Between Rationalism and Romanticism: F.H. Jacobi’s novel *Allwill* and the Aufklärung’s Self-conception

By

RICHARD LUDWIG ESCHELMÜLLER

B.A., The University of British Columbia, 1996

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

MASTER OF ARTS

In

THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES

(Department of History)

We accept this thesis as conforming

to the required standard

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

December 1999

© Richard Ludwig Eschelmüller, 1999
In presenting this thesis in partial fulfilment of the requirements for an advanced degree at the University of British Columbia, I agree that the Library shall make it freely available for reference and study. I further agree that permission for extensive copying of this thesis for scholarly purposes may be granted by the head of my department or by his or her representatives. It is understood that copying or publication of this thesis for financial gain shall not be allowed without my written permission.

Department of History

The University of British Columbia
Vancouver, Canada

Date Dec. 21, 1999

DE-6 (2/88)
Abstract

This paper addresses a problem in the history of philosophy concerning the issue of moral autonomy within the context of the German Enlightenment. More specifically, it explores the way in which Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi addressed this problem in his 1793 philosophical novel *Allwill*. The first chapter analyzes the three phases of an ongoing philosophical debate between pietists and rationalists over the definition of Enlightenment. By contrasting the rationalism of the first phase with the romantic reaction that characterized the second phase, the first chapter outlines the general historical and philosophical background of the third phase during which thinkers of the *Aufklärung* explicitly addressed the question of true and false Enlightenment. The second chapter begins with an analysis of Jacobi's role in the "Pantheism dispute" with Moses Mendelssohn regarding the issue of Gotthold Ephraim Lessing's alleged Spinozism, and then traces the development of Jacobi's Counter-Enlightenment stance through a brief biographical sketch of his political and philosophical career. The third chapter looks at Jacobi's exploration of the darker side of the *Sturm und Drang* 's cult of nature and feeling in his novel *Allwill*. The analysis here focuses on Jacobi's dual critique of disengaged rationalism and subjective emotivism, neither of which, in his view, could be the basis for moral autonomy. The final chapter concludes with a discussion of how Jacobi's Counter-Enlightenment stance may be interpreted within the larger context of enlightenment naturalism.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Abstract</td>
<td>ii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preface</td>
<td>iv</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CH. 1 What Is Enlightenment?</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CH. 2 Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi's Critique of Enlightenment Rationalism</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CH. 3 Jacobi’s Novel <em>Allwill</em></td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CH. 4 Conclusion</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bibliography</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
When thinker’s of the German Aufklärung explicitly addressed the question “What Is Enlightenment?” they brought to the surface a long-standing underlying tension in the history of German philosophy concerning the issue of moral autonomy. The most well-known answer to the question was provided by Immanuel Kant in his 1784 essay, *Was Ist Aufklärung*, in which he attempted to clarify the theoretical principles upon which enlightened social and cultural reform could be realized. By focusing on the authority of reason as the universal source of moral autonomy, Kant’s essay gave political expression to the epistemological principles outlined in his 1781 “Critique of Pure Reason”. His definition of Enlightenment as “man’s release from his self-incurred tutelage” was based on a view of rational autonomy that was closely linked to the conception of reason he explicated within a more specialized and technical epistemological context. The conception of reason Kant developed in the “Critique” paralleled the rationalism upon which he based his view of moral autonomy. There was a close affinity between his philosophical reconciliation of rational dogmatism with empirical skepticism and on the one hand, and his attempted political and theological reconciliation of the epistemological differences that divided rationalists and pietists on the other. Interpreted within the broader philosophical context of the “Critique of Pure Reason” Kant’s definition of Enlightenment may be understood as part of an attempt to reconcile a long-standing epistemological rift that set the terms of the polemical debate over true and false Enlightenment during the last two decades of the eighteenth century.

In the “Critique of Pure Reason” Kant reversed a fundamental philosophical assumption regarding the relationship between consciousness and sense perception. His self-described “Copernican revolution” in philosophy shifted the focus of attention from an analysis of how consciousness receives its perceptions of the external world, to an explication of the process by which consciousness actively organizes and structures those perceptions according to intuitively recognizable patterns, or rational categories. Kant maintained that, through the employment of reason, consciousness is intuitively aware of the way in which these categories serve as the common source from which all rational beings derive their inter-subjectively (objectively) verifiable knowledge of the natural world. But consciousness itself is not, in Kant’s view, strictly determined by those rational principles that shape its knowledge of external nature. Man stands outside of the causal nexus of rationally structured natural laws. There is, however, a parallel here between the role reason plays in structuring one’s perceptions of the external world, and the self-legislating role it plays in controlling one’s natural inclinations, desires, and emotions.
Human autonomy, in Kant's view, is based on a stoic conception of inner rational control that allows a moral agent to govern his behaviour according to a rationally derived self-given law, or categorical imperative. This imperative is autonomous because it relies on the individual's capacity for evaluating his motives according to a universal standard shared by all rational beings. What makes this conception of autonomy moral is that it situates the individual within a social context of other self-legislating agents who are held to the same standard of accountability. It is not subject to the influence of specific contingent historical circumstances or events, but relies instead exclusively on the motive of reason. Enlightenment, according to Kant, is characterized as a perpetual intersubjective process whereby the authority of reason is progressively recognized as the ultimate criterion upon which individual autonomy is reconciled with social moral obligation. The capacity for rational disengagement from specific personal interests is, according to Kant, the necessary pre-condition for the ability to universalize one's thoughts and actions by taking into consideration how other autonomous self-legislating persons would behave in the same situation. In doing so, the individual would depend exclusively on his own powers of understanding and not have to rely on others to do his thinking for him, thus allowing him to be released from the constraining influences of prejudice and superstition. The long-term goal of Enlightenment is, in Kant's view, the creation of a public sphere in which the free exchange of ideas would foster and cultivate the individual's rational capacity for universalizing his judgements and actions.

Between his explication of the role of reason in scientific naturalism, and his explanation of the role it played in establishing a universal criterion for moral autonomy, Kant had highlighted a tension in Enlightenment thought regarding the way in which abstract rational principles could be put into practice. Kant's definition of Enlightenment and the responses it evoked revealed an inherent ambiguity in his conception of reason as a universal criterion for disentangling the complex inter-relationship between a contentious constellation of political, religious, and philosophical issues. The conception of reason Kant outlined in the Critique reinforced a Deist perspective of the universe that seemed to be, in many respects, incommensurable with his view of moral autonomy. Thinkers such as J.G. Hamann and F.H Jacobi, for example, challenged Kant's epistemological assumptions on both fronts, arguing that faith, not reason, is the true source of our understanding of God's relationship to man and nature. On the one hand, they rejected the pantheistic naturalism that his view of nature presupposed, and on the other they dismissed his conception of moral autonomy as an illusory abstraction. In doing so they followed a pattern of argument that had deep roots in the long-standing pietist opposition to philosophical rationalism. Their reaction to Kant's philosophy marked the end of the debate over true and false Enlightenment
between proponents of Enlightenment rationalism and *Sturm und Drang* romanticism by polarizing, and entrenching, those epistemological standpoints that Kant had hoped to reconcile.
I

“What Is Enlightenment?”: The Epistemological Debate Between Pietists and Rationalists

During the second half of the eighteenth century the proponents of Aufklärung in Prussia worked in conjunction with the institutions of the state. From civil servants, school teachers, officers, university professors, judges and clergymen, to private tutors, writers, and publishers, those who participated in the spread of enlightenment ideas did so within the context of a centralized administrative bureaucracy in which “the necessity of loyalty to the state for those who worked in its service created a specific kind of enlightenment - one that believed in the benevolent ruler, in the king as philosopher, in reform from above.”¹ With the reign of Frederick II, who took over from his father in 1740, Prussia became a state committed to organizing itself according to rationalist principles and enlightenment ideals. As Henri Brunschwig tells us, “in the Prussia of Frederick the Great the Aufklärung becomes a philosophy, a religion, and a political system.”² In his Essay on the Forms of Government and the Duties of Sovereigns Frederick states that the sovereign’s role is “to uphold the laws, ensure that justice is done, oppose the corruption of manners with the utmost energy, and defend the state against its enemies.” But “he must always keep in mind the fact that he, like the least of his subjects, is human.” He is the head of state “not for what he represents” but for the way in which he carries out his duties. “He is merely the first servant of the of the state, is duty bound to act with probity, wisdom, and complete disinterest, as if he were liable at any moment to render an account of his stewardship to his fellow citizens.”³ The Prussian system of government was understood by the majority of the king’s officials and educated subjects to be an ideal form of enlightened absolutism, one in which the rule of law and intermediate consultative bodies provided a hedge against the potential abuses of one-man rule. Perhaps the most important potential limitation on one-man rule, however, was a free and open expression of public opinion. Freedom of the Press was an essential component of

³ Ibid., p. 16–17.
the healthy functioning of enlightened absolutism. This did not mean, however, that freedom of expression could
extend to elevating the rights of the individual over that of the state because the interests of both were seen by
Frederick to be inextricably interwoven. As Gottholm Ephraim Lessing noted in 1769, freedom of thought in
Prussia consisted of little more than “the freedom to publish as many idiotic attacks on religion as one wants”. 4

This uneasy tension between religious and intellectual freedom on the one hand, and the dictates of state
absolutism on the other, became the primary focus of debate among German intellectuals during the 1780’s and
1790’s. In his celebrated essay, “Was Ist Aufklärung” of 1784, Immanuel Kant argued that public opinion is not
only to be tolerated but encouraged. The sovereign, in Kant’s view, must allow freedom of the press in order to
courage and cultivate a public discourse, which would serve as a vehicle of communication between subject
and sovereign. Individuals were to play two roles, in Kant’s view, one public, and the other private. In their
private role they were to execute the orders of their superiors unquestioningly, but in their public role they should
be free to criticize any government policies. As Kant summed it up: “Reason about everything as much as you
like and whenever you like, only obey.” 5 The purpose behind extending the public use of reason was for Kant the
creation of a truly enlightened society, one in which “mankind would be released from its self-incurred
immaturity”. “The public use of reason”, argues Kant, “must at all times be free, and it alone can bring about
enlightenment among men; the private use of reason, however, may often be very narrowly restricted without the
progress of enlightenment being particularly hindered.” 6

Kant’s seemingly paradoxical formulation of the Enlightenment question may be understood as his
attempt to reconcile religious and political concerns within a broader vision of social organization based on the
collective acceptance of reason as the ultimate criterion upon which practical measures for reform could be
realized. Kant’s definition of Enlightenment in the essay is based on a vision of nothing less than the progress of
mankind, one in which the unrestricted use of public reason will accelerate the process by which mankind will
finally come of age. The motto of the Enlightenment, he tells us, is Sapere Aude! (dare to think!), a call for
individuals to summon the courage to think for themselves and learn to rely on their own understanding, instead

4 C.B.A. Behrens, Society, Government and the Enlightenment: The experiences of eighteenth-century France
and Prussia, Thames and Hudson, 1985, p. 176.
Eighteenth-Century Answers and Twentieth-Century Questions, ed. James Schmidt, University of California
of relying on others to do their thinking for them, be it state officials or leaders of the church. As Steven Lestition explains, Kant’s separation of the public and private uses of reason was his way of distinguishing between the long-term objective “of any given community, and of the human race itself”, which focused on “the so-called inner, private moral development of individuals”, and “the kind of reasoning clerics or obedient scholars undertook in limited historical-cultural settings”. The former was the more important goal and required the “public” use of reason, while the latter concerned itself with more narrowly prescribed and pragmatic considerations, which required the “private” use of reason. Kant believed the age in which he lived was one of enlightenment even though it was not yet fully enlightened. He explains that “much is still lacking for men to be completely able - or even to be placed in a situation where they would be able - to use their own reason confidently and properly in religious matters without the guidance of another.”

According to H. B. Nisbet, the term Aufklärung refers to a broadly based “movement of theoretical and practical reform which encompassed all areas of knowledge and experience.” During the last two decades of the eighteenth-century the term “was in widespread use as a positive expression for the state or process of intellectual, moral, and cultural advancement, whether of individuals, of whole societies, or of past historical eras.” Kant’s answer to the question was an attempt to clarify and determine the theoretical underpinning of the meaning of this process. His essay, which appeared in the Berlinische Monatsschrift in 1784, was a response to a previous article in the same journal by Johann Friedrich Zöllner concerning the question of whether marriages ought to be sanctified by the church. Zöllner, in defence of church marriages, criticized an article written by one of the journal’s editors, Johann Erich Biester, who argued, “in the name of Aufklärung or progress, that marriages should no longer be solemnized in church, but should consist of a purely civil contract.” In Zöllner’s view, Biester had misused “the term Aufklärung to justify socially disruptive measures, and predicted a general decline if such measures should be implemented.” What Zöllner made explicit in his footnote was the need to

---

6 Ibid., pp. 59-60.
8 Kant, “What is Enlightenment?”, p. 62.
10 Ibid., p. 79.
11 Ibid.
12 Ibid.
clarify the meaning of a term, which he regarded as important as that of truth. By demanding an answer to the question *What is Enlightenment* he highlighted an inherent tension within the Aufklärung between theory and practice. Kant’s attempt at theoretical clarification left unanswered the question of how Aufklärung, as an expression of the general objective of cultural advancement, could translate into practical measures of social reform.

Kant’s essay, however, was only intended to outline the principles upon which the debate over reform should take place and not to outline a blueprint for determining the answer to contentious specific issues of social, political and religious reform. In fact, Zöllner’s claim that he did not exactly understand the meaning of the term Aufklärung was probably somewhat disingenuous.\(^{(13)}\) He was a member of the Mittwochsgesellschaft, a secret society of “the Friends of Enlightenment”, which was already actively engaged in attempting to answer the question he had posed. J.K.W. Mohsen had presented a paper to the society on the question, “What is to be done towards the enlightenment of fellow citizens”, in the same month that Zöllner’s article appeared. As Schmidt explains, Zöllner’s footnote reflected the “intense interest in the question within the small group of influential men of letters, jurists, and civil servants who made up the Mittwochsgesellschaft.”\(^{(14)}\) How exactly the Prussian state was to bridge the great distance between the existing political, social and religious situation and the requirements of truly enlightened reform was the underlying source of tension which spurred attempts to clearly define the meaning of Enlightenment. This marked the third phase of the Aufklärung in which the question of true and false enlightenment came to the forefront of learned debate in Berlin. The first phase being the movements rationalistic beginnings and culmination, and the second the romantic reaction which found expression most notably in the *Sturm und Drang* literature of Goethe and others.\(^{(15)}\)

What characterized the first phase was an emphasis on religion and morality as well as clarity and distinctness of thought. Religious issues had been at the forefront of learned debate in Germany since the Reformation and the denominational strife that ensued, first with the Peasants’ Wars of the sixteenth century, and later with the Thirty Years War. By the second half of the eighteenth century Pietism had replaced Protestantism as a vehicle for religious reform by channeling “all anti-orthodox ideas and movements that had


\(^{(14)}\) Ibid.
developed since the establishment of Protestantism through the Reformation.”16 As a “subjective kind of religious practice that was centered on the individual’s inward relation to God”, Pietism served as an alternative to the Lutheran Protestantism which had become inflexible in dealing with the social disruptions created by the Thirty Years War. Although Pietism itself eventually succumbed to its own form of dogmatism, it also opened the way for *Aufklärung* by creating a “a more tolerant atmosphere for thought in general, and by raising society’s conscience.” It was, however, the religious dogmatism which had taken hold of Pietism that drew a rationalistic response from the German *Aufklärer.* 17

The tension between rationalism and pietism was central to the way in which the debate over the definition of *Aufklärung* evolved. On one side were the followers of Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz (1646-1716), who sought a rationalistic reconciliation of Catholicism and Protestantism, as well as the sectarian differences between the latter. Leibniz provided a philosophical proof for God’s existence, which combined a strictly physical explanation of natural phenomena with a metaphysical explanation consistent with Christianity. As “the last great philosophical system-builder of the seventeenth century”, Leibniz had produced a comprehensive philosophy which Lewis White Beck describes as having “had an answer to almost every question put to it.”18 Continuing in the same philosophical spirit of a rationally-grounded system of thought, Christian Wolff (1679-1754) laid the foundation for what became “the dominant intellectual system and movement in Germany from about 1720 to about 1754.”19 Wolff elevated philosophy to the position of a superior science and emancipated it from its dependency on theology and law. With the creation of a rational theology, reason became the measuring stick against which theological arguments could be measured.

On the other side were those influenced by the pietistic theologians Philip Spener (1635-1705) and August Hermann Francke (1663-1727), who emphasized the deeply personal nature of religious experience realized through introspection and prayer rather than rational demonstration. Less concerned with the metaphysical rationalization of Christian theology the pietists focused on practical measures of legal and social reform, such as the establishment of schools, orphanages, and workhouses. Christian Thomasius (1655-1628),

15 Roehr, p. 7.
16 Ibid.
17 Ibid., p. 8.
19 Ibid., p. 6.
the jurist who was the first professor to give his lectures in German rather than Latin, for example, was instrumental in the abolition of witchcraft trials and the removal of torture. He, along with Wolff, played a significant role in the popularization of Enlightenment thought. Generally speaking, reform was moving ahead on two fronts with only limited friction between those committed to a Leibniz-Wolffian approach to philosophy and those committed to Thomasian Pietism. Rationalists and pietists were largely in agreement regarding the importance of social and educational reform, and both movements emphasized the importance of the individual. The source of tension between them stemmed from differences over what each deemed the most significant aspect of this newly emerging subjectivism. The importance Pietists placed on personal religious faith was not easily reconcilable with the Aufklärung's insistence that reason was the true source of individual autonomy. The disciples of Wolff and Thomasius "carried on a running controversy for the next forty years, and it was marked by odium theologicum and general nastiness on both sides." 20

A group of pietists at the University of Halle, led by Francke, accused Wolff of heresy for the ideas he put forth in an essay entitled "On the Practical Philosophy of the Chinese", in which he argued that the commonalties between Chinese and Western ethics demonstrated that human reason, and not revelation, was the universal basis for a system of ethics. The Pietists convinced Frederick William I that Wolff's ideas promoted atheism and he was subsequently expelled from the university. Nevertheless, the connection he attempted to establish between morality and the power of reason became the basis upon which later Aufklärer would develop more fully the idea that rational knowledge facilitated virtuous behaviour. Kant, for example, praised Wolff in his Critique of Practical Reason for his explication of the "ethics of perfection", in which the intellect's ability to conceive the world's perfection was at the same time the source for discerning one's own perfection. He shared Wolff's view that "the will necessarily strives for a perfection which the intellect has discerned. Rational willing is definitive of morality."21 As well, achieving perfection, according to Wolff, was pleasurable and therefore a source of happiness. Thus, Enlightenment ideals properly articulated could serve as a means for increasing the happiness of all members of society. Although pleasure in itself could not serve as the criterion of perfection, it could provide an indirect reward for "rational willing" independent of any consideration of divine reward. Morality, happiness, and knowledge were thus bound together collectively and individually through the power of

20 Ibid., p. 7.
21 Ibid., p. 13.
reason. Rationality was both a means and an end, and philosophy was, according to Wolff, the "science of happiness." 22

The Pietists rejected Wolff's optimistic view that reason in itself could be a source of morality. Instead they adhered to Spener's belief in the power of personal revelatory insight based on a "continual praxis pietatis", in which the path to Jesus Christ leads inward to the depths of one's heart where the kingdom of God may be revealed through continual self-examination."23 Following Wolff's expulsion from the University of Halle, however, mainstream Pietism became increasingly dogmatic under Spener's student Francke. In response, 'separatist' groups were formed which rebelled against Pietism's contempt for everything "this worldly". The 'separatists' retained "strong elements of German mysticism and chiliastic, and consequently [their doctrines] possessed a much more sensuous character than Halle Pietism allowed."24 Their reaction to both Wolffian rationalism and religious dogmatism prefigured that of later writers associated with the *Sturm und Drang* and counter-Enlightenment. After Wolff was reinstated to his position at the University of Halle in 1740, when Frederick the Great came to the throne and Aufklärung was explicitly recognized as the philosophical basis of Prussian absolutism, the debate between Pietists and Aufklärer became more intense. Greater emphasis was given to that missing "element of feeling" 25 , which the rationalist philosophies of Leibniz and Wolff had failed to address. Thinkers such as Baumgarten, Mendelssohn, and Crusius, for example, developed aesthetic theories which broadened the terms of the epistemological debate by emphasizing the importance of empirical sensibility.

According to Wolff's epistemological system, sense perception was organized and refined by rational means, obscure empirically facts were perfected through reason, and precepts were, in the process, replaced by concepts. What was missing in Wolff's philosophy, however, was a theory of aesthetics. 26 Alexander Baumgarten (1714-1762) took a step toward filling this gap by pointing out that "enhancing its vividness and clarity" could perfect sense perception in itself.27 Moses Mendelssohn (1729-1786) expanded upon this in 1755 with the publication of *On Feelings (Empfindungen)*, in which he shifted the focus of attention from the object of perception to the "mind's own acts and passions, sensations, thoughts and emotions", which he described as the

---

22 Roehr, p. 45.
23 Ibid.
24 Ibid.
25 Ibid., p. 72.
27 Ibid.
“harmony of the powers of the soul”. The appreciation of beauty, for Mendelssohn, resides not in the “perception of perfection”, but rather in the “perfection of perception”. 28 This subjective empiricism seriously undermined confidence in the objective rationalism of Wolff’s system. The consequences of this epistemological shift in emphasis were twofold. On the one hand, it marked, as Beck points out, “a sharp advance in the direction of Kant’s mature aesthetic theory and the aesthetic theory of the later idealists and romantics.” 29 On the other hand, it recalibrated the epistemological parameters of the debate by adding an empiricist component put forth with greater theoretical clarity than had been previously realized. Moreover, the battle between philosophy and theology was now to be increasingly fought in terms of the phenomenology of an individual’s understanding of his relationship to God and nature.

The Pietist clergyman and philosopher Christian August Crusius (1715 - 1775), for example, sought to reverse the philosophy-theology relationship in Wolffian systems of thought by claiming that philosophy in itself could be no basis for either religious faith or human virtue. Theology had greater authority, for Crusius, because neither the mysteries of religion, nor the “brute facticity of the contingent world”, could be adequately explained by a rationalist model of thought that seemed to validate the pantheism and fatalism of a Spinozistic view of God and nature. 30 Wolff’s mistake, according to Crusius, was to explain existence in terms of logical possibility and non-self-contradictoriness. By applying the rules of reason (the laws of contradiction and sufficient reason) to possibility and ‘actual’ existence, Wolff had mistakenly reversed the relationship between the two. For Crusius existence precedes possibility, therefore the source of conceptual possibility is derived from our experience of actual, or real, existence. The laws of human understanding are grounded in experience for Crusius in much the same way as they were for Hume (whom he had not read). Crusius concluded, “like Hume, that causation is neither analytically necessary nor an empirical generalization.” 31

This parallel with Hume is matched in Crusius’s thought with an important affinity with Kantian ethics. Nature is governed by a strict determinism, which does not apply to man whose will is free. Human virtue is realized in human actions when the command of God is followed. Loving and obeying God is a motivation, which transcends the contingency of the empirical world. Human freedom is derived, pace Kant, from adherence

28 Ibid.
29 Ibid.
30 Ibid., p. 15.
31 Ibid., p. 17.
to an objective law or criterion of moral behaviour, but the source of this freedom is, contra Kant, located in the will of God rather than rational willing. It was between these two incommensurable currents of philosophical and theological thought that the question of Enlightenment became such a contentious one in the third phase of Aufklärung during which the question of true and false Enlightenment was directly addressed. At the heart of this question was the issue of human autonomy and its relationship to reason, on the one hand, and religious experience, on the other. The dispute over what constituted truly enlightened reform was fought on epistemological grounds that increasingly revealed the immanent collision of two seemingly incompatible views of the relationship between society and the individual. These opposing standpoints were best exemplified by Kant’s rationalistic notion of autonomy, on one side, and Hamann’s deeply religious, and antirationalistic view of human freedom on the other. The contrast between these opposing epistemological sources encapsulated the dialectical core of the diversity of opinions which formed the discourse concerning the meaning of Aufklärung, and set the terms upon which the polemical debate between the Aufklärung and the Sturm und Drang took place.

Johann Georg Hamann was, according to Isaiah Berlin, the most influential leader of a group of “thinkers who were in fact the philosophical wing of German cultural resistance movements - of Sturm und Drang, of ‘pre-romanticism’ and, indeed, of romanticism itself.” Recognized as the father of the Sturm und Drang, Hamann wrote on a number of subjects ranging from aesthetic theory and the irreducible significance of cultural diversity, to the role of language in thought, and the social and historical aspects of rationality. Perhaps his greatest contribution to the Counter-Enlightenment was his insistence that language should replace epistemology as the central focus of philosophical investigation. Hamann’s anti-Enlightenment stance originated from a personal epiphanous experience from which he concluded that all of creation could be interpreted as containing an allegorical message from God similar to the contents of the Bible itself. His deep Lutheran pietism, combined with his rejection of the Aufklärung’s epistemological assumptions, led him to conclude that nature and history “consist in hieroglyphs, divine ciphers, secret symbols, and puzzles”, which could be read as providing an “enigmatic commentary upon the divine word”. For Hamann: “god is a writer, and his creation is

32 Ibid., p. 18.
his language." The secularized perspective of man and nature which modern science had adopted was blind to this deeper spiritual reality because its descriptions of the world traded in abstract cause and effect mechanisms which ignored supernatural or final causes.

According to Hamann, the supernatural was embodied within natural phenomena. Similarly, human thoughts and actions could be interpreted, or deciphered, as a symbolic manifestation of the word of God. The rationalistic dissection of man and nature was a destructive force, which threatened to drain life of its true meaning and purpose. As Isaiah Berlin put it, "genuine knowledge is direct" for Hamann, and "gained through some species of immediate acquaintance; the senses, outer and inner, do not refer: they present data directly, and any attempt to organize such data into systems distorts their concrete actuality." Enlightenment philosophers, especially in France, and increasingly in Germany under Frederick the Great, had cut themselves off from reality with their abstract, and hypostasized epistemologies. Hamann had no patience for the theoretical conclusions reached by either empiricists or rationalists, all of whom in one way or another distorted the direct immediacy of thought and experience, and thus misrepresented the true nature of one's relationship with others, with nature, and with God. In his *Sokratische Denkwürdigkeit* of 1759 Hamann argued that faith is the basis of human understanding, not because it refutes reason, but because it stakes out the limits of rational inquiry. He rejected the Aufklärer's belief that philosophy could be useful and beneficial to the public. Their confidence was misguided for it was based on an illusory notion of the 'public', one that referred to an empty abstraction that threatened to dissolve individual autonomy within the hegemonic philosophical consensus of those committed to enlightened social, political, and religious reform. In the *Sokratische Denkwürdigkeit* he lampooned this notion of 'public' by facetiously dedicating the work "to the Public, or Nobody, the Well Known". Socrates had served as an example that philosophy was not necessarily compatible with the public interest, and the search for truth was, in fact, quite often opposed to it. "Truth", for Hamann, was not realized by rational reflection and mediated by the principles of reason, but was directly perceived through our sensual perception of the external objective world. It was from this epistemological starting point that he developed his aesthetic theory as an alternative to those put forth by Wolff, Baumgarten, and Mendelssohn.

36 Ibid. p. 21.
38 Ibid., p. 168.
With the publication of his *Aesthetica in nuce* in 1762, Hamann established what became, according to Beiser, "the bible for the aesthetics of the Sturm und Drang, the holy writ for the epistemology of the Romantiker." In it he provided a radical alternative to those aesthetic theories based on accepted rationalist and classicist rules and conventions. As well, he rejected the general movement toward subjectivism, which obscured the metaphysical significance of art by failing to recognize it as a medium for perceiving reality directly through the senses. Aesthetic experience, for Hamann, is neither "a confused conception of reality (Wolff), a clear perception of appearances (Baumgarten)", nor merely a "pleasant sensation (Mendelssohn)". Rather, it is a source of immediate, non-discursive, knowledge. Hamann’s aesthetic theory is a fusion of subjectivism and objectivism in which the artist’s innermost feelings and desires merge with his attempts to objectively reproduce the sensory effects produced by his/her interaction with nature. The purpose of a work of art is to reveal the word of God by accurately imitating nature, while at the same time expressing the “innermost personality of the artist”. By synthesizing subjective expressionism with objective experiential reality, Hamann’s aesthetic theory served as a starting point from which later Sturm und Drang and Romantic writers would oppose Kant’s critical philosophy.

As Garret Green explains, Hamann was critical of Kant’s definition of Enlightenment as one’s release from his “self-incurred immaturity”. In a 1784 letter to Christian Jakob Kraus, Hamann challenged Kant’s metaphorical characterization of Enlightenment in terms of “immaturity” and “guardianship”. What bothered him most was Kant’s claim that the “immaturity” of those in need of enlightenment was “self-incurred”, that the unenlightened themselves were responsible, through laziness and lack of resolution, for not having the courage to think for themselves. Kant’s unidentified “others”, upon which the immature depend to do their thinking for them, Hamann identified as those political guardians whom Kant claimed must be obeyed. Reversing Kant’s formulation, Hamann shifted the blame from the “falsely accused immature one” to the “blindness of his guardian, who purports to be able to see, and for that reason must bear the whole responsibility for the fault. Immaturity only becomes culpable, ‘self-incurred,’ when ‘it surrenders to the guidance of a blind ... guardian and
leader" - in other words, to an 'enlightened' guardian like Kant.\(^\text{43}\) Hamann's objection to the metaphor, or parable, Kant uses to define Enlightenment reveals an important epistemological difference between the two thinkers' philosophical approaches. Hamann is providing an example of his "aesthetic" critical approach to undermine Kant's "dialectical" method.\(^\text{44}\) By focusing on the meaning of the metaphor Hamann relativises the underlying assumption of Kant's definition that reason is a universal and impartial source of Enlightenment accessible to everyone who has the courage to think for himself.

In his *Critique of Pure Reason* of 1781 Kant explicated the epistemological assumptions upon which he predicated his definition of *Aufklärung*. In more general terms, Kant's objective was to resolve the apparently irreconcilable epistemological difficulties in which philosophy had become mired. According to Daniel Bonevac, Kant's self-proclaimed Copernican revolution in philosophy synthesized the rationalism of the dogmatist philosophers with the immanence (sense experience is the source of real knowledge) of the skeptics, thus avoiding the difficulties each philosophical position had run into.\(^\text{45}\) In order to integrate the rationalism of the former with the empirical realism of the latter Kant maintained that it was necessary for philosophers to adopt the transcendental method, by which the relationship between knowledge and external objects of perception would be reversed. Instead of insisting that our knowledge of the world must conform to external objects, Kant argued that objects of perception must conform to the rules, or categories, by which our minds structure our perceptions of those external objects. Kant's epistemological reversal avoided the pitfalls encountered by both a dogmatic rationalist such as Descartes, who attempted to extend the power of thought into the sphere of objective empirical reality, and a skeptical empiricist such as Hume, who concludes that nothing can be known of the causal forces at work behind any given set of empirical data.\(^\text{46}\) Kant reconciled the contradiction between these two views by separating the world of sensation and perception (phenomena) from that of things-in-themselves (noumena). This made it possible for him to reverse the relationship between concept and object, between thought and perception. Rather than originating in the passive perception of external objects, ideas constitute those objects according to rationally discernible categories, which structure our active cognitive awareness of the

\[^{43}\] Garrett Green, "Modern Culture Comes of Age: Hamann versus Kant on the Root metaphor of Enlightenment", in *What is Enlightenment*, p. 293.

\[^{44}\] Ibid., p. 299.


\[^{46}\] Ibid., p. 45.
phenomenal world. Nothing can be known of things-in-themselves directly, but it is possible to recognize the rationally structured patterns by which the mind forms representations of external objects by combining and organizing sensory data. Skepticism is thus avoided, for no claim to knowing the thing-in-itself is being made. At the same time, dogmatism is avoided because ideal rationalistic forms are prevented from being projected directly into the phenomenal realm.

Kant's argument for the synthesizing power of his transcendental method was based on his claim that the pure concepts of the understanding are independent forms that are indirectly recognized through the activity by which the mind represents to itself the process by which it unifies the sense data which constitutes its object of perception. As Bonevac explains, this is the "key contention" of Kant's subjective deduction:

The ground of the consciousness of unity is the unity of consciousness. The source of our consciousness of the unity of objects is the underlying unity of our consciousness itself. This unity of apperception is "the a priori ground of all concepts" (A 107), for all concepts unify the manifold of sensibility into objects. The most general concepts, relating to the form of an object in general, are the categories. The unity of apperception and with it the categories underlie the lawlike connections we find among objects of experience and the synthetic a priori knowledge we have of them.⁴⁷

Contra Hume, we are directly aware of the necessary connections between the series of sense data, which the mind structures into coherent concepts of unified objects. Kant thus shares the rationalist's realism while at the same time attempting to incorporate the skeptic's position regarding immanence. This process whereby consciousness binds together sense data in accordance with its own unified structure is not, however, purely subjective. Of greater importance to the transcendental method is Kant's objective deduction in which he attempted to establish the relationship between the judgments and the categories. Otherwise his position would have remained vulnerable to Humean skepticism because the subjective deduction assumes from the outset the unity of consciousness. Kant was in agreement with Hume that there is nothing in empirical consciousness itself from which to discover the unity of its contents. Nor can we determine that a given succession of mental states is unified into a single empirical consciousness by examining the contents of those states: "the combination

⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 53.
(conjunction) of a manifold in general can never come to us through the senses, and cannot, therefore, be already contained in the pure form of sensible intuition.\textsuperscript{48}

Rational intuition is the source from which the objective status of the categories is derived. This intuition is based on a modified form of the Catesian cogito. The transcendental unity of apperception is grounded within the "I think" from which one's awareness of the a priori knowledge of the unified synthesis between consciousness and its sense perceptions is derived. This awareness comes from the recognition of the 'form', and never the contents, of both actual and possible experience from which it cannot depart. We are directly aware of the rules by which consciousness organizes its perceptions of the world, and this is the objective source of our a priori knowledge. It is the rational logical form of our judgments (quantity, quality, relation, and modality) that correspond to the categories, which relate to objects, and the pure concepts of the understanding. This correspondence, roughly speaking, is the transcendental basis for equating the unity of consciousness with the unity of the object of perception itself. Thus, judgments and objects (categories) are simultaneously the products of the same unifying synthesis that serves as the foundation for knowledge, which is, according to Bonevac, "always knowledge of objects through judgments. This suggests that judgments, at least of the sort appropriate to knowledge, are possible only by virtue of the unifying activity of the categories.\textsuperscript{49}

Hamann's response to Kant's Critique, the Metacritique on the Purism of Reason, was written not long after his letter to Kraus, and it became, according to Beiser, the first important statement of post-Kantian philosophy. Not published until 1800, the Metakritik nevertheless found expression through J.G. Herder (1744-1803) and F.H. Jacobi (1743-1819), both of whom received copies. Its significance was that it was the first work explicitly to raise the question of the possibility of reason criticizing itself, of whether the power of criticism could be turned against those very conceptual tools that made criticism possible in the first place. "If everything on heaven and earth must submit to criticism, as Kant says, then ipso facto criticism itself must submit to criticism, or what Hamann calls 'meta-criticism'.\textsuperscript{50} Reason, according to Hamann, is not an independent faculty of consciousness, but an activity inextricably bound to our thoughts and actions, which themselves are deeply rooted within a linguistic and cultural context. Kant's phenomena/noumena distinction was mistakenly based on the assumption that reason is not bound by linguistic conventions, that it somehow enjoys independent status as a

\textsuperscript{48} Ibid., p. 55.
\textsuperscript{49} Ibid., p. 49.
transcendent form of intuition inherent in human understanding, yet not directly recognizable. Hamann rejected
the notion that reason could serve as an independent, permanent criterion of truth applicable to all times and
places. Kant’s *Critique* exemplified the tendency of rationalistic philosophies in general to set up artificial
dualisms that severed the connection between sensibility and understanding. Kant had divided the faculties of the
mind so sharply that any sense of their relationship to one another was either lost or hopelessly confused.\(^5^1\) In
Hamann’s view, Kant had not only failed to refute Humean skepticism; he had also pushed philosophy further
away from establishing unified epistemological principles.

One thinker who shared Hamann’s opposition to Enlightenment philosophy was Friedrich Heinrich
Jacobi, whose critique of rationalism echoed a number of themes developed in the *Sokratische Denkwürdigkeit*. Like Hamann, Jacobi believed that philosophy should not be in the business of attempting to shape public
consciousness according to the dictates of a few influential Berlin thinkers who claimed to be following only the
guiding light of reason in their proposals for religious, cultural, and social reform. He shared Rousseau’s fears
that the arts and sciences have eroded natural sociability through the corruption of morals, and shared Pascal’s
view that without revelation reason leads to skepticism. The “leading theme of his “Spinoza Letters”, for
example, was Pascal’s statement that “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”.\(^5^2\) This quote also served as an epigraph to his 1789 “David Hume on Faith, or Idealism and Realism,
A Dialogue”, in which Jacobi puts forth his incisive critique of Kantian idealism. In his view, Kant had
attempted to do the impossible, to reconcile skepticism and dogmatism within an epistemological synthesis that
simultaneously affirmed and denied the existence of the thing-in-itself. Kant had assumed, on the one hand, that
external objects cause our representations, but then, on the other, claimed that from these representations we can
know nothing of the things-in-themselves. Jacobi summed up the inherent contradiction of transcendental
idealism in his statement: “I need the assumption of things-in-themselves to enter the Kantian system; but with
this assumption it is not possible for me to remain inside it.”\(^5^3\) Like Hamann Jacobi was an opponent of all forms

---

\(^{5^0}\) Beiser, *Fate of Reason*, p. 39.
\(^{5^1}\) Ibid., p. 41.
\(^{5^2}\) Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi, “Concerning the Doctrine of Spinoza”, in *The Main Philosophical Writings And
The Novel Allwill*, Translated from the German, with an Introductory Study, Notes, and Bibliography by George
\(^{5^3}\) Beiser, *ibid.*, p. 124.
of idealism that defined knowledge and truth according to rationally derived abstract principles not grounded in actual experience. Enlightenment philosophy was moving in a direction, which threatened to circumvent the roles of faith, feeling, and intuition as the true sources of self-understanding.

We do not create or instruct ourselves; we are in no way a priori, nor can we know or do anything a priori, or experience anything without.... experience. We find ourselves situated on this earth, and as our actions become there, so too becomes our cognition; as our moral character turns out to be, so too does our insight into all things related to it. As the heart so too the mind; and as the mind so too the heart. Man cannot artificially contrive through reason to be wise, 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.54

The historical context from which Jacobi developed and made concrete his philosophical opposition to the Aufklärung was the “Pantheism dispute”, which is generally recognized as marking the philosophical crisis that ended, if not settled, the question concerning true and false Enlightenment. The crisis solidified, without necessarily resolving, the opposing philosophical/theological positions regarding the epistemological foundations of religious experience. Although the dispute initially concerned the seemingly inconsequential issue of Lessing’s supposed Spinozism, it ultimately triggered a full-scale debate in Germany that ultimately led to the early Romantic reaction against the core values and beliefs of the Aufklärung as a legitimate vehicle for religious, social, and cultural reform. The Pantheism controversy created a philosophical discourse in which previous tensions between the authority of reason and the primacy of empirical sensibility became hardened, and for many of those involved, ultimately irreconcilable. Jacobi’s news of Lessing’s apparent Spinozistic pantheism mobilized both sides of the Enlightenment debate and intensified the zeal with which those involved would pursue their respective lines of argument in the pages of the Berlinische Monatsschrift. Although Kant’s Critique may have precipitated the escalation of the debate by drawing the response of those opposed to his rationalistic reconciliation of philosophy, it was Jacobi who pushed the issue to the point of acute and irreversible crisis. As Beiser tells us, Jacobi’s Briefe über die Lehre von Spinoza, published in 1785, cast serious doubt on the Aufklärung’s faith in reason. “Referring to the effect of the Briefe on the public, Goethe spoke of an explosion, and Hegel wrote of ‘a thunderbolt out of the blue.’”55

54 Jacobi, ibid.
55 Beiser, ibid., p. 46.
The explosion was triggered in the summer of 1780 when Jacobi presented Lessing with Goethe's unpublished poem, "Prometheus". Jacobi was surprised to find that Lessing shared the poem's Spinozistic point of view. His recollection of their conversation in his 1785 Briefe reveals that Lessing was sympathetic to Spinoza's theological position. He told Jacobi: "The orthodox concepts of the Divinity are no longer for me: I cannot stomach them. Hen kai pan! I know of nothing else." Jacobi responded by asking Lessing if this meant that he was "pretty well in agreement with Spinoza", to which Lessing replied: "If I have to name myself after anyone, I know of nobody else." The news came as shock to Jacobi, who expected that Lessing would side with him in his fight against the rationalists. "To be sure, there is nothing that I would have suspected less, than to find a Spinozist or pantheist in you." Thus, when Lessing unequivocally stated that "there is no other philosophy than the philosophy of Spinoza", Jacobi took this to mean that he had become an atheist. Although no one seriously doubted Jacobi's account of his conversation with Lessing, many objected to his contention that Lessing's pantheism amounted to a confession of atheism. Mendelssohn for one believed Jacobi had misinterpreted Lessing's theological position, which he characterized as a refined pantheism in which God was not strictly synomous with the impersonal forces of nature. The question of what kind of Spinozist Lessing really was brought into sharp focus the central issue of a long-standing theological debate, one that Lessing himself had addressed earlier.

Whereas in his early theological writings Lessing had adhered to a rationalist standpoint from which he intended to rid "Christianity of spurious historical accretions" by only accepting religious truths that were "accessible to reason unaided by any positive revelation", he later adopted a more nuanced position which both orthodox believers and enlightenment rationalists rejected. With the publication of some ancient theological texts from the Wolfenbüttel library, Lessing had attempted "to show that the texts expressed beliefs that reflected deeply felt human values and needs and that, therefore, though not rationally demonstrable, were not irrational". He then published another set of texts in 1771 that included Hermann Samuel Reimarus' trenchant critique of the validity of the biblical narratives. Although he included his own defence of Christian historical faith with the other texts, their publication triggered a vehement reaction from the religious orthodox, most

56 Jacobi, ibid., p. 189.
notably Pastor Goeze, who accused him of being hypocritical and subversive. The two sets of texts drew fire from both sides because neither could see what Lessing was getting at,

\[
\text{namely that there is more to the biblical narrative (i.e. The “letter” of Scripture) than the universal truths implicit in Christianity (i.e. The “spirit”), and yet substantially less. There is less (this is what the orthodox could not appreciate) because no single historical event can ever be so related to all men as to carry for them equal authority.} \]^{58}
\]

It is this insight which was the basis for his famous saying that “there is a ‘broad ugly ditch’ separating the accidental events of history from the necessary truths of religion”. When Jacobi was pressing Lessing to clarify the nature of his Spinozism this was what he had in mind.\(^59\) He saw in Lessing’s ambivalent theological position an opportunity for putting forth his own position on what he deemed to be the only alternative to Spinoza’s, and all other rationalistic philosophies - an affirmation of faith which required a salto mortale.

Jacobi agreed with Lessing that Spinoza’s philosophy was the only philosophy, but told him that he rejected its fatalistic consequences. “If there are only efficient, but no final causes, then the only function that the faculty of thought has in the whole of nature is that of observer; its proper business is to accompany the mechanism of the efficient causes.”\(^60\) In his view, the only solution to this epistemological dilemma was a leap of faith from which a personal relationship with God could be established, and a strong sense of individual moral autonomy salvaged. Lessing’s refusal to make such a leap was for Jacobi tantamount to a confession of atheism. There was no midway point between philosophical rationalism and intuitive faith. Either Lessing was opposed to Enlightenment rationalism, or he was one of its proponents. Jacobi’s interpretation of their conversation was intended to stress precisely this point, that Lessing, the great representative of the Enlightenment, had in the end accepted rational theism. Lessing had in Jacobi’s view chosen the wrong side of that “broad ugly ditch” by dissolving our understanding of human autonomy and faith within an impersonal pantheistic universe.

\(^{58}\) Ibid., p. 57-8.
\(^{59}\) Ibid.
\(^{60}\) Jacobi, ibid.
Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi’s Critique of Enlightenment Rationalism

The reason that Jacobi’s publication of his conversation with Lessing had such a tremendous impact on public opinion was because it unequivocally set the terms of the ensuing debate between pietists and rationalists. Prior to the dispute Spinozistic pantheism represented an extreme form of metaphysical rationalism which threatened the foundations of religious belief. Thomasian Pietists such as Joachim Lange and Johann Franz Budde, for example, claimed that the rationally demonstrative philosophical systems of Leibniz and Wolff consistently applied would result in Spinozistic atheism and fatalism. Although Jacobi was opposed to the negative rationalistic consequences of Spinoza’s philosophy, he was, at the same time, attracted to its radically subversive potential. Spinoza’s view that immediate experience was the source from which our direct awareness of God’s presence could be realized through intense inward reflection without reference to the Bible - which was only a product of history and culture, and not divine inspiration - dovetailed nicely with the political reaction against the institutional authority of mainstream Protestantism. Thus, Spinoza’s philosophy could serve as a prime example of how rationalism threatened religious belief, while at the same time articulating the basis for a deeper sense of faith and piety. Jacobi saw very clearly that this combination of rational nihilism and fideistic irrationalism might serve as an effective vehicle for launching his attack on Enlightenment rationalism. He understood that news of Lessing’s Spinozism would fuel the fires of the Enlightenment’s preoccupation with the faith versus reason debate, and hoped that their epistemological incompatibility would become obvious. As Beiser explains, Lessing served as a potent symbol for what was wrong with the Aufklärung. For Jacobi to reveal that one of the “most honest and radical thinkers of the Aufklärung” was in fact a Spinozist highlighted the hypocritical philosophical position that the Berlin philosopher’s had adopted. They employed philosophical criticism for purely utilitarian purposes without having the courage to extend such criticism to sensitive moral, religious, and political questions. This created a dilemma: “if they remained true to their ideals of free inquiry

---

61 Beiser, ibid., p. 49.
and criticism, they would have to abandon their program of Aufklärung; but if they stuck to their program of Aufklärung, they would have to limit free inquiry and criticism.” 63

A brief sketch of Jacobi’s background and early career will help to shed some light on the way in which the development of his thought culminated in the triggering of the cognitive crisis of 1785 that shook the epistemological foundations of the Aufklärung. Friedriech Heinrich Jacobi was born in 1743 of a merchant family in Düsseldorf. At sixteen he began a short-lived apprenticeship at a merchant house in Frankfurt-am-Main, after which he spent three years studying under Georges-Louis Le Sage in Geneva, where he was introduced to traditional philosophy as well as the thought of the French philosophies, most notably Rousseau and Bonnet. 64 Following his studies in Geneva, Jacobi wanted to study medicine in Glasgow but was prevented from doing so by his father, who from early on expected his son to pursue a business career. After returning to Düsseldorf at the age of nineteen to assist in the running of the family business, he had a brief affair with an older maidservant, Anna Katherina Müller, who, as a result of the liaison, gave birth to a son. Jacobi paid Müller to keep silent for fear that it would interfere with his plans to marry Elisabeth (Betty) von Clermont. 65 After their marriage in 1764 he and Betty moved to his father’s country estate in Pempelfort, which became a “centre of social, literary, and philosophical activities.” 66 Among those who visited Jacobi’s estate were Wieland, Goethe, Lavater, Diderot, Hamann, Sophie La Roche, Princess Galitzin, Fürstenberg, and Herder. Others included a congregation of Pietists whose religiosity was consistent, in many respects, with Jacobi’s strong sense of inward-looking spirituality. In 1765 he became a founding member of the Parfait Amitié, the Düssldorf Freemasons lodge, among whom he was the only Protestant and only commoner. It was through Masonic contacts that Jacobi was able to secure a position in the Hofkammer of the duchy of Jülich-Berg in 1772, where he was responsible for agriculture and industry. In 1779 he became the minister of customs and commerce in Munich to the elector of Bavaria, but this position lasted only four months, as the result of personal rivalries, and Jacobi subsequently returned to his previous position in Düsseldorf. 67 Then in 1784 he received a devastating emotional blow, the death of his wife Betty, which came not long after the loss his eleven-year-old son. Although he never remarried,

63 Ibid., p.76.
64 Di Giovanni, “Introduction”, The Main Philosophical Writings, p. 5.
65 Ibid., p. 6.
66 Ibid.
Jacobi remained at Pemplfort until 1794, when French troops invaded nearby Düsseldorf. He subsequently moved north to Wandsbeck, where he stayed with Cladius for a short time before moving on to settle in Eutin.68 He retired in 1812 and spent the last years of his life overseeing the publication of his *Werke*, dying in Munich at the age of 76.69

Jacobi’s reflections on his early years provide us with a statement of what he understood to be a central driving force throughout his intellectual development. In his 4 November 1783 letter to Mendelssohn, which he later published as part of the 1785 edition of “Concerning the Doctrine of Spinoza” in the midst of the Pantheism dispute Jacobi reflected that from early in his childhood he had “noticed that real depth of sense [Tiefsinn] has a common direction.”70

I was still wearing my child-frock when I began to worry about things of another world. I was eight or nine years old when my childish depth of sense led me to certain remarkable “visions” (I know no better word for them) that still stick to me to this day. My yearning to attain certainty regarding the higher expectations of man grew with the years, and it became the leading thread on which all my fortunes were to hang. ...I came to Geneva where I found excellent men who received me with magnanimous love and truly fatherly fidelity. I later came across others of equal reputation, and others of even greater fame, who did not however ever become as much to me; and I often entrusted myself to them at my own great disadvantage. This gradually brought me back to some trust in myself; I learned to gather my own forces and muster them for counsel.

This passage combines two important elements in Jacobi’s thought, a spiritual capacity grounded in a “depth of sense” capable of revealing “remarkable visions”, and a “yearning to attain certainty”, not on the authority of others, but by independent intellectual means. From the beginning Jacobi seems to have been drawn simultaneously towards both the power of reason and revelatory insight. Steven Lestition, commenting on Jacobi’s role in the Pantheism dispute, describes Jacobi’s approach as paradoxical. By employing on the one hand “rationalist arguments (concerning, e.g., knowledge of the external world, God etc.) he sought partly to prove their thoroughgoing consistency”; then, on the other, he subsequently “came to stress the irrationality of any such...
rationality, and thus the inherent danger of the whole project of the Enlightenment."\textsuperscript{71} Jacobi himself provides some insight into the genesis of this seemingly paradoxical approach in his 1787 edition of the “David Hume”.

Of his Geneva years, Jacobi explains that he was incapable of doing philosophy because he had no real understanding of things that were not concrete. He explains that he could not, for as long as he could remember, understand a concept unless it was “made graphically present” through either sensation or feeling, and that for him “objective truth and actuality were one”. He “was blind to, obstinately set against, any demonstration that could not be verified in this way, proposition by proposition, or any definition that could not be intuitively checked against its object.”\textsuperscript{72} This disposition made it extremely difficult for him to understand philosophy.

When asked by his tutor why he had taken no instruction in philosophy, he explained that he was “of such slow and dull mind” that it was a waste of time because could not even follow the “clearest teacher” and that he would always “lose track of the context.”\textsuperscript{73} But with the help of his tutor and mentor Le Sage, Jacobi gained a crucial philosophical insight: “that the questions I believed to be simply beyond my power of comprehension were for the most part either empty words or errors.”\textsuperscript{74} With Le Sage’s encouragement, the young Jacobi felt a renewed sense of confidence in his intellectual capabilities and requested that Le Sage tutor him in philosophy. The significance of these recollections, cast in the rhetorical form of a philosophical dialogue, is that it establishes Jacobi’s commitment to realism, not as arrived at philosophically but as an integral part of his character. This important lesson which Jacobi took away from the “happiest” and “most fruitful” years of his life set the pattern for the way in which he engaged the philosophical issues of his time.

Upon his return to Germany Jacobi related the excitement with which he awaited the publication of the 1762 Berlin Academy essay contest. The theme was “Evidence in the Metaphysical Science”, and Jacobi explains that “no question could have attracted my attention more.”\textsuperscript{75} Although he was unimpressed by the winning essay, Mendelssohn’s “Concerning Evidence in Metaphysical Sciences”, in the second-place essay he found “adumbrations and disclosures that could not have suited my needs better.” Kant’s essay, “Enquiries Concerning the Principles of Natural Theology and Morality”, had such a powerful effect on him that it lead to an exhaustive

\textsuperscript{71} Steven Lestition, “Kant and the End of the Enlightenment in Prussia”, \textit{Journal of Modern History} 65 (March 1993): 57 - 112
\textsuperscript{72} Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi, “David Hume on Faith, or Idealism and Realism, A Dialogue” (1787), in \textit{The Main Philosophical Writings}, pp. 278-9
\textsuperscript{73} Ibid., pp. 279-80.
\textsuperscript{74} Jacobi, \textit{ibid.}, p.280.
study of the arguments for the proof of God's existence, "in order to be able to expose its mistake, and render the
force that it had for others intelligible to me as well." His objective was to "make out how the opposing claim
was, not absurd, but rational. During his research in the various rationalistic proofs of God's existence he came
across Leibniz's statement that Spinozism was nothing more than "exaggerated Cartesianism". It was from this
that Jacobi discovered that Spinoza had in fact clearly articulated the Cartesian ontological argument, with an
important difference. Jacobi's reading led him to believe that the proof applied to Spinoza's God. This insight
was reinforced by his tendentious reading of Kant's essay, "The Only Possible Ground of Proof for a
Demonstration of God's Existence", from which he concluded that it applied to a Pantheistic God. Jacobi
interpreted Kant's argument that "God's existence preceded his possibility as well as that of all other things in
the sense that all predication, or any possible attribute that we ascribe to a thing, presupposes some existence
which is to be qualified or determined", as being consistent with Spinoza's conception of God, which equated his
being with the absolute existence of all things. He ignored Kant's qualification that even though "God's existence
preceded his possibility as well as that of all other things; God had other properties which made him a specific
kind of existent", and therefore his existence was not strictly synonymous with his essence.

Jacobi's reading of Kant's essay drove home the point he wanted to establish regarding abstract
rationalistic philosophies, a point that was clarified in his study of Spinoza's exaggerated Cartesianism. "Its here
that the Cartesian proof shone forth for me in its full light, and all that I was looking for I found all at once. My
joy was only disturbed by the consideration that instead of coming to meet man, truth appears to flee from him,
and often leaves the sharpest of minds furthest behind." These "sharpest minds" may be read as referring to the
Berlin Aufklärer whom Jacobi believed had been deceived by their confidence in the power of reason, which had
led them further away from the truth by the lure of those abstract representations of the world which failed to
capture, and moreover concealed, the underlying experiential reality of human affairs. Of central importance to
Jacobi's close reading of Spinoza, however, was not only the danger of the fatalism and atheism which his
philosophy represented but also the courage with which Spinoza unflinchingly pursued his line of inquiry to its

75 Ibid., p. 281.
76 Ibid.
77 Ibid.
78 Beiser, Fate of Reason, p. 54.
79 Ibid., p. 55.
80 Jacobi, "David Hume on Faith", in The Main Philosophical Writings, p. 282.
logical conclusion. Spinoza’s courage had led him to an insight that seemed to cut against the dangerous implications of his overall philosophy. When Lessing, during their famous conversation, asked him if his rejection of Spinozism meant that he had become “perfect skeptic”, Jacobi responded by explaining: “On the contrary, I draw back from a philosophy that makes skepticism a necessity” and turn instead “towards the light, of which Spinoza says it illumines itself and the darkness as well”.

I love Spinoza, because he, more than any other philosopher, has led me to the perfect conviction that certain things admit of no explication: one must not therefore keep one’s eyes shut to them but must take them as one finds them. I have no concept more intimate than that of the final cause; no conviction more vital than that I do what I think, and not, that I should think what I do.  

This is, in a nutshell, the unequivocal epistemological foundation upon which Jacobi’s realism, and opposition to idealism in all its forms, depends.

Jacobi’s realism and opposition to abstract philosophical models was further reinforced by his political views, which grew in part out of his first-hand involvement in the affairs of government. When he became a member of the treasury of Julich and Berg it was his responsibility to examine the assets of the duchies in order to evaluate their trade prospects with other territories. In 1779, when he was promoted to the position of minister and privy councillor for the Bavarian department of customs and commerce, his objective was to not only rationalize the system of taxes and customs but to also abolish serfdom. Although his tenure in this position was short-lived - he resigned after only four months - due to the friction some of his policy decisions generated with his superiors and colleagues, Jacobi had over the course of his seven years of service developed a strong commitment to liberal politics. After leaving government in 1779 Jacobi wrote two essays, Eine Politische Rhapsodie, and Noch eine politische Rhapsodie, which stressed the importance of free commerce and trade. As Beiser tells us, he revealed in these essays his agreement with physiocratic economics and his support of the aristocracy as the rightful custodians of the primary source of all wealth, agriculture. Because all other economic activity is dependent on the land owning class, the aristocracy represents the true interests of the state as the ultimate source from which all wealth is derived. This would later become an important aspect of his critique of

---

81 Jacobi, “Concerning the Doctrine of Spinoza”, in The Main philosophical Writings, p. 193.
Although Jacobi’s economic views played an important role in his political philosophy, they were also a source of tension in his overall critique of the Aufklärung. Beiser explains that it is ironic that Jacobi’s emphasis on the importance of economics was accompanied by moral and religious views that were sharply critical of the social impact of increasing commercialization. How these two apparently incompatible lines of thought were held together in Jacobi’s thought is partially clarified, if not explicitly resolved, in his 1782 essay, *Etwas das Lessing gesagt hat: Eine Commentar zu den Reisen der Päpste nebst Betrachtungen von einem Dritten.*

As an attack on Joseph II’s policies for religious reform, “Something Lessing Said” marked the beginning of Jacobi’s critique of the Aufklärung’s weltanschauung. In the name of Enlightenment Joseph II had sought to strip the Catholic Church of its archaic rituals and superstitions in order that it might serve a more utilitarian purpose in the improvement of state and society. Joseph’s objective of “creating happy, obedient and productive citizens” by insisting that monasteries fill their new posts with those committed to a rationalist theology, that various rituals and holidays be reduced and simplified, and that monasteries either engage in education and charity or face the threat of closure, was met with widespread approval from various Aufklärer. When the Swiss historian Johannes von Müller criticized these reform policies in his *Die Reisen der Päpste*, Jacobi defended his position, despite having little sympathy for Catholicism, because he saw Joseph’s reforms as an illegitimate extension of state power and authority. The authority of reason served to sanction what Jacobi understood to be despotic measures invoked in the name of collective moral improvement and progress.

As Dale E. Snow explains, “Something Lessing Said” was initially rejected by the Hamburger Correspondenten because of the likelihood it would “displease Kaiser Joseph”. When it was finally published in Berlin the essay was so poorly received that Jacobi felt compelled to write an anonymous critique of his own work in order to clarify its argument, which was, in his opinion, badly misunderstood by his critics. The source of its poor reception was, according to Snow, that his readers did not see that “Something Lessing Said” was in fact the continuation of a previous argument with Christoph Martin Wieland regarding the limits of government authority and power. In 1777 Wieland had published an essay entitled “On the Divine Right of Authority” in

---

83 Ibid., p. 141.
84 Ibid., p. 142.
85 Ibid., p. 146.
which he argued that the rule of the survival of the strongest in nature applies equally well to the political realm. In an essay entitled “On Law and Right, or a Philosophical Evaluation of an Essay of Herr Councillar Wieland on the Divine Right of Authority”, Jacobi vehemently rejected Wieland’s formulation of the doctrine that “might makes right”. He points out that Wieland has conflated natural and moral necessity, the consequences of which would mean that one could condemn the intention of regicide, yet condone its successful execution. His greatest concern, however, was that Wieland had relegated “citizens to a sort of permanent immaturity (Unmündigkeit), and therein lies its danger, Jacobi claims: ‘for what do we silly children know about whether we are being dealt with too strictly or too leniently? He who has the power also has the right.... We are and remain as citizens eternal children’.”

Thus, Jacobi’s political philosophy is consistent with what Kant would later define as a necessary condition for understanding the nature and purpose of Enlightenment, and it is important to remember that Jacobi remained committed to this liberal political vision despite his disillusionment with the values and objectives of the Aufklärung as a whole.

Jacobi’s attack on Wieland’s political views demonstrates his uncompromising liberalism. In making his case against any form of political paternalism he cites not only Adam Ferguson’s “An Essay on the History of Civil Society”, but also, somewhat ironically, Spinoza’s Tractatus Politicus. Jacobi embraced Spinoza’s radical political views while at the same time rejecting the epistemological principles of his philosophical model which, like all rationalistic systems of thought, ultimately led, he believed, to pantheism and fatalism. Moral autonomy and political liberty were, for Jacobi, the necessary starting points for philosophy. In this sense he was in agreement with Kant insofar as reason is the basis for a social contract to promote cooperation and resolve conflict. He is much less optimistic than Kant, however, about the way in which reason can be put into practice by the state. Reason is, for Jacobi, purely instrumental and effective only from the perspective of the individual. It cannot serve, as it does for Kant, as an objective criterion from which a collective consensus is formulated, reviewed, and progressively recast within a public sphere. Jacobi’s political philosophy contains no trace of Kant’s notion of positive political freedom gradually realized by individuals through the collective reform of existing social institutions. As a staunch proponent of the minimalist state, Jacobi was extremely suspicious of

87 Ibid., p. 309.
any attempts to extend the power and authority of the state beyond the jurisdiction of its primary mandate of protecting citizens from the harm they might do to one another.

In *Something Lessing Said* Jacobi was concerned only with the legitimate employment of political power in general. He was not interested in the question of evaluating different forms of government. The “question of whether it is more bearable to submit to the arbitrary power of one individual, of a certain number of the many itself - that is, which variety of despotism would be best... is not really worthy of a wise man’s attention.” Power, he goes on to explain, “whether established or arbitrary, restricts every other cognition on the path to insight as well as every drive [Trieb] on the path to happiness - such a power, which only gives laws and itself has none, ...has never brought forth real truth and genuine well-being anywhere among men.” From where then “does real truth and genuine well being” originate for Jacobi? The answer lies in a distinction he draws between the ancient and the modern state, one which he had outlined a decade earlier just before he took up his position in Julich and Berg. In two letters of 1771 to the minister of the bishoprics of Münster and Cologne, Franz Friedrich Fürstenberg, Jacobi lamented the fact that unlike Greece and Rome, in the modern state there was little correspondence between the interests of the state and those of the individual citizen. Whereas the ancient world had realized a high degree of cultural achievement and community consensus, in the modern world, individuals, instead of being committed to the common good, were interested only in their own narrowly defined personal interests. “This lament about the egoism and materialism of contemporary life later became one of the leitmotifs of Jacobi’s moral and political writings.” Modern society could not, in Jacobi’s view, recapture this classical ideal through the external enforcement of laws because virtue and honour are human qualities that can not be instilled in citizens through the power of the state. True social reform must come voluntarily from within each citizen.

The Berlin Aufklärer working within the framework of Prussian absolutism had failed to understand the true basis of social and political reform.

They would like to help promote an enlightenment - elsewhere than in the understanding, because that takes too long. They put out the lights, filled with childish impatience for it to be day. Oh hoped filled darkness, in which we

---

87 Ibid., p. 193.
hurriedly totter our way toward the goal of our wishes, toward the greatest
good on earth; forward, on the path of violence and subjugation.

Their main error in their zeal for reform was a mistaken view of the role of reason in human affairs. Authentic understanding among individuals cannot be short-circuited by imposing upon them the views of the philosophers who claim to have discovered the objective rational criteria by which the direction of social, political, and religious change could take place, with little acknowledgment of the actual process by which individuals determine and conduct their affairs with one another. Jacobi's alternative was based on a sense of natural sociability rooted in the individual's autonomous employment of reason. Anticipating Kant's views, Jacobi points out: "What distinguishes man from animals and shapes his particular species is the capacity to see a relationship among ends and to guide his conduct by this insight."91 Moreover, political systems based on curbing the unbridled passions of men have resorted to arbitrary measures in their attempt to balance the conflicting "self-seeking and personal tendencies" of individuals by merely keeping them in "check only through themselves - without awakening any noble sentiments." The result has been the creation of "men who are not themselves in the position to know what is good for them and to strive for it are even less able to owe their well-being to the virtue of a guardian who is without a judge and who will never allow them to achieve maturity."92

The source of this error is a mistaken view of the relationship between reason and the passions. The metaphor Jacobi uses to describe the true nature of this relationship is of a river of reason. "Out of this source humanity flows, in all its tributaries, the same reason [Vernunft], only overflowing beds and between banks of immense diversity and size and hiding its efflux from all eyes. These beds, these banks are the passions. Many have wanted to see it differently, and - against all appearances and arguments - have taken reason for the banks and the passions for the stream."93 Wieland was one those who saw it differently, for he was among those who believed that behaviour was motivated by the passions which, as "purely natural sources of energy seeking their discharge blindly", depended on the function of reason "to channel the energy thus released in the most efficient way consistent with the greatest discharge possible".94 Jacobi believed the reverse was true, that the passions were the channels "through which reason which is an autonomous source of energy, makes its way, drawing indeed

91 Jacobi, ibid., p. 193.
92 Ibid., p. 199.
93 Ibid., p. 193.
94 Di Giovanni, "Introduction", p. 16.
from their natural resources but for purposes which transcend them altogether”. On the chances of humankind ever realizing its long-term objective of achieving full maturity through a recognition of reason as the motive force behind individual autonomy and authentic sociability, however, Jacobi, sounding again very much like Kant, explains: “Perfection is nowhere to be hoped for, for out of flawed material something flawless can never arise, and so even a human society such as the one we wish to see established, a society united exclusively to protect the security of all rights through the fulfillment of all duties, without which these rights could not exist and could not be valid, even such a society, the most perfect imaginable for men and the only one which is consistent with reason, would continually have to battle with great evils.” Any attempt to attain this unrealistic objective would require changing our nature “from the ground up”, an undesirable prospect which would only leave us “infinitely miserable.”

Jacobi’s political views demonstrate that in a number of ways he was in agreement with the overall guiding spirit of enlightened thought and its confidence in the power of human reason. Yet reason itself would become, only three years after the publication of “Something Lessing Said”, the primary target of his critique of Aufklärung. The explanation for this may be found in the connection Jacobi saw between moral autonomy and the minimalist state. His attraction to the Sturm und Drang was in this sense consistent with his political views and opposition to Enlightenment philosophy. As Snow explains, Jacobi’s work had been a “celebration of personality and individuality” that was predicated upon Spinoza’s ideal of radical individualism and moral self-mastery. Because governments can never legislate the bonds of sociability, the best they can do is remove the barriers to individual self-realization, a necessary pre-requisite for a healthy polis in which the lived experience of the collective is voluntarily determined and sustained by the contribution of each of its members. Jacobi’s position here reflects his commitment to civic humanism. As Fania Oz-Salzberger tells us, Jacobi’s political views were so heavily influenced by Roman republican authors such as Machiavelli, “and, above all, by Ferguson that it would not be wrong to see him as a disciple of the civic tradition.”

In his Sturm und Drang novel “Woldemar”, Jacobi had praised Ferguson for the distinction he drew “between the laws of natural philosophy and those of morality; whereas both are learned through experience and

95 Ibid.
96 Jacobi, ibid., p. 208.
97 Ibid., p. 209.
common sense, moral laws are not logically binding but require personal contemplation and decision."¹⁰⁰ Jacobi shared Ferguson’s model of pre-institutional polities and was in agreement with him that civic activism channeled natural human impulses in a way that strengthened the bonds of sociability.¹⁰¹ In Jacobi’s paraphrase of Ferguson,

Without power and coercion men first became brothers and formed societies, where the absence of faulty arrangements gave them more security than many artificial institutions, which often cause more and worse crimes than they prevent. Man is active out of sheer inclination [Trieb], and he must be just because he wants to be happy. Kindness and love, discernment, fairness, generosity, courage, and loyalty, these qualities, which constitute the bound and the strength of societies are original qualities of his nature, immediately bestowed by God.¹⁰²

Jacobi admits that in the contemporary modern world “the arts of government have exercised the minds of men and, giving rise to all kinds of efforts, inquiries, goals, wishes, and thoughts, enriched their spirit”, but he quickly qualifies this assertion with the claim that “they have often also degraded and worsened it” through the promotion of “inequality, privilege, division, and vanity”.¹⁰³ Trust and good will towards others has been replaced by self-interest. Jacobi’s ambivalence here is rooted in his fear that there remains little space in the modern world for a sphere of individual autonomy sufficient for the citizen’s contemplation of those moral laws on which the authentic cohesiveness of a political community is determined by voluntary consensus. Here, Jacobi’s economic liberalism seems to be in conflict with his civic humanist sentiments. On the one hand, Jacobi was an advocate of reduced government interference in commerce and trade so as to allow individuals to pursue their personal economic interests, and, on the other, he believed that a truly minimalist state would allow for the creation of social sphere in which the collective interests of the community would be served through the voluntary participation of individuals. The reconciliation of self-interest with the impulse for cooperation is central to the relationship Jacobi wanted to establish between political liberty, moral autonomy, and sociability.

Like Ferguson, Jacobi was opposed to a rationalistic worldview, which excluded virtue as a necessary human quality for realizing the collective interests of a particular community. His rejection of Mandevillian the notion of “unsocial sociability” on which Kant had based his assertion that “even a nation of devils”, so long as

⁹⁹ Oz-Salzberger, ibid., p. 259.
¹⁰⁰ Ibid., p. 263.
¹⁰¹ Ibid., p. 267.
¹⁰² Jacobi, ibid., p. 197.
they possessed understanding, could enjoy political stability, paralleled Ferguson’s criticism of Mandeville’s *The Fable of the Bees*. 104

Rather one should expect the advancement of all those tendencies that destroy the strength of the soul, the grandeur of the spirit, the nobility of the mind, and all true inner superiority and glory. One should expect the advancement of self-interest, money-grubbing, indolence; of a stupid admiration of wealth, of rank, and of power; a blind unsavory submissiveness; and an anxiety and fear which allows no zeal and tends toward the most servile obedience. 105

This “advancement of self-interest” was, from Jacobi’s perspective, linked with the rationalism of those Berlin Aufklärer who conflated moral laws with the laws of natural philosophy, the dangerous consequences of which would result in the acceptance of a deterministic view of both man and nature that threatened to become the model upon which social and political organization would be imposed according to abstract rationalistic representations which failed to accurately reflect, and threatened to erode, faith and feeling as the true basis of human sociability. Political despotism is directly related to moral corruption because principles of true sociability are replaced by self-interested calculation. Taken together, commercial modernity, state absolutism, and enlightened proposals for social and religious reform threatened to establish a socio-political system in which despotism would become an unavoidable consequence. Rational self interest, once explicitly recognized as the source of both individual autonomy and social cohesiveness, would result in the creation of a machine-like state with purely mechanical institutional levers that would impose an artificial uniformity upon human sociability. In other words, a political system based on self interest inculcates a false sense of autonomy in which despotism is represented as a form of political liberty. "The political slavery of a people is therefore at the same time a sign of its moral slavery, and just as the latter is exclusively grounded in the animal nature of man, so is the former which arises from it. Both aim at making man ever more of an animal - that is: corrupting him from ground up." 106

This connection between moral and political slavery was central to Jacobi’s anti-Enlightenment stance, based on a conception of human autonomy that was, in large measure, consistent with the *Sturm und Drang*’s opposition to the metaphysical speculations of the rationalists. He shared Goethe’s interest, for example, in the

---

103 Ibid.
104 Oz-salzberger, ibid., p. 276.
105 Jacobi, ibid., p. 200.
106 Ibid., p. 201.
"problem of how individuals establish themselves through action as valid personalities - as self-justifying works of art." He did not, however, share Goethe's acceptance of Spinozistic pantheism as expressed in his "Prometheus" poem - the one from which he prompted Lessing's confession. His ambivalence regarding the philosophical consequences of the Sturm und Drang's subjective expressionism stemmed from its inability to address the question of how individual self-interest could be reconciled with moral and social obligation. In his attempt to define autonomy Jacobi remained caught between the "rhetoric of the cult of sentiment", and the "frames of reference of Enlightenment rationalism and empiricism". He could not fully accept either Kant's or Goethe's conceptions of individual autonomy because he found both to be "self-defeating". "Kant's critical subjectivism ended up engendering a strange kind of impersonal personalism, and Goethe's naturalism made for a pantheism that harked back to Spinoza."

---

107 Di Giovanni, "Introduction", p. 38.
108 Ibid.
III

**Jcobi's Novel Allwill: A Critique of the Sturm und Drang’s Beautiful Soul**

In his two philosophical novels, first written in the 1770's, and published in their final form in the 1790's, Jacobi explored the problem of the relationship between individual and society in terms of a critical evaluation of the Sturm und Drang’s 'beautiful soul', an individual who is guided more by his inner emotional resources and conscience than by external socially prescribed standards of behaviour. *Woldemar* falls into the category of a Sturm und Drang *Bildungsroman* that puts forth a positive argument for the *Herzensmensch* or beautiful soul. *Allwill*, however, is more difficult to characterize because of its strange blend of philosophical disquisition and sentimental rhetoric. What it does provide is a dual critique of Enlightenment rationalism and Sturm und Drang sentimentalism. More of a “psychological tableau” than a novel, *Allwill* is better described as “a study in human nature painted in the variety of lights and shades that different characters project upon one another through their words and feelings.”

The guiding theme of the novel, which takes the form of an epistolary exchange between a small group of friends and relatives, is the possibility of communicating a conception of human autonomy and virtue that relies neither the cult of nature and feeling, nor on abstract rationalism.

In the preface to Edward Allwill's *Collection of Letters* edited by Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi with an Addition from Letters of his Own (1792), Jacobi suggests that the reader “should imagine the editor to be someone for whom, from his tenderest youth, and even in childhood, it was an important matter that his soul be not in his blood, or that it be not a mere breath that passes away.” He was “an enthusiast, a visionary, a mystic” who “bore a consuming fire in his bosom”, yet because none of his particular “passions could gain the upper hand over the one affect that was the soul of his life... he brought philosophical purpose, reflection, and

---

109 Ibid., p. 120.
110 The three previous editions of 1775, 1776, and 1781 were substantially different, explains Giovannoni, but few significant changes were made to the later 1812 edition. Di Giovanni, *The Main Philosophical Writings*, p. 380.
observation, to situations and moments where they are very seldom to be found.” The insight he gained from this was that his “most important convictions all rested upon immediate intuition”, for which he had no rational proofs. The overriding theme of the preface is an attempt explain the difficulty in communicating this “immediate intuition” to an audience expecting rationally demonstrative proofs. With respect to the true identity of Allwill, for example, he “supposes” that his readers who, as his contemporaries, “are sworn enemies of everything obscure...will find themselves entirely surrounded by obscurities”.112 Jacobi is satirizing the Aufklärung’s assumption that abstract reason is the ultimate criterion for determining truth. Echoing Hamann’s view of the relationship between philosophy and the public good, he sarcastically explains that he is justifiably horrified at the idea of inflicting...” unsubstantiated conjectures concerning the origin of the collection of letters “...upon a honorable public whose curiosity is restricted simply to well-established truths.”113

Jacobi’s preface outlines an alternative approach that rejects the Aufklärung’s faith in the explanatory power of reason, and its confidence in making human nature explicable according to a priori, and a-historical, principles. “The work was not to be more edifying than creation; or more moral than history and experience; or more philosophical than the instinct of natures endowed with senses and reason.” The “reason” to which Jacobi here refers is not that of the Berlin philosophers. It is part and parcel of an original “instinct” that includes sensations and emotions, and not some transcendent intellectual capacity. “Instinct”, explains Jacobi, “determines the mode and shape” of “self-activity”, whose objective is “the preservation and elevation of personal existence (the preservation of self-consciousness, or of the unity of consciousness turned back upon itself, through a steady and ever more thorough combination or cohesion).”114 Jacobi’s definition of instinct is closely related to his conception of reason as distinguished from that of the philosophers whose “two-fold knowledge of actual existence” separates that which is certain from what is uncertain.

In the prefatory note to his 1787 David Hume, Jacobi contrasted his philosophical approach with that of the rationalists, whose “two-fold knowledge of actual existence” had attempted to separate what is certain from that which is uncertain. Their “assumption was that every cognition that does not originate in rational sources is faith.” His philosophy, instead, “claims but a single knowledge through sensation, and it restricts reason,

112 Ibid.
113 Ibid., p. 381.
114 Ibid.
considered by itself, to the mere faculty of perceiving relations clearly". Jacobi’s rejection of “two-fold knowledge” is based on his view that it led to philosophical skepticism which, in turn, amounts to a form of ‘nihilism’. The consequence of limiting philosophical investigation to what is “certain” is a radical idealism that denies the existence of all reality independent of our sensations. A nihilist, for Jacobi, is an egoist “who denies the existence of everything independent of the immediate contents of his own consciousness, whether external objects, other minds, God, or even his own self”. This is the epistemological standpoint against which Jacobi contrasted his conception of realism as the immediate perception of an external reality that relies on an undemonstrable intuition, or faith. What he is most concerned about, however, are the ethical implications of nihilism, for the nihilist not only denies the existence of other things but of values as well. “Since he denies the existence of an external world, other minds, a soul, and God, the nihilist discharges himself from all obligations to such pseudo-entities.”

As a “beautiful soul”, Edward Allwill serves as the perfect antithesis to the Aufklärung’s weltanschauung, yet as an extreme example of a Sturm und Drang Herzensmensch he also represents the nihilistic consequences inherent in exaggerated forms of egoism. Whereas Jacobi was in agreement with the Sturm und Drang’s opposition to the Berlin philosophers, he was equally critical of its emphasis on nature and feeling as the source of authentic subjective expression. As Giovanni explains: “Just as the philosophers, in their subjective effort to comprehend reality reflectively, end up draining the concept of all existential content and thus actually remove the conditions that make subjectivity possible, so too the practitioners of the morality of natural feeling, in their attempt to distill from experience its supposed moment of pure spontaneity, actually reduce it to a series of fleeting events with no social or moral significance.” In his attempt to articulate a position immune to the pitfalls of both extremes, Jacobi needed a communicative form that transcended the available discursive models. His preface may be read as articulating the nature of this indirect form of communication in which subjectivity is shared between author and reader without being objectively defined in terms of rationally explicit principles.

The aim of this process is to bring one’s interlocutor to share one’s view of things. But since this view must ultimately remain private, the problem is to

115 Jacobi, David Hume (1787), pp. 255-6.
116 Beiser, Fate of Reason, p. 82.
117 Ibid.
objectify one's intuitions enough to invite others to share in them, yet to make clear that the attempted objectification has to fail precisely to the extent that it respects its subject matter - that at the end the sharing has to be done at a distance, so to speak, with each partner falling back on the privacy of his soul.  

In the closing paragraphs of the preface Jacobi explains to his readers that the purpose of the appended addition to the letters, the “Missive to Erhard O***”, is to “bolster the weight” of his argument; it is “completely philosophical in content”, and therefore “is not likely to be enjoyed and easily tolerated by enemies and friends alike.” Jacobi is here playing upon the irony of attempting to make rationally explicit that which requires a more indirect mode of understanding and awareness. This tongue-in-cheek promise for clarification of the meaning of the letters is, however, qualified in the closing lines of the preface where Jacobi quotes an “old rhyme”, which, he explains, holds for him “a rich treasure of consolation”, in which the reader may share, “if he will only change one word and replace reader with author: Reader, dost thou like me? Reader, do I like thee?”. What follows this paradox of the possibility for communication between author and audience is a short introduction to the novel that provides a brief biographical sketch of one of the novel’s characters.

We learn that Sylli, at the age of twenty-eight, has had little joy in her life. It has been filled with little more than hardship and tragedy. At fifteen she lost her mother, and shortly thereafter was abandoned by her father. At twenty-one she was married to her childhood friend, August Clerdon, who “was a spirited man, of great gifts of soul but very unstable”. Although she had “been swept off her feet by the element of greatness and glory in the young man”, she also had a “foreboding” sense” of the many ways that August would make her unhappy”. Her premonition came to pass when he died three years later; “all entangled in a lawsuit” that “threatened to ruin his external fortunes completely”. Forced to continue defending the case against him, she had to remain in a town from which she desperately wanted to escape. Left to her own resources, with only indirect contact with friends and loved ones, she has sunken into a dark personal malaise. Add to this the fact that her first born child “had followed the way of the father”. All in all, we are presented with a thoroughly bleak portrait

120 In this addition to the collection of letters Jacobi attacks the philosophical assumptions upon which the protagonists of the French Revolution based their proposals for social and political reform. Erhard personifies a naïve confidence in the power of reason to reconstruct a social order from the ground up. He believes, for example, that all true knowledge is derived from the immutable principles of nature. “No more illusions since
of the circumstances surrounding Sylli's life. Of the other correspondents, we learn that Amalia is the wife of Heinrich Clerdon, the brother of her husband, and that Leonore and Little Clair are her first cousins. “All of these characters”, explains the editor, “had at different times, spent many years with or close to one another, and they loved and looked upon one another as brothers and sisters - intimately connected as they were not only by external relations, but also even more so, by internal ones.” Of the mysterious Edward Allwill, the editor says only that “it would be superfluous to say anything in advance”.

In the first letter of the collection Sylli conveys to her brother-in-law, Clerdon, her deep sense of desolation. In describing her visit to a woman on her deathbed she projects her own feelings of remorse onto the scene when she explains how this poor woman with four adopted children, and a husband who married her “only for profit and from business motives”, had become the object of pity and sorrow which, although “heart-felt”, amounted to little. “A bit of remorse perhaps, a bit of gratitude, a mean fear of the departing shock when the departing soul would no longer be there, uneasiness in the presence of death.” Sylli’s despair has left her in a solipsistic mode of being in which her capacity for connecting with others is limited to an acutely hypersensitive form of self-reflectivity. Although she feels “nauseated” and was “physically in pain... over the physical sufferings of the sick woman”, she nonetheless “felt no sympathy for anyone.” Her feelings of disconnectedness, moreover, lead her to reflect on “the chaos of the world”. She is in a “crowd without being part of it”, and is “shaken deep within [her] being by unbearable thoughts” of her inability to authentically connect with others.

“Oh Thou of the many names, who pullest all men together, and intertwinest them - what art Thou? Source and current and sea of society; whence? And whither...?” The darker side of Sturm und Drang’s emphasis on spontaneous emotive responses is revealed in Sylli’s macabre representation of the death-bed scene, which invoked in her the image of the “great cauldron” in which Macbeth’s witches “prepare for the ‘the deed without a name’”, by gathering the “assorted limbs of beasts and men, toes of frogs and teeth of wolves”, and from which they “boil the stuff for their spell, until out of the stew all their phantoms appear” and disappear like “shadows”.

These psychological “phantoms” are, however, quickly extinguished by her realization that they originated from Locke; from now on, whatever is to last must be grounded on the external rocks of nature which the rigorous demonstrations of reason have, so to speak, laid bare.” (Jacobi, p. 479)

121 Jacobi, Allwill, p. 387-8.
122 Ibid., p. 390.
“only a gaudy, wooden, market puppet; its stump and its coat cut from a small block of wood”.123 The sharp contrast here between the raw, fleshy ingredients of the cauldron from which phantom spirits emanate, and the inanimate reified wooden puppet, reveals the troubled nature of Sylli’s emotional disposition.

In the correspondences with Clerdon that follow, Sylli’s reflections on her troubled situation alternate between optimism and pessimism. Her moods swing abruptly from disheartening despair to joyous rapture. In the next letter to Clerdon, for example, Sylli’s sense of despair has been replaced by a renewed sense of self-confidence and hope. She tells him how her spirits rose with the rising sun as she awoke to a beautiful spring day. “Yes, dear Clerdon, I was full of hope, without knowing what I hoped for, every goodness and beautiful thing: and this pleasant confusion, this half-light, was precisely the reason why I felt so well, why no lack of faith could stir me into waking.” In her intimate communion with nature she has regained her sense of confidence. The boundaries between herself and the natural world have become fluid. Walking with her dog on the first day of spring along the road leading to her original home she “wanted to be able to roll away on it”, as the sounds of flute and harp being played nearby “fell in quite neatly with the melody” in herself. Her romantic reverie, however, was abruptly shattered by her realization that the “road” along which she was walking also represented a former happiness impossible to retrieve. The pain she feels of the hard underlying reality of her circumstances cannot be alleviated by submerging herself within the depths of her self-absorbed communion with nature. These shifts between inward-looking melancholy and external projection into her natural environment demonstrate her inability to draw her thoughts and experiences together into a stable and cohesive personality.

Jacobi employs the character of Sylli to demonstrate the potentially destructive and self-defeating side of the cult of nature and feeling. Her attempt to cultivate and strengthen the connection between her inner sentiments and her immediate perceptions of external nature has driven her increasingly inward into a somewhat surreal psychic landscape in which autonomous human agents are reduced to representations of the physical environment. In describing the conflict between herself and the “Gierigsteins”, against whom she is defending the lawsuit brought against her deceased husband’s estate, for example, Sylli employs a naturalistic metaphor to describe the way in which she has found some measure of consolation from the “violence” and “evil spite” that has been directed against her. These “destroyers”, she explains, have fallen quietly away from her. “As a ripe fruit falls away; it abandons its tree and away it drops with its fullness”, leaving the rest of the tree intact. She

123 Ibid.
has “not been split by lightening, not cut down - only drained”. She still has “branches and leaves” from which the trunk is sustained. Nature, however, does not provide Sylli with an authentic source of optimism and faith. In fact, her hope-filled reflections inevitably degenerate into a form of deep-seated pessimism.

Sylli’s emotionally charged naturalistic representations provide only a temporary and shallow stopgap for her sorrow and despair. At a deeper level, the world has become for her a singular pantheistic entity in which the bonds of sociability have become a chimerical sham. All she sees when she looks at society is the “wretched monotony of human lies and deceits!”. She pities “those good souls who, after they have trudged along together for a few years, or have even kept company since infancy”, nonetheless “without knowing how manage to run each other aground... because of some pettiness”. Their only saving grace is “that they seldom know the secret of their fate.” Following the spiral of existential dread ever downward she concludes that the eye of her soul has “long held an image of all human action and being, of our ‘life-course’ as it is called: an image harsh but apt - the image of a treadmill”. Moreover, awareness of this ultimate truth brings little consolation. “For he who sees it best has only this advantage: that he stands still in his wheel, laughing at the others, or bewailing - and himself - oh, he is far worse off!” Sylli’s desperate attempt to escape from this uninspiring reality is a retreat into a world of feeling and sentiment in which the expression of spontaneous emotive responses becomes the only authentic source of virtuous behaviour. In the wanton selfishness of children, for example, Sylli sees “the most trustworthy balm of life” which, in its direct and immediate honesty, contains the unadulterated truth of human nature. Children express a form of “plain love” not found in the corrupt hypocrisy of adult sociability.

One of the central themes of the letters is the attempt by the other characters to restore Sylli’s lost confidence and optimism in herself and human nature generally. Clerdon, for example, empathizes with her, explaining that he himself is sometimes stricken with feelings of “being oppressed and wounded, often constricted to the point of despair in the daily affairs of [his] life and profession.” But even when he has “no hope at all that things will improve”, he nonetheless realizes “that these sufferings have a good side for the worthy man - he pulls himself together all the better because of them”. The worthy man, he goes on to explain, must “translate his best capacities into deed; if he is encircled by stupidity, baseness and evil, assaulted and importuned by it - this does at least sustain his spirit out of rage in any case”. He is able to transform that which

124 Ibid., p. 395.  
125 Ibid.
has brought him down into something which "actually raises him up, and gives him composure." Jacobi uses the character of Clerdon as a foil against Sylli's nihilistic egoism. Although he shares many of the same heart-felt sentiments as Sylli, his strong sense of self identity allows him to maintain a confident and optimistic perspective of his place in the world.

Clerdon's perceptions of nature, for example, also trigger deeply spiritual reflections. His experience of the "crimson glow of dawn", he tells her, was angelic "music for the eye" which floated into his soul and left him "beside himself". Uncertain about which sense had taken in the experience, he felt utterly transformed: "I shuddered; then, deep in the breast, and yet deeper and more inward, a trembling - a trembling that shook everything loose in the most secret recesses of the heart, and killed the mortal in it. It was Death, that beautiful, heavenly youth!" Rather than sending him into despair and triggering a sense of profound alienation, however, his sentimental reflections were instead transformed into a confirmation of his religious convictions. "Unburdened of the corruptible part, I flew into his [Death's] arms, sank into his lap, took up my abode with him... I tasted omnipotence, creation, eternal rest in love." Clerdon's faith serves as a source of personal strength that allows him to synthesize his perceptions of the external world with his inner sentiments according to higher principle impossible to articulate explicitly, but intuitively recognizable nonetheless. From his spiritual reflections on the "glorious landscape" that revealed to him the "majestic splendour of God", Clerdon pulled himself together and dragged himself into the "full radiance of the sun, and wandered about." In taking possession of land, brook, meadow, forest, and stream, "the high and the low, heaven and earth", he found the "pleasure and the power to live."

Whereas Clerdon's hardships have strengthened his character, Sylli's have left her sunken deep within her own "dream", from which she sees little hope of escape. The source of her failure is her stubborn egoism. She will not pull herself together as best as she can, nor will she seek help from others. "Since I am attacked at the centre of my being, help must come from that centre - total help... That is the help I want, and that's the help I shall go after. It is my will to pull through, even if I don't pull through." But Sylli only finds salvation in the end by agreeing to leave her solitary existence and join the Clerdon's household, where she can actively rejoin

---

126 Ibid., p. 393.
127 Ibid., p. 398.
128 Ibid., p. 452.
society. Jacobi’s message here “is that, despite its beauty and creative energy, nature is ultimately empty.”

With the introduction of the character of Edward Allwill, Jacobi’s exploration of the darker side of the beautiful soul becomes more complex and intense.

Allwill is the literal embodiment of his name, one “who does not yield”. He is, according to Clerdon, an incomprehensible muddle of a man” who “was never in one piece from his third year on, but always had bumps on his head, and sores all over”. At the age of six he became convinced that his wooden rocking horse, Chestnut, would come alive “if he just fed him a living fly”. Having somehow done so he mounted the “rocking machine” and rocked back and forth with such force that the momentum jolted Chestnut forward. Firmly convinced that the horse had come alive, he refused to leave its side to join the family for its mid-day meal. Unmoved by either promises or threats, Allwill stoically endured a “sound thrashing” and two hours locked confinement “in a dark hole”, rather than obey his father’s command. From early on, Allwill defied limitations on his personal autonomy of any sort. He would endure anything, Clerdon tells us, except a rebuke. Once, for example, he was “lashed near to death” for not accepting his tutor’s attempt to convince him through Socratic questioning that “the strap was a good thing”.

Strangely enough, it was not only infringements on his own autonomy that he despised. Because he found their whining and crying unbearable, for example, Allwill quite often took the “blame and the punishment of his playmates upon himself”. Although he was staunchly opposed to any infringements on his personal liberty, he was not aggressive or mean-spirited. In fact, his commitment to personal autonomy is so thoroughgoing that he refuses to reveal to others any hint of personal assertiveness or positive self-affirmation. “He was so diffident”, explains Clerdon, “so meek towards everyone (he took this to be a good thing) and at the same time so congenial, so thankful, so gentle and so good, that most people took him partly for an idiot, and partly for a flatterer”. He was “intractable” but not “wild”, he had an intense “desire for sense-pleasures” and was often reckless in his behavior, yet he was also “given to brooding, and adhered to invisible objects”. “It is unspeakably fascinating to know all this about the child, and the to observe the youth: how it is always the same hand, perhaps only a couple of cards more or less, mixed and played in a different way.” This odd blend of character traits makes Allwill a

---

130 Jacobi, ibid., p. 399.
131 Ibid., p. 400.
paradoxical character whose pattern of inconsistent behavior undermines his attempts to define himself purely on his own terms.

On the one hand we seem to have in Allwill the ideal of individual autonomy, the pure expression of the power of the human will to overcome the circumstances into which he is thrown in order to carve meaning out of his experiences exclusively on his own terms. On the other, Allwill has forfeited the possibility of defining for himself a cohesive centre from which to establish meaningful contact with others. He is a profoundly asocial being. There are, to put it simply, no real others in his world. Everything relates exclusively to his own narrowly defined and uncompromising sense of radical autonomy, the mainspring of which is nature itself. Whereas Sylli has temporarily replaced her social world with that of nature and feeling out of emotional necessity, Allwill seems to have done so by choice.

The odd blend of “contrasts” in Allwill’s character reflect a fractured self incapable of drawing together its personal resources into a cohesive whole. So fragile is his personality that any social interaction poses a potential threat to his self-image and sense of autonomy. This weakness becomes the very basis of his willfulness and sense of personal strength because it allows him to express his natural sentiments, pursue his intellectual inclinations, and satisfy his desires with greater fullness and intensity. His strength is derived from the unfettered expression of his inner nature. Like Sylli, Allwill’s sense of himself is defined largely in terms of his affinity with nature. His recovery from an apparent “apoplectic fit” which had prevented him from reading, writing, or undertaking “anything human”, for example, parallels Sylli’s reflections on her close affinity with nature. “The sun also shines again in the cheerful sky”, he tells Clerdon, “the air is still; I and the whole of nature - we are in good humour.” Unlike Sylli, however, Allwill has no sense of obligation to others. Sylli at least realizes that she has distanced herself from society because of circumstances that were beyond her direct control. Conversely, Allwill seems committed to distancing himself from others unless they happen to serve his specific purposes. It is not that he is simply a wanton utilitarian seeking pleasure and avoiding pain, chasing down his desires for their own sake. Rather he is searching for a unity of self that is determined exclusively through the expression of his natural capacities. The unity he is striving for should develop spontaneously through expressions of its own potential. His failure to realize this goal is Jacobi’s way of demonstrating why the Sturm und Drang’s cult of nature and feeling ultimately results in a distorted perspective of the relationship between individual and society.
As di Giovanni explains of Allwill's character: "Dispersion is the rule of his being, and the price that he has paid for having made the flux of nature the determinant of his existence."\textsuperscript{133}

Allwill's meekness, his brooding diffidence, and lack of assertiveness, are traits that seem to be incommensurable with his intractability, recklessness, and intense desire for sense pleasures. Yet these "contrasts" are the very source from which his sense of personal liberty is drawn. They provide him with a buffer against forming any real relationships with others. With respect to women, for example, he tells Clerdon that "association with the other gender entices me infinitely". Yet he condescendingly refers to them as "pleasant creatures" who hold something "soft" and "ingratiating", qualities which he says have the power to "tone down" his hyper-reactive "mode of feeling". As he becomes more involved with them, however, he falls prey to their seductive charms, and this inspires him to elevate them to the status of "sublime goddesses", which, consequently, "drives the devil" in him "to his wit's end". The reason for this is that he inevitably sees through his own illusion. "The thought of worshipping any of these goddesses whom I have just praised, of lying prostrate at their feet in complete earnestness, is to me unbearable." After making a plea for treating these "good creatures" as nature wished them to be "without trying to torture and tempt them into being angels", Allwill admits that: "I could never attach myself to a young woman without striving as hard as I could to reshape her according to a certain model that was in my mind." He is caught in the grip of an either/or decision regarding the way in which he characterizes his relationships to women. Either women are "good" earthly creatures "with as much inwardness, firmness and magnanimity, as their pleasant little souls are capable of", or they are surreal idealizations of "sublime goddesses". He is incapable of recognizing any of his lovers as autonomous persons in their own right. "Wearied by so many unhappy experiences", he opts for romantic idealism over realism. "Are we not often happier drinking by candle light, than feasting in the full light of the sun?"\textsuperscript{134} Women remain for him illusive representations of his imagination. They are in the final analysis nothing more than his own projections. He is, in fact, impervious to the very substance of the argument he makes regarding the inherent contradiction in the romantic idealization of women.

Another example, which demonstrates the way in which Allwill is deeply conflicted over his own responses to others may be found in a story he tells Clerdon. Upon riding past a peasant farmer whose wagon had...
overturned, Allwill found himself stopping to help the man in spite of the fact that he really had no intention of doing so. "My right arm must have pulled back automatically" and "at that moment I realized I was not fleeing from anywhere, and regained my control of what was right". He offered to help the man and received only a "bitter smile" which told him that the man assumed that "the likes of him could expect no help from nobility, but only the cruelest mockery". The incident becomes for him an issue of social injustice, which provides him with an opportunity to challenge and subvert societal norms. It was a "flash of insight", he explains, that revealed to him the hypocrisy behind the social roles he and the farmer were expected to play. He "felt all the abuses and thrashing" that he would have given the man had the situation been reversed and the man had passed him by without offering help. This insight, however, does not establish for Allwill any real connection with the man. Instead, he detaches both himself and the farmer from the experiential reality of the situation by turning it into an abstract representation of a much broader social issue. It is only from this level of abstraction that his first intuitive impulse to assist the man is given meaning. His "flash of insight" became the sustaining motivation behind the zeal with which undertook to repair the wagon, yet, at the same time, he could not accept the man's gratitude. All he wanted to do was "disappear for shame" when the man showed his appreciation and admiration for what Allwill had done.\(^\text{135}\) The man's gratitude only reinforced Allwill's indignation at the underlying societal assumptions within which each of them were expected to play out their narrowly prescribed roles. But Allwill refuses to be cast in any particular role because this would threaten the tenuous basis upon which he defines his uncompromising autonomy.

Allwill's obsessive self-reflective criticism prevents him from drawing together his personal resources into a cohesive whole from which to engage the world. This in part explains the "contrasts" in his character between brooding quietism and unbridled recklessness. He fails to see the destructive circularity of attempting to break out of his neurotic dilemma by intensifying his inward search for a radically autonomous self, defined exclusively in terms of its own spontaneous activity of thought and reflection. This failure serves as a statement against the cult of nature and feeling and the emotivist subjectivity that it promotes and cultivates. At the same time, his character gives concrete expression to Jacobi's anti-rationalist position. Read in this manner, Allwill

\(^{134}\) Jacobi, ibid., p. 401-2.
\(^{135}\) Ibid.
may be seen as the victim of the philosophical milieu within and against which he is attempting to define himself.

Of all the characters in the novel it is Clerdon who least understands the true nature of Allwill’s failure. This is perhaps because his character represents the very antithesis of a beautiful soul. As Amalia tells Sylli: with every day “Clerdon becomes ever more a father and a family head, ever more affable in all things”. With a “decent income, position, status, and prospects”, Clerdon is recognized as the centre of household stability and the primary source of Amalia’s happiness. His strong sense of the role he plays and the influence he has on others fuels his optimism and confidence. The effusive expression of his heartfelt sentiments are tempered by his will power and self control. After telling Sylli that her soul is a “chord that rings in the voice of nature ever purer and fuller”, he goes on to explain what he sees as being the “force and stability of the will”. “I learned a long time ago how to crush thorns, how to fluff them into down.” The soul he concludes “thrown back on its own resources... feels itself in itself in all its parts.” Yet, when it comes to Allwill, he always glosses over the fact that there is, as Amalia puts it, “something of the profligate in him”.

Clerdon’s fondness for Allwill, according to Amalia, comes from him constantly defending him, “but yesterday’s defence does not jibe with the one needed for tomorrow, and still less with the one needed for the day after, so that ever new artifices and ever greater efforts have been necessary”. Amalia’s worry is that the energy expended by Clerdon in meeting the challenge of making Allwill’s behavior explicable has become a cause in itself. The danger in this is the possibility that Clerdon’s fondness for him might cause him to forget himself and become as “wicked” and “evil” as Allwill himself.

Allwill poses no real threat to Clerdon, however. It is Little Clair who is vulnerable to his seductive influence. This is revealed through an epistemological debate in which Allwill sides with her against Clerdon. The debate between Clerdon and Clair is significant for explicating the epistemological problem that lies at the heart of the editor’s belief that the soul is neither in the blood, nor merely a fleeting breath. It allows Jacobi to put forth his dual critique of enlightenment rationalism and emotivism by contextualizing the philosophical content of the debate within an intersubjective setting in Sturm und Drang which the significance of the arguments

136 Ibid.
137 Ibid., p. 410.
139 Ibid., p. 426.
depend as much on who is expressing them as on the perspicuity of the arguments themselves. The debate begins with Clair’s refutation of Clerdon’s claim that “we shall remain beings of the senses for all eternity for which reason we shall have to have a body”. On this point, she tells Sylli, she and Clerdon “live in open enmity - for beyond this earth I am ready to give up my senses altogether.”

To make his argument Clerdon cites George Berkeley’s *Three Dialogues between Hylas and Philonus* (1713). But Clair remains unconvinced, arguing that Clerdon’s position amounts to saying that “since we can only see with our eyes and hear only with our ears, we also see nothing else but our own eyes, and hear nothing except our own ears”. Refusing to be “blinded by reason” she will not “do justice to the binding force of his chain of inferences” which threaten to take her “poor reason captive and reduce it to a spectre for mere spectres”. In coming to her defence, Allwill demands that Clerdon either accept Clair’s “accusation as valid... or else he should explain clearly what it is that we do not see with our eyes, not hear with our ears, and (back from there, to the centre of sensation), although it is something just the same, and indeed it is something that is genuinely true”. Clerdon must explain the nature of that crucial missing element of his epistemology, which defies rational explication. The onus should not be on Clair to provide a solution to the skeptical consequences that result from his appropriation of Berkeley’s idealism. Recognizing that which we are unable to perceive exclusively in terms of specific sensory data is, for Jacobi, the basis of our intuitive understanding of our relationship with the external world and other people. Pleased that Allwill had found words for her own thoughts, Clair emphasizes “that nobody should seriously contend” - as Clerdon has - “that the “not-nothing” come to the light of day!” For this would amount to making rationally explicit that which can only be intuitively felt to be true.

Clair’s summation of Allwill’s critique of Clerdon’s position reflects Jacobi’s own views. In his 1787 edition of the *David Hume*, for example, Jacobi asks his conversation partner, “How do you know that the sensation of a cause *qua* cause, is the sensation of an *external*, of an actual object *outside your sensation*, a thing in itself.” To say that this knowledge is a “consequence of the sensible evidence” is to circumvent the issue at hand. “The *validity of sense evidence is precisely what is in question.*” That sensations are “not mere appearances... mere determinations of our own self, and hence absolutely nothing as representations of something

---

140 Ibid., p. 437.
141 Ibid.
outside us... is not only open to doubt; it has also been shown repeatedly that the doubt cannot be eliminated on
grounds that are rational in the strict sense. So your supposed immediate certainty about external objects is
therefore, on the analogy of my faith, a blind certainty.”  

Allwill concedes to Clerdon that we do not grasp in a concept how it happens that, in virtue of a mere
affection and movement of our sense organs, we do not only sense, but also sense something - we become aware
of something entirely different from us, and we perceive it, or in other words, we take it to be true”. Clerdon’s
demand that we clarify in a concept exactly how “we become aware of something entirely different from us” is
only a philosophical difficulty that has been created by the “arrogant assumptions” of his idealist epistemology.
Yet these assumptions originate, as Allwill points out, from the same “original instinct” upon which he and Clair
base their arguments. “All our cognition of truth” begins with this “instinct”, which “demands that we should
immediately presuppose being and truth, as what is most stable”. It is this immediate pre-conscious reality
which Clerdon and the idealist philosophers inchoately recognize, but are prevented from explicitly
acknowledging as a given fact of experience. Their self-imposed adherence to an abstract model of understanding
prevents them from giving full recognition to that fundamental intuition of a simple, and unmediated, “not-
nothing” which transcends “the systematic connection of their principles”. Whereas Clerdon recognizes the
significance of the ontological status of this “original instinct”, the epistemology he has adopted prevents him
from affirming it explicitly. The point here is that skepticism is an illusion created by philosophy’s shadowy
reflections of its own projections. When Clerdon first attempted to convince Clair of the importance of Berkeley’s
philosophy, he told her that she would “shed her childish ways on this book”. But Clair seems to have intuitively
grapsed why she could not accept Clerdon’s idealism from the frontispiece of Berkeley’s book, a copper-plate
engraving portraying a child reaching into a mirror for his image, and sitting next to him “a venerable
philosopher who laughs at the child’s mistake”. The irony of the inscription beneath the engraving, “He laughs at
himself”, reveals to Clair that perhaps it is not her “childish ways” that need to be shed.

Although Allwill wins the argument against Clerdon by explicating Jacobi’s epistemological standpoint,
he later loses all credibility by reversing his position. Later that evening while sitting at the piano with Clair he

142 Ibid., p. 439.
143 Ibid., David Hume, (1787), p. 264-5.
144 Ibid., Allwill, p. 439.
145 Ibid., p. 440.
confesses to her that he believes their “good cause against Uncle Clerdon has become suspect”, and perhaps that he must “now go over to the enemy”. Upon further critical reflection he has decided that “if it is the case that through hearing we are aware of something else than the hearing itself, then we are aware of a mere *not-nothing*, for it is obvious that the *sound* is entirely and solely in us, and that it designates only a modification of our pure faculty of hearing, to which something, a *not-nothing*, is added”. After defending Clair’s intuitive realism against Clerdon’s idealism, Allwill has himself succumbed to the skeptical consequences of his opponent’s standpoint. The underlying purpose of all this talk about the ontological status of a “not-nothing” that is something, and a “not-something” that is nothing, is to show the rhetorical vacuousness of such terms. Clair’s initial intuitions were correct. And Allwill’s attempt to elucidate that which is merely a given fact of experience only enshrouded it within an obfuscating mist of rational philosophical discourse.

Later, in his 1815 Preface to the *David Hume*, Jacobi made explicit his position on idealism.

It has long been established that there is no defeating the *lower, half-way*, idealist à la Berkeley, who in spite of natural feeling claims not to perceive a material world actually existing outside him but only to have *sensations*; there is no defeating the clarity with which his [thesis] can be demonstrated. And in the same way we have to establish that there is no defeating the *upper or full blown idealist à la Hume*, who, in spite of rational feeling, denies the veracity of the ideas immediately proceeding from it, highest among them the indelible and indivisible ideas of freedom and providence.

Both Berkeley’s skepticism of our “natural feelings” regarding our perceptions of the material world, and Hume’s skepticism of the “rational feeling” through which we organize our perceptions in terms of cause and effect relations, are examples of the way in which philosophy has become a victim to its own narrow adherence to the dictates of an impoverished, and a one-dimensional, conception of reason. Ever since Plato, all philosophies have assumed that reason was an understanding “that only hovers above the intuitions of the senses, and truly refers to them alone”. From Aristotle to Kant, whether it was the rationalist philosophies of Leibniz and Wolff, or the sensualist ones of Locke, Condillac, and Bonnet, all of them in their own fashion managed to deny a broader conception of reason, one defined as a “a higher faculty that *actually reveals* to man a truth, goodness and beauty in itself, and does not merely *deceive* him with empty pictures devoid of objective reference”. This trend in philosophy was given its fullest and clearest expression in Kant, whose proofs established “that whenever an

---

146 Ibid., p. 437.
147 Ibid., *David Hume*, (Preface, 1815), p. 570.
understanding, which as a faculty of concept-building only mirrors the world of the senses and itself, tries to reach beyond the region of sensibility it only manages to catch thin air, its own shadows stretching out on all sides in infinity”. Philosophy thus established for itself a false dichotomy; either we accept that “everything supersensible is a fiction, and its concept is void of content”, or we “render judgment in favour of the veracity of a reality that transcends the senses, and of man’s knowledge of it based on a higher faculty to which truth announces itself in and above the appearances, in a way incomprehensible to the senses and the understanding”.

In terms of his novel, the philosophical debate between Clair, Clerdon, and Allwill indirectly conveys Jacobi’s sense of realism as an alternative to this false dichotomy. Clerdon, it turns out, is only an idealist in theory and a realist in practice, whereas the reverse is true of Allwill. Allwill’s description of an “original instinct” that is shared by proponents of both sides of the debate merely pays lip service to a fundamental epistemological intuition that for him remains only an abstraction, but which, for Clerdon, is manifest in his actions. Before reversing his position Allwill had criticized his opponents for “obstinately” asking: “what would such an instinct have to recommend for itself? And whenever we reply in all humility: nothing, except its authority and right of primogeniture, they find this an abomination”. Here Allwill is expressing Jacobi’s own view. In the 1815 Preface Jacobi explained how the intuitive underpinning of realism came to be seen as an “abomination”. When people first ask themselves: “How is perception possible through the instruments of the senses”, they concluded that “there is only sensation; hence genuine perception is impossible. Thus did the understanding invent its two-fold unbelief, first in a material world, and then in an immaterial and spiritual world as well; and it called the art of losing all truth (for that was its invention) Philosophy”.

Our immediate intuitive knowledge of the connection between sensation and perception was lost to the belief that it must be rationally demonstrable.

But it is Allwill, not Clerdon, who truly questions the authority of an “original instinct” which transcends that irreducible element of non-knowledge. He has succumbed to the inherent skepticism contained in all those “not-nothings” and “not-somethings” of the philosophical discourse. Like philosophy itself, Allwill, is attempting to transcend the epistemological limits of experience, which for Jacobi: “occurs in an idiom which is

148 Ibid., p. 568.
149 Ibid., p. 569.
150 Ibid., p. 440.
151 Ibid., David Hume (Preface, 1815), p. 579.
proper to the subject, but the meaning of this idiom, its logic and truth, is totally determined by another more fundamental one that belongs to the objective world at large."\(^{152}\) The character of Clerdon affirms this principle while that of Allwill rejects it. For Allwill his "sensations" are just appearances, mere determinations of his own self with no independent objective status. He is more interested in Clair than in the philosophical significance of the debate. His subjective need, which in this particular situation is his romantic attraction to Clair, overrides any considerations of establishing a consistent and coherent philosophical standpoint from which to engage the world. Allwill is an intellectual seducer whose objective is to evoke an emotional response from Clair by tapping into her philosophical intuitions. Clair’s objections to Allwill’s new - and Clerdon’s original - position expands upon the problem of the relationship between sensation and perception. If Allwill is correct in what he has said about there being “a pure hearing of nothing at the ground of every actual hearing”, argues Clair, “so too there must be a pure sensing of nothing at the ground of every sensing in general”. To accept this conclusion is symptomatic of both Allwill’s failure of individuation, and the misdirected project of philosophy in general which has increasingly distanced itself from actual experience. When she tells him that: “In the end it will become evident that the root, the deepest and most proper root of life, is from nothing and for nothing, a mere empty space of sensation, a consciousness without consciousness, a pure faculty to live”,\(^{153}\) Allwill, instead of arguing further, simply smiles. Not only has he lured Clair into developing further the philosophical standpoint which he had initially taken in her defence against Clerdon, he has succeeded, as well, in re-igniting within her a strong sense of that intuitive “original instinct”.

Following her refutation of Allwill’s skepticism, Clair begins to recite passages from Hamann. “Our thoughts are nothing but fragments. Our knowledge is piecemeal... All the phenomena of nature are dreams. The books of nature and history are nothing but ciphers, secret signs that require a key.”\(^{154}\) The significance of her recitation, aside from the anti-rationalist standpoint which it expresses, is in the affective responses that it triggers. Clair sees that Allwill is deeply moved by her speech. His “quiet attention, his whole demeanor which gave the impression that he would like to hide away, so as not to interfere with my memory”, explains Clair, “was very good”, and “best of all was his eye, which overflowed with a serenity that made his whole face almost

\(^{152}\) Ibid., p. 79.
\(^{153}\) Ibid., Allwill, p. 443.
\(^{154}\) Ibid., p. 444.
transparent". Revealed to her was a truly beautiful and “pious soul, that could not stay hidden”.\textsuperscript{155} She became frightened, however, when Allwill “suddenly grasped” her hand and kissed it, and was even more uncomfortable when he later made no secret of his “visible desire” to sit next to her at dinner. All in all, however, Clair nevertheless believes him to be good, “even if there is something of the profligate in him”, because that is something “that does injury to him; it is not something he identifies with”. He would be glad “to be rid of that evil spirit” and “to think otherwise” she “would have to carry a grudge not only against Allwill, but against human nature.”\textsuperscript{156}

Allwill’s romantic inclinations are expressed in terms of a collusive blend of rationalism and emotivism from which a distorted version of virtuous motives manifests itself. In his attempt to gain Clair’s affections, Allwill relates a story from Plato’s \textit{Theages} in which a young man comes to Socrates in search of wisdom. He had heard from his father that another student had come to Socrates and had learned much after having lived with him in his house, and even more once he shared his room. “I gained more when I could see you than when I could not. I advanced most of all, however, and most vigorously, whenever I sat next to you, holding and touching you.”\textsuperscript{157} He tells Clair that he felt the same way when he had kissed her hand. Citing another example from Plato, Allwill gives his interpretation of the story of another youth, Phaedrus, who had been persuaded, by a “rhetorical sage” named Lysias, that because what is pleasant is closely related to what is beautiful, and the “pleasant is easily given precedence over the useful, then if one rightly distinguishes between what belongs to \textit{desire} and to \textit{reason}, it follows in the end that the love of the beautiful stands to the love of the useful, as vice does to virtue, or as the state of \textit{careful prudence} does to the state of madness”. Lysias had raised “the things of reflection above those of plain sensation” and in so doing had shown that “the love of the beautiful is by nature reckless and it is a \textit{species} of madness because in its highest stage it sets men \textit{besides themselves}”. Socrates qualifies this with the assertion that this “mighty love” is also the source of “what is truly \textit{divine} in man”. Allwill recasts the earlier epistemological debate in terms of Platonic conceptions of truth, beauty, and goodness. He utilizes rational polemic, cast in an emotivist rhetorical frame that parallels \textit{Sturm und Drang} expressionism, to seduce Clair by affirming her own philosophical sentiments.

Allwill himself has been seduced by philosophy. He is, as Giovanni puts it:

\textsuperscript{155}\textit{Ibid.}, p. 445.
an example of what happens when we translate the philosopher’s mental attitude into action - when, because of moral weakness, we act in the way we would have to act by nature if we were indeed the mere appearance of empty, universal intentions to which we are reduced in the philosopher’s systems. Just as our existence as independent individuals would then be mere pretense, so would our actions. While offering the appearance of personal choice, they would unfold in fact according to the timeless and anonymous patterns dictated by the unconscious.

When he quotes Plato’s insight, for example, that “Words can only remind us of what is already known; and everything is dead word and senseless letter without the spirit of interpretation, which has its being in immediate intuition and cognition”, Allwill only recognizes these as just the words which will bring him closer to Clair, for he is by his nature incapable of experiencing this “immediate intuition and cognition”. Allwill’s actions are not based on personal choice because the choices he makes as a beautiful soul are based on the inclinations and desires of an inner nature which spontaneously generates the sources from which they spring through the expression of his subjectivity. That is, his actions only appear to be based on personal choice, when in fact they are merely unfolding “according to the timeless and anonymous patterns dictated by the unconscious”.158

Sylli, as a beautiful soul herself, perhaps best understands Allwill’s psychological profile. In a letter to Amalia she explains: “Concerning now this species of mankind with which I claim to be so intimately aquatinted, the superior talents which must be presupposed in them already carry with them the danger of misuse”. This “misuse” comes from a quickness of mind” in which:

the transition from sentiment to reflection, inspection and re-inspection (with the help of memory) becomes evermore swift, varied, reciprocal, radical, encompassing - until finally the acquired ease of self-d discernment, presence of spirit, and inner concentration, which never quite abandons the heroes of this species even under the severest pressure of passion, simply keeps on devouring intuition, consideration, and sentiment of any kind; and these powers end up with no authority or natural right of their own.159

Although Allwill falls into this category of mankind, he has not reached the perfection of this state in which a “genuine mysticism of enmity to the law, and quietism of immorality” has taken hold. Because “the Allwills do not indulge themselves outwardly” and “frequently allow glimpses of the most beautiful impulses of the soul”

156 Ibid., p. 446.
157 Ibid., p. 448.
158 di Giovanni, “From Jacobi’s Novel to Fichte’s Idealism”, p. 83.
159 Jacobi, Allwill, p. 463.
they ought not be entirely despised or hated. Nevertheless, their "stubborn" and "brutal" egoism makes them incapable of genuine renunciation, and the resiliency of ethical life is as good as dead in them".

In the last two letters of the collection of letters between Allwill and his ex-lover Lucy, Jacobi presents his final judgment on the beautiful soul. In defense of himself, Allwill explains to Lucy that he has always been motivated by “strong feelings, lively emotions, [and] passions”, rather than the artificiality of “rational, clever conduct”. From early on in his life he resented the “artificial, forced, faith” in which he was brought up. He was confused in his “entire being through the violent combination of ideas that did not hang together”, and amounted to a “thoroughly distorted, completely fake existence” which presupposed a soul “that least comprehends the truth within it”. He sought instead “to find something beautiful and good”, which precluded “committing himself permanently to a course of action based on adherence to specific principles”, for this, he believed, “would turn him into some kind of machine”. His radical notion of autonomy was predicated upon the notion that “each being grows within its own nature” and does not depend on the objective “light of reason to illuminate everything all at once”. It is better to be guided by one’s own light and, moreover, to only be held accountable for one’s present will and not be bound, in the name of virtue, to blindly obey one’s former will. Although much of this sounds like the perfect antithesis to the Kantian notion of autonomy based on the categorical imperative, the example of Allwill’s character and behavior undercuts the credibility of the philosophical standpoint he is articulating. Jacobi may have been tempted by the Allwillian notion of autonomy, but he was unwilling to jettison the traditional conception of human virtue along with it. Through the character of Allwill Jacobi is able to put forth certain aspects of his own anti-philosophical stance while at the same time providing a meta-critique of that position when judged according to the character who has given it expression.

From the perspective of his ex-lover Lucy Allwill’s radical autonomy amounts to nothing more than amoral narcissism. In the last letter of the collection, she tells him that he is nothing more than a “sorcerer” who has long ago lost every last vestige of innocence. He had already outgrown himself “while still in children’s shoes”, and already felt “strained” long before he could “feel” his heart and collect himself together. It is miraculous, she explains, that he has not become either “an angel of virtue, or Satan of vice”. “The absurdity of your being resists every concept. Unruly sensibility and a propensity for stoicism; feminine tenderness, extreme frivolity - and the most cold-blooded courage and the most unswerving fidelity; the sense of the tiger - and the
heart of the lamb; totally present - and nowhere; all - and never something.”  

He has failed to develop a definite moral orientation from which to engage the world. He told Lucy, for example, that the “so-called virtues” engendered “the most bland form of uniformity”.  

“Such a man”, Lucy explains, “can appear to be an entirely good man for perhaps half his life; for the other half, however, he will be sure to be all the more a bad man”. She admits Allwill was correct when he “compared the great masses of our studious ones to people who industriously run about here and there looking for what they have not lost”, but this does not mean that there is “anything better about the idle collecting of sentiments, about the striving to sense.... sentiments, to feel.... feelings”. The true and beautiful soul does not merely say there is “bliss” in this feeling or sentiment, but rather, “there is bliss in this deed”, for that “is what keeps the course of the noble straight”. Allwill’s failure of individuation is a moral failure because of his inability to commit to a consistent set of principles from which to act. His “butterfly philosophy... would see anything called ‘form’ banished” because “everything ought to happen freehand”. Lucy sums up his failure with a metaphor. She tells him that people like him “do not stop to think that the human character is like a liquid matter that cannot have shape and permanence except in a receptacle; and so it never once comes into your heads to consider that pure water in a glass is of more use than nectar poured on mud.”

---

160 Ibid., p. 473.  
161 Ibid., p. 471.  
162 Ibid., p. 474.  
163 Ibid., p. 477-8.  
164 Ibid., p. 479.
IV

Conclusion

Jacobi's conception of reason and the role it plays in human affairs was never clearly explicated in his novel. Because he understood reason to be a purely instrumental and subjective faculty of consciousness, the best he could do was to demonstrate the way in which his characters employed it in defining themselves through their relationships with one another. Jacobi explained from the outset that the message he was attempting to convey was necessarily oblique and depended as much on the reader's suspension of his rational critical faculties as it did on the author's ability to communicate that which required intuitive affirmation, and defied explicit articulation. To provide a definitive description of a soul that was neither in his blood, nor a fleeting breath, would have been to commit the same error as that of the philosophical discourse to which he stood opposed. Instead, he tried to evoke in his readers his own intuitions regarding the sources from which he believed individuals defined their own sense of moral autonomy. This was the rhetorical means by which he attempted to convey a conception of the self that was based neither on rational disengagement, nor on spontaneous emotivism. Edward Allwill personified both extremes. Taken as a whole, Jacobi's novel encapsulates the way in which his Counter-Enlightenment stance was engaged in a philosophical discourse that he was attempting to discredit from within the confines of an epistemological rhetoric that had no hope of attaining its objective.

In terms of the question "What Is Enlightenment", Jacobi had more to say about what it was not. His counter-Enlightenment standpoint had long roots in a Pietist tradition that opposed the rationalistic philosophies of Leibniz and Wolff. He was in agreement with Hamann that reason was not a separate faculty of consciousness, and rejected Kant's idealism. Hume had, in his opinion, arrived at the inevitable dead-end of rationalism. In Concerning the Doctrine of Spinoza, Jacobi brought to public attention his deeply held view that all rationalistic philosophies ultimately ended in atheism, fatalism, and nihilism, the escape from which required an unequivocal affirmation of faith, or "mortal leap". His request to Lessing that he follow his example and make the leap himself symbolized a desperate attempt to rescue the Aufklärung from the ethical ambiguities in which it had become entangled as a result of its blind adherence to abstract rationalism. Perhaps Jacobi's most positive
contribution to answering the question of defining true and false Enlightenment was expressed in his political views. His liberalism and civic humanism demonstrated that he was in general agreement with the overall guiding spirit of Enlightenment thought. The connection he saw between individual autonomy and the minimalist state revealed that his quarrel with Enlightenment rationalism had more to do with the erosion of moral values than with the outright rejection of reason. His liberal political ideals, for example, anticipated a number of themes outlined in Kant’s *What Is Enlightenment* essay. The same can be said of his exploration of the darker side of the beautiful soul. His critique of Edward Allwill was rooted in what he saw as the moral vacuousness of the unrestrained expression of the cult of nature and feeling.

From a contemporary perspective, Jacobi’s counter-Enlightenment stance may be situated within the broader framework of what Charles Taylor has described as “two big constellations of ideas which either immediately or over time have helped generate forms of unbelief.”¹⁶⁵ The first of these predicated its conception of autonomy on disengaged rational control as exemplified by Kant, while the second emphasized the link between our “powers of creative imagination”, and “nature as an inner moral source”.¹⁶⁶ Both were deeply internalized responses “to the felt inadequacies of Enlightenment naturalism”¹⁶⁷, and both positions were articulated within a Deist conception of nature as a self-subsistent, interlocking order, the inner-workings of which would reveal the “providential order of things”.¹⁶⁸ The tension between these two positions stemmed from differing views on the means by which access to the inner-workings of this “interlocking order” could be attained. As attention was increasingly focussed on the internal epistemological sources from which this providential order was revealed, these responses moved in the direction of acknowledging nature as an independent, non-theistic moral source. As Taylor puts it, “some strands of naturalism... try to move towards articulacy, and thus to a more direct and open, hence fuller, release of the stultified powers of nature and desire. This meant modifying the exclusive focus on disengagement, and ultimately a marriage of naturalism and expressivism”.¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁶ Ibid.  
¹⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 382.  
¹⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 370.  
¹⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 343.
Jacobi's critique of transcendental idealism reflected this growing dissatisfaction with disengaged reason as the basis for moral autonomy. At the same time, his characterization of Sylli's intense inward looking affiliation with nature registered his rejection of the *Sturm und Drang* 's cult of nature and feeling. In more general terms, Jacobi's opposition to Enlightenment naturalism was revealed in his interpretation of Goethe's "Prometheus" poem, from which he extracted Lessing's confession of Spinozistic pantheism. This, it seems, confirmed his suspicion that Enlightenment naturalism ultimately constituted an exaggerated form of Deism that was synonymous with pantheism. As Giovanni points out, however, there was a deeper significance in Jacobi's interpretation of Goethe's poem: "The implicit moral assumption was that individual identity has value *per se* and hence must be upheld at all cost, even at the price of futile defiance." \(^{170}\) Thus, there were certain aspects of Goethe's pantheism that Jacobi accepted, just as there were certain elements of Spinoza's philosophy which he found appealing. His ambivalence stemmed from an uncertainty regarding the connection between man's relationship to nature, and the epistemological sources from which its providential significance could be revealed. Jacobi's attempt to explicate the alternative moral source he envisioned remained situated between the two responses to Enlightenment naturalism. In terms of his novel, Edward Allwill gave expression to his author's ambivalence by personifying the "marriage of naturalism and expressivism". \(^{171}\)

Jacobi's depiction of Allwill personified the philosophical attitude that shaped what Taylor has described as the "expressivist turn" of the 1790's. Allwill's mode of being represented an attempt to reconcile the dialectical relationship between the two responses to Enlightenment naturalism. His character gave concrete expression to Jacobi's ambivalence regarding the philosophical tension between Kantian rational disengagement on the one hand, and Goethe's pantheism on the other. Allwill was simultaneously a protagonist for, and victim of, broader philosophical forces. He represented a dangerous convergence of disengaged rationality and radical expressivism, a convergence in which the former became the instrumental means for fulfilling the latter. His uncompromising autonomy was defined exclusively in terms of the spontaneous expression of his feelings, sentiments, and desires. In this sense, Allwill's radical subjectivism reflected the deeper significance of the "Prometheus" poem. His failure to establish meaningful relationships with others, however, demonstrated that his natural powers of expression were morally vacant. To rely on the "inner voice of nature" was to accept a

---

\(^{170}\) di Giovanni, "Introduction", p. 73.  
\(^{171}\) Taylor, *ibid.*, p. 343.
pantheistic view of the world in which all of our actions would become devoid of moral significance. All will inhabited a Spinozistic world in which “all rational and social relationships are epiphenomena of what is in fact only a play of competing forces all blindly spewing forth from the same undifferentiated source”\(^{172}\). Taken as a whole Jacobi’s novel is an exploration of two incommensurable discourses, rationalism and romanticism. In the final analysis Jacobi remained critical of both, but provided no real alternative to either. Neither nature nor reason could serve as the source from which individuals define themselves as morally autonomous agents.

\(^{172}\) di Giovanni, ibid., p. 76.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


