents are intimately morally involved instead of as an external objective order can be read as continuation and development of his reinterpretation of Kant's theory of the postulates. I argued in Chapter Two that Kant's moral religion turns out to be little more than pretending that an external order exists so that moral action will make meaningful sense. Kant clearly does not intend things like this but given his epistemological assumption that we can only have knowledge of appearances, it is difficult to interpret the postulates in any other way, at least not in a way that remains faithful to the letter of Kant's philosophy. Schelling's interpretation of Kant is really a reinterpretation, one that proceeds based on ideas that I have argued have their origin in Jacobi. While it is clear that Jacobi's doctrine of immediacy is meant to show that feeling is an immediate connection to the world. The feeling of my body, of other people and of course of God and the divine order all provide immediate access to an external world in a way that Schelling would regard as dogmatic. But Jacobi's deeper point is that it is only in the context opened up by human activity, the practices of faith, the *salto mortale* that accepts what is felt as a meaningful revelation of truth that feelings can be taken as epistemologically relevant. This is a point Schelling would have a much easier time assenting to. In the *Letters* we saw Schelling argue that in the terms spelled out by the Kantian critical philosophy, a philosophical system ultimately rests on the orientation of the philosopher. One can be a dogmatist and take the external world as the object of examination and source of truth, or one can be a critical philosopher and take the subject as the proper object of philosophical investigation. Nothing can decide this save the free choice of the philosopher; Kant's system leaves both options open. But Schelling, as I explained in Chapter IV, thinks this is an error in Kant's philosophy, or at least a possibility Kant left open that should have been closed off.

The true critical spirit is one that embraces the active subject as the source of meaning, not one that remains riveted to the dogmatic commitment to a God and moral world order with a *theoretical* existence, that is, an existence that would be theoretically demonstrable for a being without the human weakness of reason. Providence as an external order sets up the subject in opposition to a world with which it has no particularly intimate relation. The vocation (*bestimmung*) of humankind is here the postulation of an objective world that supports pre-existing moral commitments. And here we get all the typical problems of modern philosophy. What guarantees that our representations are accurate descriptions

---

<sup>453</sup> *System*: 273; 210.

of the external world? How do we know that the order of the universe is amenable to our moral action? Schelling recognizes the serious nature of these problems and his own theory of Providence as a play of free, conscious action and the necessary objective order that emerges as an unconscious result of freedom is a clear attempt to think past these issues. In this sense, what Schelling is doing in the *System* is deepening the argument he first forwarded in the *Letters*; the argument, namely, that claims that to postulate the existence of God and thereby the moral world order God guarantees means to set these things up as objects of a form of practical striving that proceeds by way of imagination and creative effort. Indeed, Schelling has deepened his understanding of how the world takes on meaningful structures. Practical striving has been internalized as part of the very structure of consciousness itself. For as I explained in the last section, intellectual intuition itself is not an awareness of an active self in contrast to an external world but rather an activity that itself creates the boundaries that defines it. The objective order of Providence is thus something that is created by the practical activity of the self. And this creative process is characterized by moments of activity and passivity. Insofar as the self is separate from and creates the moral world it is active. Insofar as the self is a part of this moral world that presents boundaries and limitations to action, the self is passively receptive. Neither of these two moments have any meaning without the other and it is this dual nature that maintains the world *qua* external as a meaningful place; it is objective, something real that presents obstacles and limitations to my free activity, yet it is something I have had a hand in creating.

Schelling's deep connection to Kant is further evident in his reasoning for the *belief* in Providence and implies a reinterpretation of Kant's model of belief. Schelling agrees that we can never have perfect knowledge of the order of the world and its receptivity to our action. Schelling also agrees that morality as such is only possible on the condition that the belief in Providence is a true belief. We must believe in Providence not because it provides a meaningful context for moral action; we must believe in Providence, rather, because it is a unity between our freedom and the necessity we perceive as external to us. Providence is the history that arises from the play of freedom and necessity. The external world appears to us as causally determined, yet we know immediately that we are free and that our actions have real effects in the external world. This means that if we are to understand the world and our place within it, we have to focus on the relationship between freedom and necessity and the way in which meaning emerges as a play between the two. Kant is a helpful critical reference point not only because Schelling is deeply influenced by Kant, but also since he seems to have similar goals but remains committed to the metaphysical structures he seeks to overcome. Meaning – I mean the kind of meaning we find in life and which moves us in everything we do – is only possible through an active subject that is actually involved in the creation of the world that appears to be fixed externally to ordinary consciousness. If we never get beyond the natural prejudice that there is a strict division between subject and object, we will never be able to understand the world as meaningful to humankind. So long as philosophy assumes this division, it will never be able to see that the world is something with which we are connected not in a merely passive, receptive way, but with which we are actively *involved*. In this context, one of Schelling's greatest insights was that while in ordinary

consciousness we may not be aware of it, the world becomes meaningful for us precisely because we have had a hand in making it. It is important to see that it is only in the context of the transcendental *Kunst* that is the artifice transcendental idealism that this kind of insight into the contribution of our activity in creating the moral world can surface in the first place. It is only this aesthetic approach of transcendental idealism that can reveal the essentially creative nature of the self. Unlike Jacobi, Schelling never maintains that belief in a moral world order is motivated by immediate experience. But Schelling does share with Jacobi the idea that it is through activity that such beliefs arise and make sense. Belief in Providence is no mere passive hope that the world is a certain way, regardless of my activity; it is not the vain hope that the universe will reward virtuous action with happiness. Rather, belief in Providence is the belief in a moral order of which we are co-authors. This kind of faith is active insofar as it recognizes itself as a necessary condition for Providence itself; it is passive insofar as the object of belief is something real that presents obstacles to our activity.<sup>454</sup>

#### 4. Art as Keystone

Having read the *System* in the way I have been suggesting, it perhaps comes as no surprise that Schelling makes such a dramatic move to make art the highest point in the *System*. As I explained above, art is no mere *capstone*, but rather a *keystone*, that very element without which the *System* would not even be possible. Art is the highest point of the *System* precisely because the *System* has been aesthetic from the very beginning and it takes an aesthetic sense to grasp art.

Schelling's account of aesthetic experience and creativity revolves around the basic claim that in what he calls "aesthetic intuition" the objective evidence of the identity between free human subjectivity and the mechanical exigencies of nature is laid bare. Such evidence the philosopher can only intuit intellectually, but the artist-genius can reveal in the in the full light of aesthetic intuition, in objectivity. Until now, the products of Schelling's transcendental *Kunst* have only been objects for the philosopher; that is, in order to see the fundamentally aesthetic nature of the self and its relation to the world it has been necessary to take the perspective of the transcendental philosopher, to intuit the processes whereby the self comes to understand itself and its world as meaningful. This has been enough to reveal the origin of the natural prejudice that characterizes ordinary consciousness. But if the *Kunst* proposed by the transcendental philosopher as a

---

<sup>454</sup> For a contemporary parallel, we might consider Richard Kearney's well-known "poetics of the possible God" which proposes that God is better thought as "*posse* rather than *esse*." *The God Who May Be*. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001) 5. Kearney's bold thesis is that thinking of God as possibility rather than as existing determinately makes important differences in how we understand ourselves, our relationship with God and our place in the cosmos. Creation is seen to be a process in which we are all bound up as agents responsible for the very unfolding of creation and the moral order of the universe. In this sense, God's existence is at stake in creation and we, as agents active in the development of the world order, are responsible not only to God's sovereignty, but to God's legacy and for the real existence that God comes to have in our lives. As Kearney unforgettably puts it, "God depends on us to be." (2001, 4)

meaningful story about human experience is to take on a real objective meaning for everyone, then the transcendental perspective is not enough. What is necessary is that the purely intellectual intuition of the transcendental philosopher give way to the aesthetic intuition of the artist. Schelling's understanding of what he has achieved with his transcendental philosophy is captured by the idea that intellectual and aesthetic intuition bookend his system in that what intellectual intuition can only think in abstract forms, aesthetic intuition can manifest in a real and objective work of art. Schelling writes,

the whole system falls between two extremes, of which one is characterized by the intellectual, the other by aesthetic intuition [...] the former, since it is necessary purely for purposes of that special direction of the mind which it takes in philosophizing, makes no appearance at all in ordinary consciousness; the latter, since it is nothing else but intellectual intuition given universal currency, or become objective, *can* at least figure in every consciousness.<sup>455</sup>

Now, it is one thing to say that art can render objective what in philosophy is limited to subjective imaginative constructions. This is almost too obvious. Philosophy is an imaginative play of pure concepts; art is able to create something objective, something we can see, touch; something we can *feel*. With this, the injunction of the *System-Programme* to make ideas aesthetic is met with enthusiasm. But while this is certainly an important part of Schelling's theory, it does not fully explain Schelling's claim that art is the *sine qua non* of philosophy, the very keystone that holds the whole thing together.

Art does not merely step in when philosophy is no longer sufficient for the transcendental project. Despite the nearly complete lack of discussion of art in any but the very final pages of the *System*, the whole project needs to be understood as aesthetic through and through. The turn to art in transcendental philosophy is necessary because the latter comes to a point where it realizes that the whole project has been aesthetic from the very beginning. Transcendental philosophy, Schelling's chosen method, begins from the perspective of the simple fact of knowledge, the correspondence of subject and object, and seeks to explain how this seems to us to be such a simple fact. What are the structures responsible for the common sense certainty that my ideas are accurate representations of the world? How might we philosophers go about constructing a system that accounts for this inescapable situation in which we all find ourselves? Schelling's method involves a kind of history of self-consciousness that proceeds through a series of epochs that mediate the original opposition we all feel between subject and object. The goal of this 'history' is to finally grasp, in a full intuition of the self (*einer vollkommenen Selbstanschauung*)<sup>456</sup> and the activities that constitute its experience. But in the end Schelling seems to abandon the 'philosophical' component, claiming that this full intuition can only be achieved aesthetically. James Dodd observes that there is a kind of irony in the fact that the very thing Schelling sets out to do as a transcendental

---

<sup>455</sup> *System*, 233; 301.

<sup>456</sup> *System*, 285-86; 221.

philosopher has to be left to the unique creative capacities of the artist. “The philosopher,” Dodd concludes, “is at best a witness.”<sup>457</sup> In this final stage, the product of what Schelling calls “aesthetic intuition” is art, the objective evidence of the identity between free human subjectivity and the mechanical exigencies of nature. Such evidence the philosopher can only intuit intellectually, but the artist-genius can reveal it in the full light of aesthetic intuition, in objectivity.

But setting things up the way Dodd does seems hasty. The argument is that “In philosophy the goal is to imitate [...] the productive acts implicit in the I” and that this imitation is a purely imaginative play that can never have the “sense of an all-consuming, complete world.”<sup>458</sup> I have emphasized my claim that the role of art in the *System* cannot be understood as a mere capstone, but rather as a central concern of the system as a whole. It may be true that Schelling finds a limit to intellectual intuition in that it only provides an *ideal* construction of the aesthetic acts that create for us the objective world as we know it. Yet when Schelling claims that aesthetic intuition is a higher point in the system it is only because it is able to actually engage in a *conscious act* that not only imitates the aesthetic acts of the subject but actually is one of those very aesthetic acts itself. With the very same ontological force with which the self creates the external objective world, aesthetic intuition can create something objective that is at once guided by conscious intention and impelled by an unconscious drive that can never be fully mastered. In this sense, to say that the philosophical is abandoned for the aesthetic is more than a little misleading. Art does something that philosophy does not – cannot! – do. To create a world with the same ontological force with which the subject unconsciously creates the objective world of ordinary experience is an aesthetic achievement and such an achievement is only possible as a balance between the active (conscious) and passive (unconscious) elements of the self that are always in a balance in the constitution of ordinary experience. Dodd’s way of putting things, then, claiming that the philosopher can only be a *witness* to what the artist can actually *do* captures what Schelling seems to have in mind. Yet it also misses the fact that transcendental philosophy is a *Kunst* precisely because a *Kunst* is the only way that the essentially aesthetic process of producing a meaningful world can be adequately captured. Philosophy, it is true, never creates a complete world in the sense that art does, but philosophy – at least *transcendental philosophy* in Schelling’s understanding of the method – does provide an aesthetically driven narrative that is itself an imaginative construction of process by which the self generates a meaningful world. Dodd rightly notes that for something to take on real objective significance “it needs to take on the sense of that “being out of my hands” that is crucial for objectivity to have any sense at all.”<sup>459</sup> But this is precisely the process philosophy explains, the process that transcendental *Kunst* constructs and renders conceivable for philosophy. Providence is out of our hands because the creative capacities of the self generate a world that takes on the appearance of an objective order, and this

---

<sup>457</sup> “Philosophy and Art in Schelling’s *System des transzendentalen Idealismus*.” In *The Review of Metaphysics*. 52:1 (September 1998): 80.

<sup>458</sup> Dodd 1998, 82.

<sup>459</sup> Dodd 1998, 82.

means that the transcendental story philosophy provides is itself an aesthetic achievement that shows why the objective world can “have any sense at all.”

The philosopher can explain why the external world is meaningful to us in the way it is – we have seen part of the way in which Schelling understands this process in our discussion of providence and history. The artist, however, can actually make something objective that is meaningful in a way guided by the hand of the artist. For Schelling, art is a product of freedom, and as such is the product of conscious activity, whereas products of nature are the products of unconscious activity.<sup>460</sup> Philosophy exposes the unconscious processes responsible for the products of nature in intellectual intuition; art creates new products of nature along the conscious avenue of freedom. Philosophy and art are thus like two sides of the same coin, one revealing the aesthetic dimension of human experience, the other revealing the human capacity to create an objective world in its own image. Bernard Bosanquet puts this very nicely in his classic study in the history of aesthetics. “Take away,” he observes, “the objectivity of art, and it ceases to be what it is, and becomes philosophy; give philosophy objectivity, and it ceases to be philosophy, and becomes Art.”<sup>461</sup> The reason I like this way of putting things is that it emphasizes the tacit interpretation that art and philosophy are continuous along the same arc. Whatever art is, Schelling implies, it is only philosophy rendered objective. And whatever philosophy is, it is only art minus objectivity. In this way, even Schelling’s own words are somewhat misleading, emphasizing as they do the essential difference between intellectual and aesthetic intuition. This is a vital distinction, one that defines Schelling’s understanding of philosophy and art. Yet this is far from the end of the story, and to stop here would be to ignore the significance of Schelling’s unique brand of aesthetic idealism as a theory of the self as a creative source of meaning.

**4.2.** In many ways we have reached a kind of natural end to the story we set out to tell in this thesis. In the second part of this thesis, we have seen how aesthetics emerges out of practical philosophy as a way to respond to the problem of nihilism Jacobi identified in his debate with Mendelssohn. Schelling’s next move in the *System* is to explain not only how the external world becomes meaningful for us, but will also describe what is entailed in the process of consciously creating a world through human freedom. With this, Schelling has thus not only explained how the world emerges as meaningful; he has explained how, given this process, we can make a meaningful world. This may push the thesis slightly beyond its stated scope, but given that it is a natural development of these themes it will be worthwhile to explore what Schelling does. The relevant element is Schelling’s theory of genius.

Schelling’s theory of genius owes a good deal to Kant’s idea that there is something dark and mysterious that grounds the capacity to create great art. Kant intimated – but never fully appreciated – the consequence of his claims that in beautiful art there is a unity between the conscious productive skills of the artist and the productivity of natural

---

<sup>460</sup> *System*: 283; 219.

<sup>461</sup> *A History of Aesthetic*. (London: Routledge 2002) 319.

mechanism. In Schelling, this identity of conscious and unconscious takes on a whole other level of significance. Schelling writes,

This unchanging identity, which can never attain to consciousness, and merely radiates back from the product, is for the producer precisely what destiny is for the agent, namely a dark unknown force which supplies the element of completeness or objectivity to the piecework of freedom; and as that power is called destiny, which through our free action realizes, without our knowledge and even against our will, goals *that we did not envisage*, so likewise that incomprehensible agency which supplies objectivity to the conscious, without the cooperation of freedom, and to some extent in opposition to freedom (wherein is eternally dispersed what in this product is united), is denominated by means of the obscure concept of genius.<sup>462</sup>

With the notion of destiny Schelling is couching his philosophy of art in the context of his discussion of Providence. Just as Schelling employed the notion of Providence to introduce an element of necessity into the *Stückwerk* of freedom as manifest in history, so too does he introduce destiny as a way to give art the completeness it requires. Kant famously argues that the necessary mechanical processes of nature appear as the products of conscious agency, of an intelligent being, while the freely created work of fine art appears as a product of nature.<sup>463</sup> Schelling follows on this basic model of the interpenetration of freedom and nature, arguing that the blind, unconscious activity of nature appears in the organic product as conscious and the free, conscious activity of art appears as unconscious.<sup>464</sup> Kant gives a deep and complex story of precisely how nature can appear as art, but, as I have argued above, fails to flesh out his claim that fine art appears as a product of nature. What, precisely, is the rule that *gibt der Kunst die Regel*? And if, as I suggested, what Kant really wants to do in the third *Critique* is provide the sensible evidence that the world really is amenable to our moral projects, how does artistic creativity show that human activity can affect real objective products in the natural world? These are important questions that Kant never adequately addressed. Art for Kant never makes it past the status that he confines it to at the beginning of his discussion of fine art, namely, a work (*opus*), as distinguished from an effect (*effectus*) of nature.<sup>465</sup> Kant does indeed intimate a blurring of the line between *opus* and *effectus*, but he is always careful to point out that works of artistic genius are first and foremost products of artistic intention, of judgment.

Turning now to Schelling, the problem of how the free creativity of the artist becomes implicated in the unconscious processes of nature, and how the nature gets implicated in the free creativity of the artist becomes the central focus of aesthetics. In this sense, the abandoned Kantian claim that art appears as nature is too weak to capture Schelling's meaning. It is not merely that *opus* takes on the appearance of *effectus*; nor is it even that

---

<sup>462</sup> *System*, 286-87; 222.

<sup>463</sup> *CJ: Werke V*, 306.

<sup>464</sup> *System*: 283; 219.

<sup>465</sup> *CJ: Werke V*, 303.



they become indistinguishable; rather, it is that the *effects* of nature actually give rise to the *works* of the artist, for “unconscious activity operates,” Schelling writes, “through the conscious.”<sup>466</sup> This means that the works of genius really are the effects of nature. Schelling has thus taken the Kantian model of the interpenetration of art and nature and thought seriously about its implications. As the final mediating gesture of the self to reconcile its opposition to the objective world, the aesthetic intuition of the genius renders objective a temporary harmony between subject and object, thus revealing the deep connection – indeed, identity – between the conscious self and unconscious nature. The goal of philosophy was to reveal the deep structures at work in conscious experience; the system it sets up is just a *mimesis* of what is implicit therein. But art grasps the fact that all of the products of subjective activity are not my own, that objectivity is not something dreamed up, but rather a product of unconscious forces that can never be articulated discursively, no matter the hubris of the rationalist philosopher.

Turning to Schelling’s specific comments about genius, we see the same variation on the undeveloped Kantian theme. On the surface, much of what Schelling says about genius matches up with Kant’s account. Indeed, he mobilizes many of the same basic distinctions, at least in outline. For instance, where Kant says that the genius, unlike the scientist, cannot give an account of the steps involved in the production of the work,<sup>467</sup> Schelling will speak of “that incomprehensible agency which supplies objectivity to the conscious, without the cooperation of freedom, and to some extent in opposition to freedom.”<sup>468</sup> In both cases works of genius are dependent on an inscrutable activity that is beyond cognitive awareness. Recall that for Kant this activity turns out to be the harmonization of *imagination*, *understanding* and *spirit*, all coordinated by *taste*. Notice that Schelling has made good on Kant’s claim of the connection between genius and nature by showing that this “incomprehensible agency” is no mere coordination of subjective cognitive powers, but rather the “*unwiderstehlicher Trieb*” (irresistible drive) stemming from the deep unconscious nature of the artist.<sup>469</sup> This drive is irresistible because the unconscious activity of nature bubbles up in the genius in opposition to freedom. This is what Schelling means when he says that “every aesthetic production proceeds from the feeling of an infinite contradiction.”<sup>470</sup> The opposition between subject and object that is initially posited in the primordial act of self-intuition is brought to its point of greatest intensity in the genius, when the exigencies of nature assert themselves as an irresistible drive, supplanting freedom and impelling the artist to create. Here Schelling has taken what in Kant was a mere intimation of forces acting outside of the conscious awareness of the genius and fleshed out the idea that nature acts through genius, giving a new rule to art.

It is tempting to conclude that Schelling is here on the side of the *Sturm und Drang*, which takes genius to be kind of mystical connection between the genius and nature, but in fact Kant and Schelling share an admonition directed at the *Stürmers*. Of the conscious

---

<sup>466</sup> *System*: 283; 219.

<sup>467</sup> *CJ: Werke V*, 309; 177.

<sup>468</sup> *System*: 286-87; 222.

<sup>469</sup> *System*: 286-87; 222.

<sup>470</sup> *System*: 291; 225.

and the unconscious activities that constitute the activity of genius and thus the conditions of the possibility for the production of true art, it is impossible to decide which is the most important, for “each of them, in fact, is valueless without the other.”<sup>471</sup> And six years later in the public lecture *Concerning the Relation of the Plastic Arts to Nature*, Schelling will say that if artistic production proceeded according to the blind mechanism of nature, without the aid of conscious reflection on tradition and established artistic practice, then it would be no different than nature and thus not art at all.<sup>472</sup> What for Kant is a “raving” imagination, whose presentations *amant obscurum*, is for Schelling the hypothetical artist whose products are produced simply according to blind mechanism, without the facilitation of consciousness. The difference, of course, comes when one considers that for Schelling the accomplishment of the artist is in the way in which the blind mechanism of nature is channeled through freedom. Despite all of Kant’s encouraging remarks about nature acting through the genius, he never presents art as such an accomplishment, leaving nature as the true artistic wonder.

Schelling’s strange result is that by taking nature seriously, he has made art into the model of aesthetic appreciation. Natural beauty is merely contingent, but true art is the sign of perfection, of the accomplished identity between humans and nature.<sup>473</sup> There is a kind of native harmony to nature that was lost in the subject in the passage to self-consciousness, and for this reason the final mediation in the work of art is always a triumph of spirit, indeed a triumph that can be accomplished afresh in every work of genius. In a sense, Schelling maintains the distinction between *opus* and *effectus* by claiming that what nature achieves comes at the cost of no conscious effort and so is nothing more than a blind effect, while what is achieved in art is the *opus* of a long struggle of consciousness that finally realizes its fundamental identity with its unconscious element. In the process of artistic creativity, unlike in any other experience, we become aware that objectivity is an aesthetic accomplishment that is only partly our own.

## 5. Concluding Remarks

I mentioned above that Schelling’s reflections on artistic creativity seem to fall slightly outside of the scope of this thesis, but in summing up my discussion I would like to point out the way in which Schelling reflections are an importantly relevant natural development of the themes this thesis has pursued from the beginning. When the authors of the *System Programme* demand that philosophers have an aesthetic sense they demand not only attention to the immediate feelings which provide us with our basic orientation to the world, but also that philosophers be attuned to the creative force that underpins all meaningful experience. My interpretation of Jacobi pivots on the idea that his polemical stance against Spinoza, Mendelssohn and eventually Kant is grounded in a positive

---

<sup>471</sup> *System*: 289; 224.

<sup>472</sup> Translated by Michael Bullock. In *The True Voice of Feeling: Studies in Romantic Poetry*. Edited by Herbert Read. (London: Faber and Faber, 1953).

<sup>473</sup> *System*: 293; 227.

proposal for a philosophy that can account for the way in which the actions of real historical agents are responsible for the way in which we experience ourselves and our world. What we find in Schelling's aesthetic idealism is precisely this very idea that the reality of the objective world hangs on subjective activity.

Jacob Sherman has linked this element of both Jacobi's and Schelling's thinking to what has recently been identified as "the participatory turn" in Religious Studies. The participatory turn embraces the thesis that, "religious worlds and phenomena [...] come into existence out of a process of participatory cocreation between human multidimensional cognition and the generative force of life and/or the spirit."<sup>474</sup> While I would rather not be tangled up with labels of this sort, in the context of Jacobi's philosophy, this kind of model is useful in identifying the significance of his *salto mortale*, the heels over head leap that Jacobi proposes as an alternative to and escape from the fatalistic mechanism of rationalist metaphysics, especially Spinoza.<sup>475</sup> In freely choosing to make the *salto mortale* into the belief in God and human freedom, Jacobi thinks that we become active agents in the realization of the divine on earth. Here, God and human freedom cease to be objects or mere metaphysical facts about the kinds of things there are in the world and become objects of practical action that depend on the finite activities of real historical agents. As I explain in detail in the first part of this thesis, it is in making this move that Jacobi thinks that he can avoid the problems inherent in the idea of a preestablished order of universe that can only be revealed by the abstractions of the philosophical reason; Jacobi thinks, that is, that by placing the power to generate meaning in the hands of real human agents he can deliver the kind of meaningfulness that people expect from a philosophical account of the world and the human relation to it. As Sherman notes, this sentiment of Jacobi's was critically taken up by Schelling in his claim that the mode access we have to the Absolute is not based on the demonstrations of discursive reason, but rather on the creative and aesthetic acts that express the infinite in finite forms.<sup>476</sup> In this way, Schelling will come to the radical conclusion that the fate of God lays in the hands of humankind, that it is only through the participation of finite human agents that God becomes what God is. The responsibility for creation is in the hands of humankind.

It is important to see the trajectory along which the development of this idea takes place. Jacobi's critique of rationalism was powerful enough to derail the confidence in the possibility of a properly rational religion. Since God could not be demonstrated discursively, we must follow Jacobi and take that all-important *salto mortale* into the arms of faith, onto the firm ground of immediate feeling. Without such a leap, we remain trapped in the abyss of nihilism, where the possibility of a meaningful life is lost in the infinite fabric of causes. Faith in the veracity of feeling keeps us firmly planted as active agents motivated by the intimacies of human moral life. Kant was not convinced by Jacobi's approach, but he did take his lead from the crisis that Jacobi's 1785 intervention catalyzed. For Kant too saw something wrong with the hubris of rationalism's confidence

<sup>474</sup> Jorge N. Ferrer and Jacob Sherman, "Introduction." *The Participatory Turn*. (Albany: SUNY, 2008) 34-5.

<sup>475</sup> Jacob Sherman, "A Genealogy of Participation." In *The Participatory Turn*, 97-8.

<sup>476</sup> Sherman 2008, 98-102.

in reason. But it is in Schelling's early thinking that Jacobi's diagnosis receives a rigorous course of treatment. Seen as agents responsible for the order of the world, on Schelling's way of thinking, we are thus charged not only with the responsibility for creation, but also for the unique ability to actually create objective artifacts that take creation in a distinctly human direction. In this way, reading Schelling's *System* in the context of Jacobi's critique of Enlightenment rationalism pays dividends towards a greater understanding not only of the historical consequences of Jacobi's polemical interventions, but also of the constellation of issues that led the authors of the *System-Programme* to place aesthetics at the centre of their proposed direction for the future of philosophy. As one of the *System-Programme's* putative authors, Schelling took its injunction to heart and proposed his own celebration of the deep affiliation between the philosophical and the poetic. Ultimately, this *aestheticizing* of philosophy needs to be seen as a response to the nihilism Jacobi revealed to be at the heart of eighteenth-century philosophy.

## Conclusion

This dissertation has pursued a primarily historical thesis; it has attempted, that is, to map a trajectory beginning with Jacobi's diagnosis of the nihilism of philosophy at the end of the eighteenth century, proceed through some of the consequences of this diagnosis in the thought of Kant and Jacobi himself and end with the idea that Schelling's aesthetic idealism finally provides a laudable escape from the meaningless abyss of rationalism. On this historical register, three main goals guided my investigation. First, I have attempted to place Jacobi's thinking in the context of the German idealist response to Kant.<sup>477</sup> In part, this is not unusual since Jacobi is most well-known for his early critique of Kant's notion of the thing-in-itself. But Jacobi had much more to say and his influence was much broader than this small but compelling polemical jab. Second, my thesis about Jacobi had the direct consequence of producing a critical reading of Kant, one that sees Kant's practical philosophy and aesthetics as more disingenuous attempts to provide a metaphysical *Weltanschauung* that anchors human action and experience in the context of a world that makes sense and with which humankind is intimately connected. Third, I attempted to lend further support to my Jacobi-inspired critique of Kant by exploring Schelling's reinterpretation of Kant's doctrine of the postulates and his aesthetics. Here, the dominant claim was that Schelling's reading of Kant is pursued along lines that Jacobi had been developing against Kant from the beginning. In particular, Schelling's turn to aesthetics is motivated by the same deeply felt conviction that rationalism cannot bring the hearts or minds of people to true conviction.

The thread that runs through the whole story is that Jacobi's thinking gave rise to a deep suspicion that rationalist philosophy was somehow disingenuous. An appeal to the hearts and minds of people could only be made through ideas that are as deeply felt as they are understood. It is perhaps no surprise that, given the recent explosion of interest in aesthetics as a discipline concerned with the philosophical relevance of subjective and private feeling, that Jacobi's call to return to our immediate relation to the world around us was taken up via innovations in aesthetics. The heart cannot be convinced through argument; it must be compelled by feeling. And what is more compelling than the felling of beauty?

One of the critical points Jacobi stressed was that human freedom could not be properly understood as riveted to the mechanical world. This never meant that free acts had to be defined as uncaused, but just that human agency itself cannot be understood on a mechanical model. The deeper reason for this commitment to human freedom, however, is the claim that understanding the whole world on a mechanical model creates an infinite regress anyway. There must be something unconditioned at the ground of a series of conditions. We have no conceptual access to the unconditioned since to conceptualize it would be to condition it in some way. Yet we do have access to this unconditioned through immediate feeling, through the immediate feeling of our self in the practical action that has always already created a context in which feelings are meaningful. This means, as I was at pains to stress in Part I, that for Jacobi feeling is not some mystical

---

<sup>477</sup> Cf. Franks 2005, where Jacobi is also placed in a post-Kantian context.

revelation, but rather an experience bound up with action and practice. Hence Jacobi's positive contribution is the claim that the world as we experience it depends on free human action. To have faith, then, is to undertake the practices of faith that open up the world as meaningful. Perhaps paradoxically, faith is at once an active embrace of the divine and the passive reception of revelation. The divine becomes human and the human becomes divine.

Such a position Kant could never understand, preferring to consider Jacobi a mystic who claims a special kind of knowledge though a special kind of *Alchemie*. This dismissal of Jacobi, unfortunately common at the time, stems from Kant's conviction that there is unbridgeable gulf between mind and world, that the world must be a certain way which is beyond the epistemic reach of human cognition. We have seen how this basic orientation becomes implicated in Kant's practical philosophy and aesthetics, often undermining Kant's own ambitions. At this point, of interest is the way in which Schelling's work in the "spirit" of Kant's philosophy actually ventures the repair work of the critical philosophy based on ideas that Jacobi had been trumpeting all along. In many ways this flies in the face of the conventional wisdom about Jacobi as a critic of all things idealistic. In summing things up, I would like to focus on one example from the contemporary literature where this interpretive convention generates some problems.

In a refreshingly generous and inspiring reading, Frank Ankersmit attempts to claim Jacobi as a beacon for an intellectual climate dominated by an "all-pervasive scientism."<sup>478</sup> Jacobi's realism, his *salto mortale*, his doctrine of immediacy and his conception of *Glaube* all provide a historical precedent for contemporary philosophy's insistence on constitutive interaction between mind and world, especially, for Ankersmit, in the philosophy of language. On Ankersmit's reading, Jacobi was uniquely placed in the history of philosophy, not properly at home in the much-studied period between Kant and Hegel, yet decisive for the early romantic interpretation of Kant. This meant that Jacobi was able to provide legitimately non-Kantian conceptual resources for an age "when responding to Kant was a philosopher's main duty."<sup>479</sup> This surely identifies something important about Jacobi's strange place in the history of philosophy. Indeed, the thrust of the fourth Chapter of this thesis was to show that Schelling was able to employ uniquely Jacobian insights to the project of developing a properly Kantian moral religion. But this is where Ankersmit's reading begins to break down. As generous as his analysis is, Ankersmit is content to uphold the common interpretation of German idealism as antithetical to Jacobi's oddly idealistic brand of realism. Ankersmit suggests we think of Fichte and Schelling as the philosophical counterparts of modern-day scientism. And just as he provided the tonic for this philosophical spirit drunk on the fantasies of the mind, Jacobi's thinking can provide a resource for contemporary thinkers committed to "*return to reality*" and do away with the stifling abstractions of excessively rationalistic philosophical discourse.

I should not, of course, fault a writer for not paying close enough attention to aspects of Jacobi that I think are important. Indeed, I think Ankersmit's article is laudable in its

---

<sup>478</sup> Ankersmit 2008.

<sup>479</sup> 2008, 243.

attempt to renew interest in a relatively obscure writer. Yet it is striking that in his return to Jacobi, Ankersmit upholds the very assumptions that originally confined Jacobi's thinking to the backwaters the *Goethe-Zeit*. Indeed, to leave these assumptions intact risks missing important aspects of what makes Jacobi, and the German idealists, significant for us today.

Ankersmit himself cites passages where Jacobi presages the moves of later idealists, even pointing out that "the supreme paradox in Jacobi's writings is that his brand of realism has its origins in the subject."<sup>480</sup> And he goes on to cite Jacobi on the idea that subject and object arise immediately, at one and the same moment in the mind of the subject. "I experience that I am, and that there exists something independently from me, at one and the same moment."<sup>481</sup> It is insights like these that led people like Schelling to develop a system of absolute idealism; a system, that is, resting on a single unity, a single inarticulable principle, what Schelling later calls the *ungrund* or the *urgrund*. As I have tried to show in Chapters four and six, Schelling's philosophy (at least from the period with which I have been concerned, 1795-1800) can be understood as an attempt to think seriously about this "one and the same moment", this point at which subject and object disappear into each other in the unity of activity and passivity that characterizes feeling and aesthetic experience. Strikingly, Ankersmit himself cites a passage from a 1783 letter to Hamann that clearly bears this out. I shall cite it at length:

Light is in my heart, but it is extinguished as soon as I try to conceptualize it. Which of the two clarities is the true one? That of the mind which, admittedly, presents us with clear and fixed forms, but behind them with a bottomless abyss? Or that of the heart which, admittedly, reveals to us a most promising light from above, but fails to produce clearly defined knowledge? Could the human mind ever hope to achieve truth, unless it tries to unite both clarities within one light? And is this unity conceivable other than through a miracle?<sup>482</sup>

The second part of this thesis was dedicated to explaining that this miracle is the miracle of beauty, of art. While Jacobi focused his polemical interventions on the rationalism that prizes the clarity of fixed concepts above all else, and in so doing revealed the nihilism inherent in any philosophical attempt to prove that which can only be felt and believed, Schelling saw that such a critique necessitated a move to aesthetics. There is indeed a light in my heart and my mind, for Schelling, and to the final questions Jacobi poses in his letter to Hamann, he answers that truth is indeed found within the unity of these lights and that this unity really is only conceivable through the miracle of art and beauty. Truth here is defined as beauty, as only expressible aesthetically. It is only in art that we can bear witness to the miracle of existence and the intimate relationship between humankind and the world. "Philosophy attains, indeed, the highest," we have already seen Schelling

---

<sup>480</sup> 2008, 238.

<sup>481</sup> DH: *Werke* 2, 175. Cited in Ankersmit 2008, 238.

<sup>482</sup> *Werke* 1, 367. Cited in Ankersmit 2008, 240. Ankersmit leaves off the last sentence, which I have translated here.

claim in his *System*, "but it brings to this summit only, so to say, the fraction of a man. Art brings *the whole man*, as he is, to that point, namely to a knowledge of the highest, and this is what underlies the eternal difference and the marvel of art."<sup>483</sup> So what Jacobi leaves open as a problem, Schelling attempts to address by developing an aesthetic idealism in which divine creativity takes on a human counterpart in art. Both thinkers, however, are deeply committed to the idea that it is in the activity of human subjects that truth is revealed. Perhaps paradoxically, it is only insofar as we are agents active in the constitution of experience that we can be passive recipient of divine revelation. Jacobi never puts a clear name on this unity of activity and passivity, referring to it as *Glaube* and later even *Vernunft*.<sup>484</sup> But Schelling is convinced that such a unity is only achieved in art.

As we have seen, Jacobi's thinking is at the centre of Schelling's reinterpretation of Kant's postulates as demands for human activity, for the construction of the world *qua* postulated imaginatively. Schelling deepens his position in the *System*, showing that the objective world itself is an aesthetic accomplishment, a result of subjective acts that embody what Schelling had earlier called "the proper principle of aesthetics", the balance between the active and passive elements of experience. As active, we are isolated subjects, responsible for the world of experience; as passive, we are absorbed by the exigencies of our creation. In the case of ordinary cognition, our subjective acts disappear into the object created thereby. But in aesthetic creativity, the subjective acts are maintained alongside the passivity that characterizes the artist's absorption in the providential order.<sup>485</sup> What Schelling does with his theory of genius is allow for both the active element and passive elements of experience to be preserved. These two elements are in a constant struggle, maintaining a kind of precarious balancing act. But in the end, when the artistic product emerges, the struggle ceases and these elements of creativity are reconciled into one. Conscious activity and unconscious passivity collapse into a single unified whole and a wholly new object emerges. What Schelling thus does is show that the balance of active and passive that results in ordinary experience can be consciously mastered by genius in the process of artistic creation. Schelling's aesthetic idealism, then, accounts not only for why the world of ordinary experience is meaningful to us, he shows us that in art all our nihilistic fears can evaporate since all meaning is at bottom a human artefact.

---

<sup>483</sup> *System*, 301; 233.

<sup>484</sup> See the 1815 Preface to DH, which also acted as the introduction to Jacobi's collected works.

<sup>485</sup> Cf. Emil Fackenheim, *The God Within*. (Toronto, 1996) 60.



### Bibliography

Adorno, Theodor. 1984. *Aesthetic Theory*. Translated by C. Lenhardt. London: Routledge.

Allen, Barry. 2003. "The Abyss of Contingency." In *History of Philosophy Quarterly*. 20:4.

Allison, Henry. 1970. *Lessing and the Enlightenment*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.

Allison, Henry. 1980. "Kant's Critique of Spinoza" In *The Philosophy of Baruch Spinoza*. Edited by Richard Kennington. Washington: The Catholic University of America Press: 199-228.

Allison, Henry. 2001. *Kant's Theory of Taste: A Reading of the Critique of Aesthetic Judgment*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001.

Althusser, Louis. 1969. *For Marx*. Translated by Ben Brewster. London: Penguin Press.

Altman, Alexander. 1973. *Moses Mendelssohn: A Biographical Study*. Alabama: University of Alabama Press.

Ankersmit, Frank. 2008. "Jacobi: Realist, Romanticist, and Beacon for our Time." In *Common Knowledge* 14.2.

Arkush, Allan. 1994. *Moses Mendelssohn and the Enlightenment*. NY: SUNY Press.

Baxley, Anne Margaret. 2005. "The Practical Significance of Taste in Kant's *Critique of Judgment*: Love of Natural Beauty as a Mark of Moral Character." *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*. 63:1: 33-45.

Beck, Lewis White. 1960. *A Commentary on Kant's Critique of Practical Reason*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Beck, Lewis White. 1963. "Forward." In *Lectures on Ethics*. New York: Harper.

Beck, Lewis White. 1969. *Early German Philosophy*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Beiser, Frederick. 1987. *The Fate of Reason: German Philosophy from Kant to Fichte*. Cambridge: Harvard.

Berlin, Isaiah. 1955. "Hume and the Sources of German Anti-Rationalism." In *Against the Current*. Edited by Henry Hardy. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Berlin, Isaiah. 2000. *Three Critics of the Enlightenment: Vico, Hamann, Herder*. Edited by Henry Hardy. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Bowie, Andrew. 1993. *Schelling and Modern European Philosophy*. NY: Routledge.

Bowie, Andrew. 2000. "German Idealism and the Arts." In *The Cambridge Companion to German Idealism*. Edited by Karl Ameriks. Cambridge.

Crawford, A. W. 1905. *The Philosophy of F.H. Jacobi*. New York: MacMillan.

Crawford, Donald. 1982. "Kant's Theory of Creative Imagination." In *Essays in Kant's Aesthetics*. Edited by Ted Cohen and Paul Guyer. Chicago.

Deleuze, Gilles. 1984. *Kant's Critical Philosophy*. Translated by Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Denker, Alfred. 2000. "Three Men Standing over a Dead Dog: The Absolute as Fundamental Problem of German Idealism." In *Schelling: Zwischen Fichte und Hegel*. Herausgegeben von Cristoph Asmuth, Alfred Denker and Michael Vater. Amsterdam: B.R. Grüner: 381-401.

Di Giovanni, George. 1989. "From Jacobi's Philosophical Novel to Fichte's Idealism: Some Comments on the 1789-99 'Atheism Dispute'." In *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 27:1.

Di Giovanni, George. 1994. "Introduction: The Unfinished Philosophy of Freidrich Heinrich Jacobi." In *The Main Philosophical Writings and the Novel Allwill*. Montreal: McGill/Queen's University Press. 1-167.

Di Giovanni, George. 1998. "Hume, Jacobi, and Common Sense." In *Kant-Studien*. 89:1.

Di Giovanni, George. 2005. *Freedom and Religion in Kant and his Immediate Successors: The Vocation of Humankind, 1774-1800*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Düsing, Klaus. 1999. "The Reception of Kant's Doctrine of Postulates in Schelling's and Hegel's Early Philosophical Projects." In *The Emergence of German Idealism*. Edited by Michael Baur and Daniel O. Dahlstrom. Washington: The Catholic University Press: 201-37.

Dyck, Corey. 2004. "Spirit Without Lines," *Idealistic Studies* vol. 34:2: 151-62.

Fackenheim, Emil. 1966. *The God Within*. Toronto.

Ferrer, Jorge N. and Jacob Sherman. 2008. "Introduction." *The Participatory Turn*. Albany: SUNY.

Fichte, J. G. *Science of Knowledge*. 1970. Translated by Peter Heath and John Lachs. New York: Meredith.

Ford, Lewis. 1965. "The Controversy Between Schelling and Jacobi." In *Journal for the History of Philosophy*. 3:1.

Frank, Manfred and E. Kurz, eds. 1975. *Materialen zu Schellings philosophischen Anfängen*, Frankfurt: Suhrkamp,

Frank, Manfred. 2004. *The Philosophical Foundations of Early German Romanticism*. Translated by Elizabeth Millán Zaibert. Albany: SUNY.

Frank, Manfred. 2007. "Philosophy as 'Infinite Aproximation.' Thoughts arising out of the 'Constellation' of Early German Idealism." In *German Idealism: Contemporary Perspectives*. Edited by Espen Hammer. New York: Routlegde.

Franks, Paul. 2005. *All or Nothing: Systematicity, Transcendental Arguments, and Skepticism in German Idealism*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Franks, Paul and Sebastian Gardner. 2002. "From Kant to Post-Kantian Idealism." In *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society, Supplementary Volumes*, 76: 211-246.

Gasché, Rudolph. 2002. "Linking Onto Disinterestedness, or the Moral Law in Kant's *Critique of Judgment*." In *Between Ethics and Aesthetics*. Edited by Dorota Glowaka and Stephen Boos. New York: SUNY Press.

Görland, Ingtraud. 1973. *Die Entwicklung der Frühphilosophie Schellings in der Auseinandersetzung mit Fichte*. Frankfurt: Vittorio Klostermann.

Guyer, Paul. 1993. *Kant and the Experience of Freedom*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Guyer, Paul. 2000. *Kant on Freedom Law and Happiness*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Guyer, Paul. 2005. *Values of Beauty: Historical Essays in Aesthetics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Hadot, Pierre. 2006. *The Veil of Isis*. Translated by Michael Chase. London: Harvard University Press.

Hegel, G.W.F. 1977a. *Faith and Knowledge*. Translated by Walter Cerf and H.S. Harris. Albany: SUNY Press.

Hegel, G.W.F. 1977b. *Phenomenology of Spirit*. Translated by A.V. Miller. Oxford.

Henrich, Dieter. 1992. "The Origins of the Theory of the Subject." In *Philosophical Interventions in the Unfinished Project of the Enlightenment*. Edited by Axel Honneth, Thomas McCarthy, Claus Offe, and Albrecht Wellmer. Translated by William Rehg. Cambridge: The MIT Press.

Henrich, Dieter. 2003. *Between Kant and Hegel*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Jacobi, F.H. 1812-25. *Werke*, 6 volumes. Edited by F.H. Jacobi and F. Köppen. Leipzig: Fleischer.

Jacobi, F.H. 1994. *The Main Philosophical Writings and the Novel Allwill*. Translated and Edited by George Di Giovanni. Montreal: McGill/Queen's University Press.

Kant, Immanuel. 1965. *Critique of Pure Reason*. Translated by Norman Kemp Smith NY: St. Martens Press.

Kant, Immanuel. 1968. *Werke*. 8 volumes. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter.

Kant, Immanuel. 1987. *Critique of Judgment*. Translated by Werner S. Pluhar. Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company.

Kant, Immanuel. 1996. *Critique of Practical Reason*. Translated by Mary Gregor. In *Practical Philosophy*. Cambridge.

Kant, Immanuel. 1998. "What Does it Mean to Orient Oneself in Thinking?" Translated by Allen Wood and George di Giovanni. In *Religion Within the Bounds of Mere Reason and Other Writings*. Cambridge.

Kant, Immanuel. 1999. *Correspondence*. Translated and Edited by Arnulf Zweig. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Kearney, Richard. 2001. *The God Who May Be*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Kemal, Salim. 1986. *Kant and Fine Art*. Oxford.

Kneller, Jane. 2007. *Kant and the Power of the Imagination*. Cambridge.

- Krell, David Farrell. 2004. "Nietzschean Reminiscences in Schelling's *Philosophy of Mythology*." In *Epoché* 8:2: 181-93.
- Krell, David Ferrell, Translator. 2005. "The Oldest Program Towards a System in German Idealism." In *The Tragic Absolute*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Krell, David Ferrell. 2005. *The Tragic Absolute*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Lukács, Georg. 1962. *Die Zerstörung der Vernunft*. Nuwied am Rhein: Luchterhand.
- Liotard, Jean-François. 1994. *Lessons on the Analytic of the Sublime*. Translated by Elizabeth Rottenberg. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Marx, Werner. 1984. *The Philosophy of F.W.J. Schelling: History, System, and Freedom*. Translated by Thomas Nenon. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Mendelssohn, Moses. 1968. *Schriften zur Philosophie, Aesthetik und Apologetik*. Edited by Moritz Brasch. Hildesheim: Georg Olms Verlagsbuchhandlung.
- Murray, Bradley. 2007. "Kant on Genius and Art." *British Journal of Aesthetics* 47:2.
- Nauen, Franz Gabriel. 1971. *Revolution, Idealism and Human Freedom*. The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff.
- Neiman, Susan. 1994. *The Unity of Reason*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Neiman, Susan. 2002. *Evil in Modern Thought*. Princeton.
- Nietzsche, Friedrich. 1968. *The Twilight of the Idols*. Translated by R.J. Hollingdale. London: Penguin.
- Nietzsche, Friedrich. 1969. *Werke* III. Edited by Karl Schlechta. Frankfurt: Ullstein.
- Norman, Judith. 2004. "Schelling and Nietzsche." In *The New Schelling*. Edited by Judith Norman and Alistair Welchman. London: Continuum: 90-105.
- Nuzzo, Angelica. 2005. *Kant and the Unity of Reason*. West Lafayette: Purdue.
- Pfleiderer, Otto. 1893. *The Development of Theology in Germany Since Kant and its Progress in Britain since 1825*. Second edition. Translated by J. Frederick Smith. London: Swan Sonnenschein, 1893.

Reinhold, Karl Leonard. 2005. *Letters on the Kantian Philosophy*. Translated by James Hebbeler. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Rogerson, Kenneth. 2008. *The Problem of Free Harmony in Kant's Aesthetics*. New York: SUNY.

Rosario Acosta López. 2007. "Beauty as an Encounter between Freedom and Nature: A Romantic Interpretation of Kant's *Critique of Judgment*." In *Epoché*. 12:1.

Russon, John. 2009. *Bearing Witness to Epiphany*. Albany: SUNY Press.

Sassen, Brigitte. 2000. *Kant's Early Critics*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Sassen, Brigitte. 2003. "Artistic Genius and the Question of Creativity." In *Kant's Critique of the Power of Judgment: Critical Essays*, edited by Paul Guyer. New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.

Schelling, F. W.J. 1927. *Schellings Werke*. Edited by Manfred Schröter. Munich: Beck.

Schelling, F.W.J. 1953. "Concerning the Relation of the Plastic Arts to Nature". Translated by Michael Bullock. In *The True Voice of Feeling: Studies in Romantic Poetry*, edited by Herbert Read. London: Faber and Faber.

Schelling, F.W.J. 1978. *System of Transcendental Idealism (1800)*. Translated by Peter Heath. Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia.

Schelling, F.W.J. 1980a. "Of the I as the Principle in Philosophy." Translated by Fritz Martin *The Unconditional in Human Knowledge: Four Early Essays*. Edited by Fritz Martin. Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press.

Schelling, F.W.J. 1980b. "Philosophical Letters on Dogmatism and Criticism" Translated by Fritz Martin *The Unconditional in Human Knowledge: Four Early Essays*. Edited by Fritz Martin. Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press.

Schelling, F.W.J. 1988. *Ideas for a Philosophy of Nature*. Translated by Errol E. Harris and Peter Heath. NY: Cambridge University Press.

Schelling, F.W.J. 1994. *On The History of Modern Philosophy*. Translated by Andrew Bowie. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994.

Schelling, F.W.J. 1994. "System of Philosophy in General and the Philosophy of Nature in Particular". Translated by Thomas Pfau. In *Idealism and the Endgame of Theory*. Edited by Thomas Pfau. NY: SUNY.

Schelling, F.W.J. 1994. "Treatise Explicatory of the Idealism in the *Science of Knowledge*." Translated by Thomas Pfau in *Idealism and the Endgame of Theory*. Albany: SUNY.

Schelling, F.W.J. 2000. *System des transzendentalen Idealismus*. Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag.

Schlapp, Otto. 1901. *Kants Lehre vom Genie und die Entstehung der 'Kritik der Urteilskraft'*. Göttingen.

Scholz, Heinrich, Ed. 1916. *Die Hauptschriften zum Pantheismusstriet zwischen Jacobi und Mendelssohn*. Neudrücke seltener philosophische Werke, ed. Von der Kantgesellschaft, vol. 6. Berlin: Reuther and Richard, 1916.

Sherman, Jacob. 2008. "A Genealogy of Participation." In *The Participatory Turn*. Albany: SUNY.

Snow, Dale. 1987. "F.H. Jacobi and the Development of German Idealism." In *Journal of the History of Philosophy* vol. 25: 397-415.

Snow, Dale. 1996. *Schelling and the End of Idealism*. NY: SUNY.

Snow, Dale. 2000. "The Evolution of Schelling's Concept of Freedom." In *Schelling: Zwischen Fichte und Hegel*. Herausgegeben von Cristoph Asmuth, Alfred Denker and Michael Vater. Amsterdam: B.R. Grüner. 317-32.

Spinoza, Baruch. 1992. *The Ethics*. Translated by Samuel Shirley. Cambridge: Hackett Publishing.

Vallée, Gérard, translator. 1988. *The Spinoza Conversations Between Lessing and Jacobi*. New York: University Press of America.

Westphal, Merold. 1999. "Von Kant bis Hegel: Reflections on "The Earliest System-Programme of German Idealism." In *The Emergence of German Idealism*. Edited by Michael Baur and Daniel O. Dahlstrom. Washington: The Catholic University Press: 269-87.

Wilde, Norman. 1966. *Friedrich Jacobi: A Study in the Origin of German Realism*. New York: AMS Press.

Wirth, Jason. 2003. *The Conspiracy of Life: Meditations on Schelling and His Time*. NY: SUNY.

Wizenmann, Thomas. 1786. *Die Resultate der Jacobischen und Mendelssohnschen Philosophie von einem Freiwilligen*. Leipzig, Göschen.

Zammito, John. 1992. *The Genesis of Kant's Critique of Judgment*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.