



The Main Philosophical
Writings and the
Novel *Allwill*



Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi

Translated with an
Introductory Study, Notes,
and Bibliography by
George di Giovanni

THE MAIN PHILOSOPHICAL WRITINGS
AND THE NOVEL *ALLWILL*

Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi

Translated and edited by George di Giovanni

This scholarly edition of Jacobi's major works is the first extensive English translation of these literary and philosophical classics. A key but somewhat eclipsed figure in the German Enlightenment, Jacobi had an enormous impact on philosophical thought in the later part of the eighteenth century, notably on the way in which Kant was received and the early development of post-Kantian idealism.

Jacobi was propelled to notoriety in 1785 with his polemical tract *Concerning the Doctrine of Spinoza in Letters to Herr Moses Mendelssohn*, included in this translation, along with *David Hume on Faith, or Idealism and Realism*; *Jacobi to Fichte*; and the novel *Allwill*.

In his comprehensive introduction, George di Giovanni situates Jacobi in the historical and philosophical context of his time. Avoiding a simplistic portrayal of Jacobi as a fideist or proto-existentialist, di Giovanni shows how Jacobi's life and work reflect the tensions inherent in the late Enlightenment. To learn about Jacobi is also to learn about the period in which he lived.

This book will be invaluable to students of German Idealism and to anyone interested in the Enlightenment and early Romanticism.

George di Giovanni is professor of philosophy, McGill University.

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Preface

WHEN I APPROACHED Emil Fackenheim—it is now a quarter-century ago—to ask him whether he would be willing to direct a thesis on Hegel's *Logic*, I remember his first look of disconcertment and the warning that followed. It was not just that the *Logic* is a fiendishly difficult work and that nothing very enlightening had ever been written about it. Experience showed that serious students of Hegel have a tendency to lose themselves in their subject and not come up with anything publishable for years after their first exposure to it. That was not a happy prospect for someone who would soon be looking for a job in academia.

I did manage to find a position a few years later. Yet Fackenheim's warning proved true in a way. The thesis was completed in a reasonable length of time, but at the price of limiting it to what had originally been intended as only its introductory chapter. The rest, which I had hoped to complete and publish as a book in short order, has yet to see the light of day. I soon discovered that Hegel's *Logic* cannot be properly understood without being studied in the context of the Enlightenment sceptical tradition, which continued unabated throughout the high period of German Idealism. Hegel has more in common with this tradition than is usually recognized. With an eye to my planned future book, I therefore undertook to document it, in co-operation with H. S. Harris, with a translation of relevant texts from the period (*Between Kant and Hegel*, 1985). However, it did not take me long to realize that the discussions in those texts of the epistemological and metaphysical issues were all motivated by broader and deeper interests in religious and moral matters. The ancient "faith versus reason" debate was in all cases just below the surface. One could not, however, broach this debate without coming face to face with Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi. Jacobi was not, indeed, a

first-rate philosopher. Yet his polemic against abstract reason on behalf of faith undoubtedly shaped the course of philosophical discussion in Germany in the last fifteen years of the eighteenth century. Its influence continued in the following century and was, in some respects, just as important for the development of philosophy as Kant's *Critique*. At the time when I was preparing *Between Kant and Hegel* I found it impossible to represent Jacobi among the texts chosen for translation. Jacobi simply defied every attempt at excerption. I promised myself, however, to make up for this failure sometime in the future. The present work, which turned out to be a much greater enterprise than I had originally bargained for, is the fulfilment of that promise. The book on Hegel is of course still to be written, but I am not despairing yet.

I chose the first five texts that I have translated because, in my opinion, they best convey the philosophical promise that unfortunately Jacobi never fulfilled. The open letter to Fichte is a good expression of Jacobi's growing concern, at the time, over the new idealism that was taking shape in Germany in the wake of Kant. The introduction to the 1815 edition of the *David Hume* was chosen because it is Jacobi's final statement of his philosophical position. In the case of his two novels, *Allwill* and *Woldemar*, the choice was difficult. Practical considerations finally tipped the scales. I chose *Allwill* because of its relative brevity in comparison to *Woldemar*. I have made it a point in my introductory study and in my notes to Jacobi's texts to cite extensively from the rest of Jacobi's major works, and from most minor ones as well, in an effort to provide as complete a picture of Jacobi's opus as possible. I have made my translations from first editions, and I have ordered them chronologically. I have followed this policy because Jacobi's thought altered over the years, not necessarily for the better, in my opinion, and the reader ought to be given an opportunity to note the changes. Although I make no pretensions to have provided a critical edition of the texts translated, I have made every effort to identify Jacobi's many references and to explain their context. Two of Jacobi's quotations (Otway, p. 257; and Heder, p. 324) have, however, escaped my most diligent searches. I trust that some reader will eventually find them for me. Finally, I have made no effort in the footnotes and in the Bibliography either to modernize or in any way to standardize the eighteenth-century spelling of German, French, or Italian words.

A work as complex as the present one would not have been possible without the help of many. It is now my pleasure to acknowledge this help. The staff at the libraries of the Universities of München, Münster,

and Tübingen were always very kind and helpful. Most of all, however, I must thank the staff of the McGill Library. The fine collection at McGill of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century texts was for me a veritable treasure-trove. So was the Kierkegaard Library, now housed at McGill. It appears that Kierkegaard had in his possession copies of many of the books that Jacobi had also read and used. Any book that I could not find in either of these two funds, or that I had not already examined in Europe, was procured for me by the staff of the Interlibrary Loans Department. I thank them for their competence, their graciousness, and the humour with which they met even my most extravagant requests.

My colleagues Harry Bracken, David Norton, and Jeremy Walker were invaluable sources of scholarly information and of encouragement. I thank them for both.

Jeremy Walker came to my aid with his poetic skills by rendering in English verse Goethe's two poems that appear in the *Spinoza Letters*.

Hans-Jakob Wilhelm and Louise Collins (both PhD candidates at McGill) were, at different times, my research assistants. Hans-Jakob, whose first language is German, tested my translations for accuracy and occasionally found them wanting. Louise tested my English, and she too had cause to protest. Louise also subjected my introductory essays to a rigorous analytical examination that often made me feel as if I were back in the hands of a stern teacher. I thank her for her splendid work, just as I thank Hans-Jakob for his.

My thanks to Frederick C. Beiser and the anonymous reader for McGill-Queen's University Press, whose sharp and informed criticisms helped me to clarify some of my statements, at least to my satisfaction, though not necessarily to theirs.

To H. S. Harris I owe a special debt. It was he who first suggested to me, shortly after I completed my thesis on Hegel, that I turn my attention to Jacobi. I did not take the bait then, mostly because I was too ignorant to recognize Jacobi's historical importance. But I eventually came around to his early suggestion. To Harris also fell the ungrateful task of reading and improving the first version of my translations, when the text was still raw and definitely German-sounding. I thank him for this work, for his original suggestion, and for all the encouragement.

The Social Sciences and Humanities Council of Canada awarded me a two-year grant for research assistants and travel to German libraries. Computer equipment was provided through a grant from the McGill Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research. It is a sign of the times, and hopefully an indication that we are back to the cosmopolitanism so dear

to the Enlightenment, that this translation of German texts into English was done by one whose first language is Italian, in an institution of Scottish origin in a French-speaking part of Canada.

I am responsible for any error.

George di Giovanni

Introduction
The Unfinished Philosophy of Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi

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I

Jacobi and His Spiritual Landscape: An Essay in Synthesis

THE FIGURE

1. When Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi died in 1819, four years had elapsed since the Congress of Vienna and the second Peace of Paris finally put an end to Napoleon and the Napoleonic regimes in Europe.¹ The Restoration was in full swing. "Old Fritz," as Jacobi was known to friends and foes alike, died a septuagenarian. The years of his life saw many changes in German society. At his birth in 1743, almost a century had elapsed since the Peace of Westphalia (1648) ended the Thirty Years' War. That war had been fought mostly on German lands and, apart from the carnage and the material devastation that it wreaked in the towns and countryside, it had also brought to a standstill whatever cultural and intellectual life German society had previously enjoyed. Nor was the cen-

1. For the general historical and literary background I have drawn from many sources, but especially from the following: Emil Adler, *Herder und die deutsche Aufklärung* (Wien: Europa Verlag, 1965); Richard Benz, *Die Zeit der Deutschen Klassik, 1750-1800* (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1953); Ernst Cassirer, *Die Philosophie der Aufklärung* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1932); Hajo Holborn, *A History of Modern Germany, 1648-1840* (New York: Knopf, 1968); H. A. Korff, *Geist der Goethezeit*, IV (Leipzig: Koehler and Amelang, 1966); Friedrich Meinecke, *Machiavellism: The Doctrine of Raison d'Etat and Its Place in Modern History*, tr. D. Scott (New Haven: Yale, 1962); Angelo Pupi, *Alla soglia dell'età romantica* (Milano: Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore, 1962); Paul Rilla, *Lessing und sein Zeitalter* (München: Beck, 1973); Hermann Timm, *Gott und die Freiheit. Studien zur Religionphilosophie der Goethezeit: I, Die Spinozarennaissance* (Frankfurt/Main: Klostermann, 1974); Valerio Verra, *F. H. Jacobi, dall'illuminismo all'idealismo* (Torino: Filosofia, 1963; in my opinion, still the best general treatment of Jacobi and his age); Hans-Ulrich Wehler, *Deutsche Gesellschaftsgeschichte, 1700-1815* (München: Beck, 1987). I have also made ample use of the *Allgemeine deutsche Biographie*, the *Neue deutsche Biographie*, and the *Biographie universelle*.

tury that followed to be a peaceful one. Wars followed upon wars with singular regularity, and in the process the whole socio-political face of Europe was modified. England rose to the status of unchallenged world power, and in the eighteenth century it began to exercise direct influence on the German lands through its possession of Hanover. On the continent, while the influence of Spain eventually collapsed and the Holy Roman Empire was reduced to an ineffectual symbol, other centres of power were beginning to assert themselves. France soon became the single strongest continental nation. Austria gradually gained in strength and eventually turned itself into an empire. There was also the steady rise of Brandenburg-Prussia, which, together with the influence that Russia had begun to exercise, added one more factor to the balance of power in Central Europe. It was the ordinary folk who bore the brunt of the destruction caused by all these changes. Yet in spite of the constant dislocations, cultural and intellectual life had slowly come alive again in Germany. The revival was clearly dependent on influences coming from France and England, which exercised cultural and political hegemony over Europe at the time. But to these foreign influences the Germans always added elements drawn from their particular intellectual and religious tradition, so that, by the middle of the eighteenth century, the typically German phenomenon of the *Aufklärung* was in full swing.

Jacobi was born, therefore, to a world full of the tensions and contradictions that rapid change always leaves in its wake, and the rest of his life was to witness changes even more radical. At the political level, the French Revolution was to challenge long-established ideas about the role of the prince in society. At the intellectual level, under the stress of ideas that it had itself nurtured, the *Aufklärung* gave way to new attitudes that eventually provided the ideology required to justify the French Revolution. The attitudes themselves persisted even after the revolution had run its course, so that, under the trappings of the old political order, the "Restoration" of 1815 in fact established a totally new one. A new state absolutism emerged that had little to do with the absolutism of the eighteenth-century princes.

Jacobi did not shy away from active life, as we shall see. He was also to suffer at first hand some of the effects of the French Revolution. But unlike his younger and more famous contemporary Goethe, he never was an effective participant in the great events of the day. Like the characters of his philosophical novels, for whom action is mostly restricted to emotion and discussion, Jacobi lived through those events emotionally and verbally, through his writings and countless letters to just about everyone

of consequence in his day. If he did leave a mark on his world, it was precisely in his role as a commentator on the contemporary scene—most of all, as an acute critic of the ideas by which the new socio-political tendencies were seeking legitimization. In this respect Jacobi's literary work proved to be a catalyst for both the ideologies justifying the new order and the reaction against it, as we shall see in what follows. As a commentator on a world in transition, Jacobi came to reflect the tensions and contradictions of the latter in his own personality and work. In order to be justly measured, therefore, his figure must be viewed as part of a larger and complex spiritual landscape. Jacobi was not just a defender of faith *vis-à-vis* the Enlightenment or a man of feelings (a typical *Herzensmensch*) in opposition to the rationalism of the schools. Nor was he just a realist in opposition to the scepticism of Hume and the idealism of Kant. Jacobi was all these and much more, at his best holding his beliefs together in a unity of tension, at his worst, especially in his later years, reconciling them under a facile account of the notions of faith and reason.

2. The main events of Jacobi's life can be related here briefly. He was born in Düsseldorf, of a merchant family. His older brother, Georg, was to make a name for himself as an anacreontic poet. His two younger half-sisters, Charlotte and Helene, eventually became part of Jacobi's family, acting as secretaries and, at the death of Jacobi's wife, as household managers. Of his childhood we know only what Jacobi himself gives us to understand from hints in the *David Hume* and from what are probably autobiographical characterizations in his *Allwill*.² As a child Jacobi apparently was very awkward and withdrawn, stubborn and highly strung, and given to brooding on religious matters such as the existence of God and the reality of an everlasting time. His father intended him for a business career and so had him apprenticed for a brief period (1759) at a merchant house in Frankfurt-am-Main. After that he was sent to Geneva for a three-year period of general education. Jacobi himself explains that there, under the tutelage of the renowned Lesage, he became acquainted with both the traditional philosophy of the schools and the thought of the French *philosophes*, notably, among the latter, Rousseau and Bonnet. After this Geneva stay, on his father's refusal to have him pursue medical studies in Glasgow, Jacobi returned to Düsseldorf, where

2. See below, *David Hume*, pp. 67ff., and *Allwill*, pp. 28ff. References to texts included in this translation are to the pagination of Jacobi's editions.