

M O S E S
M E N D E L S S O H N

Last Works

TRANSLATED BY

Bruce Rosenstock

Last Works

MOSES
MENDELSSOHN

Last Works

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*Translated, with an
Introduction and Commentary,
by Bruce Rosenstock*

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Abbreviations

<i>AA</i>	Immanuel Kant, <i>Akademie-Ausgabe von Kant's Gesammelte Schriften</i> . For publication details, see Kant 1969–.
<i>JubA</i>	M. Mendelssohn, <i>Gesammelte Schriften Jubiläumsausgabe</i> (Collected Works Jubilee Edition). For publication details, see Mendelssohn 1971–1990.
<i>MH</i>	M. Mendelssohn, <i>Morgenstunden (Morning Hours)</i> . For publication details, see Mendelssohn 1785. The definitive edition is found in <i>JubA</i> 3,2: 178–218.
<i>Spinoza-Letters</i>	F. H. Jacobi, <i>Über die Lehre des Spinoza in Briefen an den Herrn Moses Mendelssohn (Concerning the Doctrine of Spinoza in Letters to Herr Moses Mendelssohn)</i> . The English translation is found in Jacobi 1994, 173–251. The German text of all editions of the work published by Jacobi during his lifetime is in Jacobi 2000. Citations are to the first German edition's pagination (provided in the header to the Jacobi 2000 text of the work and within the English translation of Jacobi 1994). Quotations are from the English translation of <i>Spinoza-Letters</i> in Jacobi 1994.
<i>TFL</i>	M. Mendelssohn, <i>An die Freunde Lessings (To the Friends of Lessing)</i> . For publication details, see Mendelssohn 1786. The definitive edition is found in <i>JubA</i> 3,2: 178–218.
<i>ZA-Digital</i>	“Retrospektive Digitalisierung wissenschaftlicher Rezensionsorgane und Literaturzeitschriften des 18. und 19. Jahrhunderts aus dem deutschen Sprachraum,” a digital archive for 160 journals published in Germany during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. http://www.ub.uni-bielefeld.de/diglib/aufklaerung/index.htm .

Introduction to the Translation

On February 15, 1781, Gotthold Ephraim Lessing died at the age of fifty-two. The two final works of Moses Mendelssohn's career, *Morgenstunden* (*Morning Hours*, 1785) and *An die Freunde Lessings* (*To the Friends of Lessing*, 1786), were written in the long shadow cast by this death over the remaining years of Mendelssohn's life.¹ "The death of this friend with whom, one could say, I felt I had come to share my life has struck a deep wound in my heart," Mendelssohn confessed, just one month after Lessing's death, in a letter to Johann Gottfried Herder.² Two months later, Mendelssohn informed Herder, "I have the intention this summer, if my health permits, to write something about the character of our Lessing."³ This intention was never fulfilled, although not because Mendelssohn's health did not permit it. Instead of the planned book on Lessing's character, we have *Morning Hours* (*MH*) and *To the Friends of Lessing* (*TFL*).

Both *MH* and *TFL* have Lessing at their center, but in a ways that are far different from what Mendelssohn had originally intended. And if Mendelssohn had first seemed concerned that his health might prevent him from completing a book on Lessing, he abandoned all such concern in order to write *MH* and *TFL*. Mendelssohn informs us in his foreword to *MH* that the book was composed in the face of a nervous disorder that in those years plagued him whenever he engaged himself seriously with philosophy. Not many months after publishing *MH*, Mendelssohn penned *TFL* in great haste. Feeling it was urgent that the manuscript reach his publisher as soon as possible, Mendelssohn carried it to him on a bitterly cold Saturday, the thirty-first of December 1785. He grew feverish that evening, and on Wednesday of the same week he died. He was fifty-six years old. Reflecting upon the final outcome of Mendelssohn's intention to "write something about the character of our Lessing," Alexander Altmann put it best when he wrote that "it was as if [this intention] was born under an evil star."⁴

Despite the fact that the books as we have them now do not correspond to Mendelssohn's original intention to write about Lessing's character, *MH* and *TFL* are nonetheless testimonies to the lifelong friendship and creative collaboration of Lessing and Mendelssohn. They do not, however, provide a mere record of a past friendship or a portrait of his dear friend's character. Rather, *MH* and

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TFL were written to stake a claim upon the future. They were written to ensure that the friendship between Lessing and Mendelssohn would continue to inspire the transformation of German culture along the path of the Enlightenment ideal of religious toleration, to which both men had devoted themselves throughout their decades-long association. The last two writings of Mendelssohn's career seek to provide a firm foundation for an ambitious cultural project that he characterized with the term *Bildung*, defined by him as the guided *formation* of a nation's character through the intertwined development of, first, the practical and creative arts (generally designated with the term *Kultur*, or culture) and, second, the theoretical clarification and systematization of the nation's moral and religious ethos (*Aufklärung*, or enlightenment).⁵ Mendelssohn regarded Lessing's death as a serious blow to their shared *Bildung* project, but one that could be overcome if posterity would remember Lessing as a model of *Bildung*, as the harmonious embodiment of both *Kultur* and *Aufklärung*. This was certainly how Mendelssohn remembered him, and it was how he wished him to be remembered by others. But as a rule, history does not conform to our wishes. When Mendelssohn published *MH* in the fall of 1785, he was instantly caught up in a public battle over Lessing's legacy that significantly reshaped the course of both German philosophy and literature.

A few words about Mendelssohn's friendship with Lessing are in order before turning to this battle over Lessing's memory. Lessing had been Moses Mendelssohn's closest friend since their first meeting in 1754. The two friends worked closely together on a number of philosophical and literary projects. In 1755 Lessing edited and published Mendelssohn's first foray into philosophy, his *Philosophical Conversations* (*Philosophische Gespräche*), which was written in the form of a conversation between two friends.⁶ In subsequent years, Lessing and Mendelssohn, joined by their mutual friend and publisher Friedrich Nicolai, worked as editors and major contributors to journals devoted to the advancement of new aesthetic standards in German literature and art, primarily aimed at freeing German culture from its dependence on French models. Lessing's friendship with Mendelssohn, this unique and unprecedented friendship between Germany's leading dramatist and a Talmud-trained Jewish philosopher whose first language was Yiddish, was seen as the living demonstration of the *Bildung* project that both men were seeking to spearhead: to free Germany from the shackles of its cultural backwardness and fawning reverence for outworn traditions, and to let the bright light of critical reason and the spirit of an enlarged and humane sensibility guide the creation of a new and broad-based cultural renaissance.

Both *MH* and *TFL* contain passages in which Mendelssohn offers sometimes moving testimony to the memory of Lessing and the profound significance, in

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Mendelssohn's view at least, of their friendship and collaboration. But it is not in these passages, perhaps all that is left of the original intention to write about "the character of our Lessing," where Mendelssohn preserves and, one might say, fights for Lessing's legacy and their common project of a German cultural renaissance. In fact, the effort to establish Lessing as a model of *Bildung* is not always apparent on the surface of these last writings of Mendelssohn. *MH* especially seems to have moved so far from Mendelssohn's first plans for his Lessing book that it is hard to believe that Lessing plays anything more than a tangential role in it. *MH* is a wide-ranging and systematic exposition in the form of early morning "lectures," occasionally interrupted by Mendelssohn's youthful pupils, including his son Joseph (born in 1770) and two of his friends, concerning a number of philosophical topics: the nature of truth, the foundations of human knowledge, the basis of our moral and aesthetic powers of judgment, the reality of the external world, and the grounds for a rational faith in a providential deity. We know from the later testimony of Joseph himself that these early morning conversations, beginning at five o'clock and concluding at nine, did in fact take place, but we are not certain exactly in what year they began. It must have been either in late 1783 or early 1784, however, and it is therefore not far-fetched to describe *MH* as the record of the theological bar mitzvah training that Mendelssohn provided to his son.

And what did Mendelssohn hope to teach his son and his two companions? Mendelssohn was convinced that the theology of Judaism was nothing other than the rational theology to which everyone, regardless of creed, could assent if only they had a proper training in the basics of philosophy. Such at least was the claim that Mendelssohn had advanced in his *Jerusalem, oder über religiöse Macht und Judentum* (*Jerusalem; or, On Religious Power and Judaism*, 1783).⁷ And thus in *MH* we have a demonstration of how easy it is to gain a universally valid understanding of the nature of God. If Socrates in Plato's *Meno* had led a young slave boy to produce the Pythagorean theorem, the "Socrates of Berlin" would lead his young interlocutors to a common knowledge of God.⁸ Even though Joseph, having reached the age of bar mitzvah, would now be responsible for following the commandments enjoined by God upon one particular people, he could take his place within the universal community of all humanity in his rational acknowledgment of the one God, the providential Creator whom all people can worship together.

What, then, has become of Lessing in *MH*? What place does he have in this theological bar mitzvah training? The battle over Lessing's legacy remains at the heart of the book, but it is true that only in Lectures XIV and XV does Lessing himself make an overt appearance. In Lecture XV we read a fulsome

praise of Lessing's devotion to the unprejudiced pursuit of the truth and his commitment to religious tolerance that is placed in the mouth of an unnamed interlocutor "D.," a guest at one of the morning lectures. This particular praise of Lessing reflects the same sentiment that Mendelssohn had expressed to Lessing's younger brother Karl in a letter of consolation composed immediately after Lessing's death. In this letter Mendelssohn wrote that Lessing's critique of intolerance in *Nathan der Weise* (*Nathan the Wise*, 1799) showed him to be "in advance of his century by more than one generation."⁹ Mendelssohn adds that it was said of Copernicus, "He brought his new system into the world, and died." He continues: "The biographer of your brother will be able to write, with the very same assurance: 'He wrote *Nathan the Wise*, and died.'"

The most famous, and most controversial, passage in the play *Nathan the Wise* is what has come to be known as the Parable of the Three Rings (Lessing 1882, lines 1911–2055). The parable is told by the Jewish character Nathan, a resident of Jerusalem during the time of the Crusades. Nathan describes a ring of "inestimable worth" that has the power to make its possessor beloved of men and of God, on the sole condition that he remain convinced that it truly has this extraordinary power. The owner, intent on keeping the ring in his family, gives it to his most beloved son, and he in turn passes it on to his most beloved son. After many generations, the ring comes into the possession of a father with three sons, each equally beloved. The father promises the ring to each son, and as he faces death, he contrives to have copies of the ring made. So perfectly made are these copies that the father himself cannot tell which ring is the original. Just before he dies, he gives each of his sons a ring. After their father's death, each son contests the claim of the other to govern the household, and they agree to bring their suit before a judge. The judge realizes that it is a simple matter to detect which son holds the authentic ring. He asks the brothers one question: "Which of you is most beloved?" When the brothers find it impossible to answer, the judge realizes that each brother loves *himself* most. He thus concludes that no brother possesses the authentic ring. But he offers the sons advice: "Do not despair, but hold fast to your conviction that you possess the true ring. Make every effort," he tells each of the brothers, "to demonstrate that yours is the true ring by doing all in your power to make yourself the most beloved of the other two. Perhaps this was the intention of your father," he explains, "who truly loved each son equally and sought to free his house of the 'tyranny of *one* ring' (l. 2036) by creating two, and perhaps three, copies of the original ring."

Lessing's Parable of the Three Rings is narrated by Nathan to the Sultan, who rules over Jerusalem. The Sultan has asked Nathan, a man admired for his

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wisdom, for his opinion about which of the three Abrahamic faiths is the true one. The parable rejects the possibility of determining the truth of any faith by an objective examination of its doctrines. Instead, the truth of the faith is only able to be established (after many thousands of years, as the judge in the parable states) by the degree to which it leads its practitioners away from acts performed out of self-love to acts done with “humility, heartfelt tolerance, benevolence, and deep devotion to God” (ll. 2045–48). This is certainly a sentiment with which Mendelssohn would be sympathetic, especially since he believed that Judaism was not in possession of any objectively ascertainable theological truth that was unavailable to any person who could think clearly and examine the evidence, both speculative and empirical, for the existence of a providential Creator. But it was indeed the case that Lessing, as Mendelssohn told Lessing’s brother, “was in advance of his century by more than one generation.” Søren Kierkegaard, in the middle of the next century, reinterpreted the parable and all of Lessing’s theological writings as expressing the view that the one truth on which human happiness depends is not an objectively verifiable truth but is, rather, “only in the becoming, in the process of appropriation.”¹⁰ Kierkegaard was the first Christian thinker who was able to read Lessing’s parable as more than a thinly disguised rejection of Christianity in favor of, at best, some form of natural religion or neutral deism. In Lecture XV Mendelssohn’s “D.” describes how, after the publication of *Nathan the Wise*, Lessing became a social pariah. His plea for religious tolerance, as Mendelssohn interpreted it, was seen as a denunciation of Christianity rather than as a harbinger of a new cultural renaissance, a new form of *Bildung*:

Basically, his *Nathan* had promoted, if we are to speak honestly, the true glory of Christendom. *At what a lofty level of enlightenment and culture must a nation stand in which a man can lift himself to this height of sentiment, can develop himself to this refinement of knowledge concerning things divine and human!*! At least, it seems to me, this is how posterity will judge him, but Lessing’s contemporaries were of a different mind. Every rebuke he made against some of his co-religionists for their conceit and one-sided thinking, or that he allowed one of his dramatic characters to make, they heard as an insult directed at themselves personally by Lessing. The friend and acquaintance who was once welcome everywhere now found faces everywhere unfriendly, glances everywhere restrained and frosty, greetings cold and farewells glad, and he saw himself abandoned by his friends and acquaintances and left exposed to all the sneers of his enemies. (Lecture XV, par. 9; emphasis added)

Mendelssohn certainly wants to show that Lessing had written *Nathan the Wise* only to promote the “true glory of Christendom,” but in Lecture XV it is no

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longer the play that is the foremost issue. Mendelssohn’s more pressing challenge is to defend Lessing’s *pantheism*.

That Mendelssohn should want to defend Lessing’s pantheism is at first sight surprising. In Mendelssohn’s letters composed soon after Lessing’s death, there is not the slightest hint that Lessing had abandoned a theistic faith in favor of pantheism, and certainly there is no suggestion that Mendelssohn would need to pen a defense of Lessing’s pantheism. We may well wonder what brought Mendelssohn to so drastically alter his plan to write a book about “the character of our Lessing” in the summer of 1781 “if my health permits.” What has led him to offer us instead *MH*, a record of tutorials in rational theology with a lengthy digression on Lessing’s pantheism?

Sometime after his initial plans for the Lessing book, Mendelssohn came to believe that the future of everything he and Lessing cherished most—an enlightened, humane culture of open-minded tolerance and the unprejudiced pursuit of the truth—hinged on the question of whether Lessing had embraced pantheism, a doctrine most closely associated with the rigidly deterministic philosophy of Baruch Spinoza. To be known as a “Spinozist” was tantamount to being an atheist. To protect what Mendelssohn took to be the core of Lessing’s legacy—the message of religious tolerance expressed in *Nathan the Wise*—it would be necessary to show that Lessing had not denied the existence of a providential God concerned with the happiness of humankind. How could anyone hear a message of religious tolerance from someone who thought of God as nothing more than another name for the implacable laws of nature, the “All and One” of pantheism? One reviewer, writing about *TFL* soon after its publication, put the matter clearly: “All the great benefits that a *Nathan the Wise* is able to bestow would be negated if one were certain of the claim [that Lessing was an atheist]. Were Lessing an atheist and not an enlightened worshiper of God, every golden speech of his *Nathan* would disgust us as sheer hypocrisy.”¹¹ To show that Lessing remained committed to a belief in a providential God is the task that Mendelssohn sets himself in both *MH* and *TFL*. A “refined” (*geläuterte*) Spinozism and *Bildung* were, Mendelssohn sets out to show, fundamentally compatible.

In order to explain what led Mendelssohn to alter his original intentions for the Lessing book and to write instead a defense of Lessing’s “refined” pantheism, scholars have commonly referred to a letter Mendelssohn received from Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi (1749–1832) in August 1783. This letter was delivered to Mendelssohn by a mutual friend of his and Jacobi’s, Elise Reimarus.¹² In this letter, Jacobi recalls his visit to Lessing’s home not long before his death and the confession Lessing made to him then that he was a “decided Spinozist.”¹³

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This letter from Jacobi and the several others that followed it over the course of nearly two years certainly had an impact upon Mendelssohn’s Lessing book, but it needs to be placed in the wider context of the new intellectual and personal challenges confronting Mendelssohn at exactly this time. Only then will it be possible to offer a judicious assessment of the role that Jacobi played in the final shape of *MH*. In the case of *TFL*, the importance of Jacobi’s provocation is clear and on the surface. *TFL* was a direct response to Jacobi’s publication of his correspondence with Mendelssohn about the nature of Lessing’s alleged Spinozism and about the nature of Spinozism more generally.¹⁴ But with *MH*, the situation is far less clear and deserves a fresh look. So, before turning to Jacobi’s letter and its importance, it is necessary to get a better understanding of what the other issues were that were occupying Mendelssohn when he received the report of Lessing’s “decided Spinozism” in the summer of 1783.

First of all, it is important to note that for reasons having nothing to do with Jacobi, Mendelssohn had already postponed the writing of his Lessing book for two years by the time he received Jacobi’s letter. After the publication of Christian Wilhelm von Dohm’s *Ueber die bürgerliche Verbesserung der Juden* (*On the Civil Improvement of the Jews*) in the summer of 1781, Mendelssohn had become involved in the pressing issue of arguing for the extension of civil rights to the Jews, and he seems to have put the writing of the Lessing book momentarily to one side, although he continued to gather materials for it. Mendelssohn’s efforts to defend civil rights for the Jews led him to spearhead a German translation of *Vindiciae Judaeorum* (*The Vindication of the Jews*, 1656) by Rabbi Menasseh ben Israel, an English treatise addressed to Oliver Cromwell pleading for the right of Jews to enter England. Mendelssohn wrote a passionate preface to the German translation rendered from the English by his close friend Markus Herz (*Rettung der Juden* [*Salvation of the Jews*, 1782]). Mendelssohn went further than to defend Jewish civil rights. He denied the very existence of any “religious rights”: no one should be in a position to appeal to the state to support his or her particular religion in any way whatsoever. Religious associations should be entirely voluntary and should be protected by the state only because they are (or ought to be) nondiscriminating associations of free citizens seeking to promote benevolence toward everyone. After an anonymous author challenged Mendelssohn to show why, if he held this view, he chose to obey the particular laws of Judaism, Mendelssohn composed *Jerusalem*. It remains not only a brilliant analysis of the non-coercive nature of Jewish law but also a powerful statement of the necessity of separating religion from state power.

Mendelssohn had thus been swept up in the cause of Jewish civil rights and the defense of religious toleration very soon after Lessing’s death. Although

this compelled him to put the Lessing book on hold, he nonetheless prepared himself to return to it by methodically gathering Lessing's letters and other unpublished material. As part of this task, Mendelssohn was involved as an advisor to Lessing's brother Karl in assessing Lessing's manuscripts for an edition of his previously unpublished writings. In April 1783 Mendelssohn received from Karl the theological manuscripts of his brother.¹⁵ Mendelssohn quickly read through the manuscripts and judged them to not be fit for publication.¹⁶ We do not have the letter that Mendelssohn wrote to Karl Lessing sometime in April or early May 1783 in which he explains his reasons for not wanting these theological manuscripts to be published, but we have Karl Lessing's response, dated May 8, 1783. Karl Lessing informs Mendelssohn that he will go forward with their publication despite Mendelssohn's advice. Mendelssohn could see that there was much in the manuscripts that would lend itself to being construed as the speculation of a pantheist who placed little or no value on the Scriptures and what they might teach us about a providential God. In his apparent disparagement of both the Old and the New Testaments, Lessing seemed to have gone further even than Spinoza. Spinoza had at least granted that the Scriptures contained a core set of universally binding moral commandments. It is clear that Mendelssohn was troubled by what he had read in Lessing's unpublished theological manuscripts.

The manuscripts seem to have provided the initial impetus for Mendelssohn's revised plan for his Lessing book. In the same letter (May 1783) in which he tells Mendelssohn that he plans to publish the theological manuscripts, Karl Lessing also thanks Mendelssohn for his intention to "dedicate your morning hours to the memory of my brother."¹⁷ The information that Mendelssohn was going to dedicate his morning hours to the Lessing book was presumably conveyed to Karl Lessing in the same letter in which Mendelssohn explained his reasons for not wanting Lessing's theological manuscripts published. Although he had not wanted Karl Lessing to publish the theological manuscripts of his brother, Mendelssohn himself ultimately published a large section of one of them in Lecture XIV of *MH*. He used it to show that Lessing's views, even though they were pantheistic in tone, were nonetheless compatible with a belief in a providential deity.

Even had he never received Jacobi's letter, Mendelssohn would have had sufficient grounds for wanting to address Lessing's pantheism. Mendelssohn wanted to frame Lessing's theological writings within the context of a "refined" pantheism because, had they been read without this framing, the entire goal of his and Lessing's lifework, epitomized in *Nathan the Wise*, was in danger of being "negated" and condemned as "disgusting hypocrisy." Mendelssohn's *Bildung* project was profoundly threatened: enlightenment, it might seem from

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a reading of Lessing’s “enlightened” theological writings, could never be used to advance the moral and religious ethos of a nation, because it is incompatible with faith in a transcendent and providential God, the very core of a nation’s moral and religious identity.

Therefore, when Mendelssohn received Jacobi’s letter in the summer of 1783 (several months, in other words, after his receipt of Lessing’s theological manuscripts) informing him of Lessing’s Spinozism, it confirmed for him the need to link Lessing’s religious views with a doctrine of a providential God. Jacobi later sent to him a much longer report about his conversations (in a letter dated November 1783), which further impressed upon Mendelssohn the need to deal with Lessing’s apparent pantheism. In a letter to Elise Reimarus and her brother written soon after he received Jacobi’s longer report, Mendelssohn told them he had decided to write about Spinoza before writing about Lessing’s character.¹⁸ But Spinoza was of interest to Mendelssohn only for the sake of explicating the difference between Spinoza and Lessing. Jacobi made it very clear to Mendelssohn that Lessing’s theological writings, when they were published by Lessing’s brother Karl, could open Lessing to the charge of Spinozistic atheism.

Around the time Mendelssohn was nearing the completion of *MH*, in June 1785, he jokingly complained to Elise Reimarus that when she had given him Jacobi’s first letter in the summer of 1783, it had led him to renew his involvement with Spinoza and metaphysical questions once again, despite all of his reluctance to do so on account of his health. But this is an exaggeration on Mendelssohn’s part. Mendelssohn finished *MH* in April 1785, and the work is far more than an engagement with Jacobi over the nature of Lessing’s Spinozism. More than this, the work reflects the intention that must have inspired Mendelssohn, perhaps as early as the spring of 1783 and almost certainly before receiving Jacobi’s first letter, to offer bar mitzvah training in rational theology to his son Joseph and his friends. Even if Mendelssohn did not immediately sit down to record his lectures after each session (Joseph’s later report is ambiguous about this), they reflect his fundamental conviction that without an understanding of what reason can teach us about God, no one is able to assume his place in the building and preservation of an enlightened community, whatever one’s specific creed may be. A rational theology is the foundation of any enlightened state. Mendelssohn had come to see that the achievement of what he and Lessing wanted above all else—to demonstrate in their friendship and in their writings how reason can guide humanity toward a more tolerant society—depended on a full-scale exposition of what reason can teach about God. Mendelssohn also saw that in order to convince the public that he and Lessing shared the same goal, he would have to deal directly with the question of Lessing’s pantheism, a topic

that would surface when the theological manuscripts were published. Jacobi's correspondence proved to Mendelssohn the pressing need to buttress the religion of reason against the assault of those, like Jacobi, who saw it as inimical to the revealed faith of Christianity.

In writing *MH*, therefore, nothing less was at stake for Mendelssohn than the theological underpinnings of a religiously tolerant, enlightened society. Mendelssohn had argued in *Jerusalem* that an enlightened state should tolerate all religions insofar as they promote benevolence toward everyone in the name of a universally benevolent deity whose existence and providential nature all humans can acknowledge on the basis of reason alone. But Mendelssohn had not shown how reason supports a belief in a benevolent deity. Perhaps Spinoza was right (and perhaps Lessing agreed with him) that reason leads one rather in the direction of equating God with the implacable laws of nature, as Spinoza's pantheism seemed to do. *MH* sought to settle this question in favor of a providential and benevolent God accessible to all humans through reason. And Mendelssohn needed to have his late friend Lessing firmly on his side if he wished to persuade his readers that his plea for religious tolerance was not merely a cover for an atheistic attack on religion.

To complicate matters further, Mendelssohn also had to confront a more fundamental question still: was reason perhaps *incapable* of answering the question of God's existence and providential benevolence one way or the other? The latter possibility was what the "all-crushing Kant" (Mendelssohn's term for him in the preface to *MH*) had argued for in his *Kritik der reinen Vernunft* (*Critique of Pure Reason*, 1781).¹⁹ Mendelssohn was aware that Kant was as firmly committed to the goals of tolerance and enlightenment as he was (Kant had written to him praising his *Jerusalem*), but he was afraid that Kant's book had shattered any hope for providing a rational basis for religious belief. Kant himself thought that he had cleared the way for such a rational faith in God, but Mendelssohn saw a danger in Kant's approach. If God is beyond the reach of reason and can only be the object of faith, might this not open the floodgates of *irrational* faith? Mendelssohn perhaps sensed from the beginning of his correspondence with Jacobi that here was a person who, clearly familiar with Kant's *Critique*, seemed to be taking it in just this dangerous direction. Mendelssohn wrote *MH* to demonstrate that reason could in fact guide humanity to a core set of beliefs about God that would justify a political and social commitment to religious toleration. He needed to steer a course between the Scylla of atheistic pantheism and the Charybdis of a critical debunking of reason's ability to demonstrate the existence of a providential deity. He needed to save his friend Lessing from the charge of atheism that a reading of his theological writings might support, and

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also from the wrecking ball of Kant’s critical philosophy. The stakes were high, and Mendelssohn was willing to risk his health, and even his life, for them. I will come back to a discussion of how Mendelssohn responded to Kant’s challenge, but for the moment I want to follow to its end the story of Mendelssohn’s struggle with Jacobi over Lessing’s legacy.

I have so far argued that Jacobi’s letter, received in August 1783, was not entirely responsible for turning Mendelssohn away from writing a book about Lessing’s character to writing one about rational theology, including a defense of Lessing’s pantheism. However, Jacobi’s correspondence made it abundantly clear to Mendelssohn that there were individuals who were eager to work against his and Lessing’s dreams for a more religiously tolerant society. Jacobi’s correspondence with Mendelssohn reinforced Mendelssohn’s decision to write a defense of Lessing as a believer in a providential God despite his pantheistic pronouncements. Jacobi’s argument, advanced with increasing vehemence in every letter that he sent Mendelssohn from 1783 through 1785, was that fatalistic Spinozism was the only system compatible with reason. Reason would never demonstrate the existence of a providential deity, because the very effort to prove God’s existence rationally was a turning away from the only available evidence of God’s providential concern for humanity—namely, his *revelation*. And only *faith* permitted one to recognize God’s revelation. By “revelation” Jacobi did not mean the Old and New Testaments, nor did he mean by “faith” the orthodox faith of Christianity. Rather, he was seeking to defend a nonrational experience of what Rudolf Otto, a close reader of Jacobi, would call *the wholly Other*. For Jacobi, this radical Other opened the individual to a realm beyond reason, a realm beyond nature, a realm of freedom. But all of this was certainly not clear from his correspondence with Mendelssohn.

Mendelssohn did not want to confront Jacobi on the territory of revelation, which for him meant the revealed law of the Torah. To confront Jacobi on that territory would be to pose a conflict between Christianity (for that is what he thought Jacobi meant by “revelation”) and Judaism, and this was inimical to his *Bildung* project of religious tolerance. He therefore confronted Jacobi on the territory of Jacobi’s interpretation of Spinoza’s philosophy as the only rationally consistent view of God. To this end, Mendelssohn resurrected his much earlier critique of Spinoza as a philosopher who, however logical he had striven to be, had fallen victim to two basic errors.²⁰ First, Spinoza confused God’s infinite power with the infinite extension of a material universe and the infinite number of representations that the infinite number of finite minds have of that universe. Second, Spinoza confused freedom with absolute equilibrium or lack of preference before the choice of one possibility over another, and since no intelligent

being could ever act without a reason to prefer one course of action over another, Spinoza denied that God or any other intelligent being possessed freedom. As a consequence, Spinoza's God never created any actually existing universe by preferring one possible universe over another. Thus, Spinoza's God seemed to be nothing more than all possible representations of all possible extended universes; none of these infinite possibilities actually existed, because there was no divine will to choose one over another universe to realize. To demonstrate that only a providential God could bring an actually existing world into being is the philosophical goal of *MH*.

Lessing's “refined” pantheism, Mendelssohn will argue, is not Spinozism, because it asserts that God has actually brought the world into being and that He did so by choosing the best world out of all possible worlds. Having thus established that reason is on the side of a providential God, Mendelssohn has achieved his overarching goal: to build a rational foundation for a new, religiously tolerant political and social order. Jacobi makes no appearance in *MH*, because from the start Jacobi's challenge to Mendelssohn—to show that reason supported a belief in a providential God and that Spinoza's conception of God as infinitely indifferent to the choice between good and evil was flawed—had been the goal of Mendelssohn's lectures to his young companions. From around the time when these lectures began, and perhaps even from before he received Jacobi's letter reporting Lessing's Spinozism, Mendelssohn intended to bring Lessing and his “refined” pantheism into the orbit of the goal to which his decades-long friendship with Lessing had been dedicated: an enlightened, open-minded, religiously tolerant state.

While Mendelssohn seems to have an easy time in *MH* refuting Spinozism with arguments from one of his earliest writings, he has a more difficult time with the more recent Kantian challenge I referred to above: can reason ever achieve demonstrative knowledge about God? Can the existence of God, to say nothing of God's providentiality, ever be established through rational arguments? In the *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant had argued that reason had an inherent drive or need to extend itself beyond the world given in sensory experience, but that in pushing beyond experience necessarily involved itself in unresolvable contradictions or “antinomies.” The realm beyond experience, the “noumenal” realm, was simply unknowable. Speculative reason cannot reach it, although it is driven by its nature to make the attempt.

In the concluding sections of the *Critique of Pure Reason* titled the “Canon of Pure Reason” and the “Architectonic of Pure Reason,” Kant offers his readers some solace for the seemingly tragic condition of speculative reason, driven by its nature to push beyond experience but fated to fail in the effort (A797ff.). Rather

than remaining trapped within its speculative cage, reason can begin from the single access point granted to humans in their relation to the noumenal realm: the feeling of being commanded by a moral law that demands of them that they rise above considerations of personal preference or even general utility and act in accordance with the pure obligation to fulfill the moral law. This feeling witnesses to humanity's participation in a realm beyond experience, beyond a morality based on the drives for pleasure, happiness, or even the benevolent impulse to alleviate another's suffering. All of these things are part of our experienced world, but the feeling of duty toward a universal moral law arises from the fact that reason can form an a priori moral law without reference to any empirical act or context ("act so that the maxim of your action could be a universal maxim of action"). According to Kant, this fact, and the feeling of moral obligation that arises from it, demonstrates that here humanity is in touch with the noumenal realm. Building upon this single point of access to the noumenal realm, reason is within its rights if it hypothesizes the existence of a Supreme Being in whom humans can repose their hope that in acting in accordance with the moral law, the actual, empirical condition of humanity in the general course of history will be slowly ameliorated. Further, as Kant explains in the final "Architectonic" section of the *Critique*, this hypothesized Supreme Being can offer the grounding for reason's necessary working assumption within the natural sciences that the world of experience is a unified and organized whole. Reason is within its rights if it hypothesizes that this organized whole reflects a *plan* where the parts of the whole are as little randomly distributed as are the parts of a living organism. Within this organized cosmos, rational beings are not mere flotsam and jetsam thrown up by impersonal forces, but are, rather, an integral part of the purposive design or plan expressed within the cosmos.

In reason's ability to articulate a universal moral law and also to envision nature as a planned whole, according to Kant, there is some solace for a reason otherwise tragically trapped within the limits of experience. The focus of this solace is the hypothesized Supreme Being in whom a rational hope for a better future for humanity and a rational confidence in the ordered unity of the cosmos can find their grounding. The existence of the Supreme Being, however, can never be established by speculative reason alone. But one is permitted to frame a "moral faith" (*moralische Glaube*, A828) that makes sense of two ineluctable feelings arising from reason itself: the feeling of duty toward the moral law and the feeling that the natural world is a planned whole in which rational beings are at home.

Why does Mendelssohn apparently dismiss this tempered Kantian "moral faith" in the existence and providentiality of God? In his preface to *MH*, Mendelssohn calls Kant "all-crushing," and at the end of the preface he expresses a

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hope that Kant will someday rebuild what his *Critique* had destroyed. It seems that Mendelssohn did not consider Kant’s “moral faith” sufficient solace in the face of Kant’s demonstration that speculative reason was tragically cut off from God. It is possible that Mendelssohn never managed to read through to the concluding sections of the *Critique*. But I think a close examination of *MH* will show that although he was sympathetic with Kant’s project of clipping the wings of speculative reason, Mendelssohn believed Kant had presented a too tragic picture of reason.

Reason, according to Mendelssohn in *MH*, certainly could, and often in fact did, involve itself in speculative flights that were beyond its power to bring to a successful conclusion, but these flights were caused not by reason’s drive to fly past a barrier that cannot be passed. Rather, these flights arose from *the misuse of words*: “Language is the element in which our separate concepts quicken and grow,” Mendelssohn writes (Lecture VII, par. 5). “They can exchange one language for another, but they cannot leave language behind without risk to their life.” Speculative flights end in disaster when words are taken out of their living context. It is not that reason seeks to drive beyond experience to an unknowable realm that causes problems; it is that reason loses touch with the *common use of words*. In a passage that Kant himself would focus upon as having the right attitude but for the wrong reason,²¹ Mendelssohn claims that common sense can offer guidance when reason loses its way:

Whenever speculation seems to have carried me too far from the high road of common sense, I stand still and seek to orient myself. I look back toward the point from which I set out and attempt to compare my two guides. Experience has taught me that in most cases right is on the side of common sense, so that reason must speak unequivocally on behalf of Lady Speculation if I am to follow her lead and turn my back on common sense. Indeed, reason must make it crystal clear to me how common sense was able to stray from the truth and fall into error in order to convince me that its insistent pressure on behalf of speculation is not merely a case of brute stubbornness. (Lecture X, par. 2)

Mendelssohn thus views reason’s “insistent pressure on behalf of speculation” to be a case of stubborn resistance to follow the path of common sense—in other words, to abide within the common world of human beings using language together for common purposes. Philosophy has a tendency to carry humans away from the common world, but Mendelssohn’s entire *Bildung* project is based on the conviction that philosophy’s true task is to help in shaping the commonly shared world that humans inhabit. There is no unsurpassable barrier that reason is tragically condemned to seek to cross. There are only humans

who misguidedly seek to escape from their commonness, their embeddedness in a social context where truth is discovered through conversation rather than solitary speculation.

In light of Mendelssohn's faith in common sense, we may better appreciate the literary structure of *MH*. *MH* is written as a conversation. Although much of it is written without the give-and-take of dialogue, the sense that the authorial voice is addressing a living audience is never entirely lost. Mendelssohn's untragic faith in language is not a philosophical perspective that the next generation of German thinkers will share. It is not until Ludwig Wittgenstein and Franz Rosenzweig that philosophy returns to language in its everyday commonality as a way to cure the malaise of a solitary and disoriented speculative reason.²²

Although Mendelssohn never directly confronts Kant in *MH*, the entire work is pervaded with a conviction in the power of reason, guided by common sense, to provide the foundations for faith in the existence of God and in His providential plan. But something changes when we open *TFL*. Mendelssohn published *MH* sometime in September 1785 (he sent a copy to Jacobi on October 4), and at almost the same time Jacobi published his letters to Mendelssohn and selections from Mendelssohn's (much briefer) responses (he sent a copy to Mendelssohn on September 30).²³ Jacobi titled his book *Über die Lehre des Spinoza in Briefen an den Herrn Moses Mendelssohn (Concerning the Doctrine of Spinoza in Letters to Herr Mendelssohn, 1785; hereafter, Spinoza-Letters)*. He had heard in the previous spring about Mendelssohn's plans to publish *MH*, and he believed that Mendelssohn's book would be a direct assault against him, against the trustworthiness of his report about Lessing's Spinozism, and against his claim that Spinozism was atheistic and fatalistic. Since he had no knowledge of Mendelssohn's plan for *MH* and could judge its contents only on the basis of what he could gather from Mendelssohn's brief responses to him and from what he heard from Elise Reimarus, Jacobi perhaps cannot be entirely faulted for jumping to the conclusion he did about the polemical intention of Mendelssohn's book. But Mendelssohn for his part had reason to be upset with Jacobi's preemptive publication of the correspondence that had passed between them. Mendelssohn thought he had made it clear to Jacobi that *MH* would never mention him or their correspondence. He thought he and Jacobi could publish their separate accounts of the correspondence in the following year.

Jacobi's *Spinoza-Letters* was written as a defense against what Jacobi imagined would be a direct assault against his attempt to show that speculative reason was inevitably drawn to atheistic fatalism. The text is therefore quite polemical in tone, especially in its concluding pages. It calls upon Mendelssohn to confess that Spinoza had stripped God and humanity of freedom and had stripped the

world of all purpose, casting it as a lifeless machine where good and evil are mere illusions. To get beyond reason's construction of the world as a lifeless machine, Jacobi offered a *salto mortale* (death-defying leap) into faith in God's supernatural revelation. Reason is "degenerate," he says, and only revelation can save one from its grip.

Here was a challenge to reason that was far different from Kant's. Kant had said that speculative reason was incapable of proving the existence of God; Jacobi claimed that speculative reason was only capable of *denying* God, even if it deluded itself into believing that it was only intent upon proving God's existence. Mendelssohn spent the final months of 1785 writing a reply to Jacobi's *Spinoza-Letters*. The result is *TFL*, which places the correspondence with Jacobi front and center. *MH* as we now have it was called the *Erster Teil* (First Part) of a larger work devoted to the explication of rational theology. In his introduction to the *Jubilee* edition (*Juba*) of *MH*, Leo Strauss suggested that the second part of *MH* would have entered into the more "popular" side of this theology and, in particular, its relation to morality. If he is right, the overarching goal of *MH* would only become clear in its second part, in which Mendelssohn would show how a morally grounded social and political order can grow out of a universally accessible rational theology. Mendelssohn gives us a clue about the second part of *MH* when he says in a letter to Elise Reimarus (written before the publication of *Spinoza-Letters*) that he intends the second part to directly address the challenge of Jacobi, but it is not entirely clear what this means.²⁴ Around the time he was finishing *MH*, Mendelssohn received a long letter, the fourth and last, from Jacobi, the concluding pages of which offer an encomium to Christian revelation and an attack on a "degenerate reason" (*verkommene Vernunft*) "that has nothing to offer a world that has grown bereft of religion, morality, and public spirit" (*Gemeingeist*).²⁵ It is possible that Mendelssohn meant to deal with this challenge to reason in the second part of *MH*. It would certainly be consistent with Strauss's speculations about the projected content of the work. And it would confirm Strauss's affirmation that in fact we essentially have the second part of *MH* in *TFL*.

Although the basic gist of the second part of *MH* might be found in *TFL*, it is undeniable that this text, Mendelssohn's last work, is very different in tone and structure from *MH*. Mendelssohn attempts to unmask the individual whom he believes to be the real enemy of the enlightened state: the *Schwärmer*, the religious fanatic, the individual who rejects reason in favor of belief in suprarational revelation. It was not only the last letter of Jacobi with its reference to "degenerate reason" that led Mendelssohn to believe he had an enemy in Jacobi. It was not even so much the fact that Jacobi had published his letters without his

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permission, but rather it was what he read for the first time in the final pages of the *Spinoza-Letters* that revealed Jacobi's polemical intent. These final pages go much further than what Mendelssohn had read in Jacobi's last letter to him. In the final pages of his *Spinoza-Letters*, Jacobi offers a full-blown assault on reason as a reliable guide in the life of the individual and the community. Jacobi offers in place of rational theology a "complete submission to a superior authority," a "firm faith" that does not let itself be "seduced" by a desire to eat from "the tree of knowledge."²⁶ In the name of this "firm faith," Jacobi enjoins Mendelssohn, "only be faithful from now on; and keep the faith that you have accepted, whatever its name: just renounce the conceit of your will." Mendelssohn placed his previous correspondence with Jacobi from 1783 to 1785 in the light of Jacobi's now open avowal of faith and revelation as the only recourse against "degenerate reason." Mendelssohn came to believe that Jacobi was everything that Lessing despised, or so Mendelssohn would attempt to show in *TFL*.

Throughout *TFL* Mendelssohn seeks to show that because Jacobi is opposed to the religion of reason, he is an enemy of the common man of goodwill who wishes to seek God through reason rather than blind faith. Mendelssohn also suggests that Jacobi's opposition to Spinoza and to himself reflects the age-old prejudices of every Christian fanatic: Jacobi simply cannot tolerate Jews as equal partners in philosophical conversation with non-Jews. Jacobi is also an enemy of Mendelssohn's entire *Bildung* project of creating a religiously tolerant state. Mendelssohn hopes that Jacobi's attack on Lessing's alleged Spinozism, an attack he couches in the abstract language of philosophy, will appear before the world as what Mendelssohn takes it to be: an attack on Lessing's entire Enlightenment project—religious tolerance and forbearance—and an attack on both Jews and non-Jews who are attempting to build an enlightened Germany.

Near the beginning of *TFL*, Mendelssohn writes: "Mr. Jacobi does not know me: according to him I might be described as reason's hireling [*Verniünftling*], as someone who defers too much to reason and not at all to faith, who so stands in the grip of delusion that he would try to set the world aright by means of metaphysical proofs, even conjure the spirits with quiddities." Against this description of his complete and utter deference to reason, Mendelssohn declares that despite all the arguments and doubts he knows can be raised against it, "the obvious truth of natural religion, it seems to me, is just as brilliantly clear to any unspoilt and uncorrupted mind, just as unshakably certain, as any proposition of geometry." The "truths of the religion of reason," Mendelssohn goes on to say, are able to be comprehended by anyone, in "whatever life situation a human being may find himself." But Mendelssohn casts himself as the defender not only of the common man but also of the Jew. Near the end of *TFL*, Mendelssohn

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draws the contrast between himself and Jacobi in the starker light as a contrast between two contesting types of faith, the dogma-free Judaism that he embraces and the faith of Jacobi, a faith that seeks to blot out the light of reason.

[S]ince all of us, as Mr. J[acobi]. says, are “born in belief,” I therefore return to the faith of my fathers, which in accordance with the original [Hebrew] meaning of the word [*emunah*], is not a faith in a teaching or an opinion, but is a trust and confidence in God’s attributes. I assert with full and unqualified confidence in the omnipotence of God that He has the power to bestow upon humans the ability to recognize the truths upon which happiness is based. I cherish a childlike confidence in God’s mercifulness, that it is His will to bestow this ability upon me. Strengthened by this unwavering faith, I seek to learn and be persuaded of as much as I can from wherever I can. And praise to the benevolence of my Creator! I *believe* that I have discovered much, and everyone can find just as much if he seeks with open eyes and does not want to interpose himself before the light.

Mendelssohn’s counterassault on Jacobi deliberately foregrounded his Judaism as offering a faith that was true to the “original meaning of the word,” a faith that did not stand in the way of the light of common sense that shined from the Creator upon all humans.

Mendelssohn could go no further in making the contest between himself and Jacobi seem to be a contest between Judaism and Christianity. It would be wrong to say, as Adam Sutcliffe has claimed, that “despite his desire to normalize both Spinoza’s and his own position as Jewish participants in the world of Enlightenment philosophy, the cultural pressures that stood against this were too strong for him to overcome.”²⁷ Mendelssohn did not seek to “normalize” Spinoza and himself as Jews, but rather sought to show that Jacobi’s stance against Judaism was abnormal, offering an extreme and fanatical assault on reason. Mendelssohn certainly felt that Jacobi was attempting to paint him and Spinoza as “faithless” Jews, but he did not feel that as a Jew either he or Spinoza was a questionable participant in the “world of Enlightenment philosophy.” Jews did not require “normalizing” in order to enter this world; Judaism, Mendelssohn believed, was entirely consonant with the religion of reason. Indeed, Jews more than Christians were prepared for the world of Enlightenment philosophy. Jews had no theology other than the rational theology that all humanity could attain to, and therefore there was no need to reconcile Judaism with philosophy. The first Jewish philosopher, Baruch Spinoza, seemed to give the lie to Mendelssohn’s claim, since Spinoza seemed to deny a providential God and thereby undercut the basic tenet of rational theology. But in *MH* and again in *TFL* Mendelssohn tries to show that Spinoza had been working with erroneous conceptions of God’s infinity

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and of God’s freedom. Once these errors were cleared up, Mendelssohn says at one point in *TFL*, Spinoza “could have remained an orthodox Jew.” Mendelssohn believed that by thus returning Spinoza to the fold of Jewish law, and by standing together with him *as Jewish witnesses to God’s wish for universal human happiness* against the muzzling of reason in the name of Christianity’s particularistic offer of salvation through Jesus alone, he could drive Jacobi from the world of Enlightenment philosophy. Mendelssohn in effect reverses the traditional roles of “particularistic” Jew and “universalist” Christian. He thus sought to align himself with the universalism of the Parable of the Three Rings in *Nathan the Wise*: Mendelssohn is the tolerant representative of an inclusive truth; Jacobi is the advocate of a particularistic and even persecutorial faith that would seek to tame and even silence reason. *TFL* goes further than any previous work of Mendelssohn’s in linking the Jew and the Enlightenment, but it is not by any means a desperate defensive gesture against “cultural pressures” by which he felt overwhelmed in the end. Mendelssohn certainly misjudged the cultural pressures around him, but to the extent they represented the drive of the Enlightenment in Germany, he judged them to be ranged against *Jacobi* and not against himself.

One individual Mendelssohn probably thought he could count on for support in his quarrel with Jacobi was the theologian Friedrich Johann Zöllner, the initiator of the question “*Was ist Aufklärung?*” (What is Enlightenment?) in the *Berlinische Monatschrift*, to which both Kant and Mendelssohn offered response essays. Along with Mendelssohn and the editors of the *Berlinische Monatschrift* and a handful of other Prussian notables, Zöllner was a member of the Mittwochsgesellschaft (Wednesday Society), a secret group of Berlin intellectuals who constituted themselves “Friends of the Enlightenment.”²⁸ He had been critical but essentially not dismissive of Mendelssohn’s position in *Jerusalem* that ecclesiastical bodies should never have recourse to oaths in order to guarantee the orthodoxy of its leaders. But Zöllner’s tolerance for Mendelssohn’s views, however much he might disagree with them, was stretched to the limit with *TFL*. He found himself confronted with a Mendelssohn he could not recognize, although he took pains to explain away the apparent anti-Christian tone that Mendelssohn assumed in the work. Immediately after the appearance of *TFL*, Zöllner published in the *Berlinische Monatschrift* a brief article, “Ueber eine Stelle in Moses Mendelssohn’s Schrift an die Freunde Lessings” (“On a Passage in Moses Mendelssohn’s *To the Friends of Lessing*”).²⁹ Zöllner begins by quoting from a letter to Jacobi that Mendelssohn printed in *TFL*. In the letter, Mendelssohn tells Jacobi that “the Christian philosopher is able to make a pastime out of teasing the natural philosopher, proposing to him a snarled

tangle of arguments on behalf of skepticism, all designed to beguile him like will-o’-the-wisps, drawing him out of his corner and luring him into the open, in the end only to slip away from his firmest grasp.”³⁰ Zöllner comments:

This passage, as I see it, creates a rather sensational effect, and for several reasons. On the one hand, it pains the serious friends of the truth that a great and beloved philosopher, one who had been so sincerely respected by decent Christians, could let himself be carried away to such a degree that he would write down such a worn-out jab, and at Christianity’s expense. On the other hand, I hear the very same notion repeated over and over as a given, whenever someone would like to spare himself the trouble of reflection and, by making fun of Christianity, acquire the reputation of being a martyr for reason. And a third party who really intends to follow Lavater’s and Jacobi’s encouragement and would try to retreat back under the banner of his Christianity would find one more reason in this passage to strengthen his defenses against the necessity of investigating things rationally. (271–72; translation mine)

Zöllner goes on to try to exonerate Mendelssohn of outright contempt for Christianity by reading this passage as an *ad hominem* piece of mockery, “teasing” Jacobi with a caricaturish image of the Christian dogmatist. But the initial response of Zöllner to *TFL* is quite telling. He is brought to declare, almost to convince himself by the sheer force of exclamation: “Moses Mendelssohn, without question, did not mean it; he could not have meant it!” (272). But Mendelssohn did mean it. It was a central part of his rhetorical strategy to drive as large a wedge as he possibly could between the Enlightenment religion of reason and Christianity. This strategy was doomed to backfire. Jacobi’s accusation that the Enlightenment religion of reason sought to undermine Christian faith, that this assault was openly begun by a Jew, Spinoza, and carried forward under cover of the hypocritical goal of “religious tolerance” by Mendelssohn, would win the day.

The so-called Spinoza Controversy (*Spinozastreit*) between Jacobi and Mendelssohn would dominate the intellectual scene for several years. Mendelssohn, dying before *TFL* was published, could no longer defend himself. The legacy of Lessing would not be his message of tolerance in *Nathan the Wise*, but his pantheism. The younger generation of men like G. W. F. Hegel, F. W. J. Schelling, and Friedrich Hölderlin in Germany and Samuel Taylor Coleridge and William Wordsworth in England would come to believe that Kant’s *Critique of Pure Reason* had sounded the death knell of Mendelssohn’s Leibnizian-Wolffian rational theology. They would not, however, be content with Kant’s strictures against speculative reason’s attempt to break free of experience. Rather than resting content with Kant’s “moral faith,” they would fill the unknowable vacuum

of Kant's noumenal realm with their version of Lessing's pantheistic "All and One." Until his death in 1819, Jacobi himself would never cease battling this new Spinozism as merely the "nihilistic" dream of reason, but both he and Mendelssohn seemed to be part of a distant past.³¹

The fact is that Mendelssohn's quarrel with Jacobi's interpretation of Spinoza takes us to the very heart of the new ontology that would shape the emerging post-Kantian German philosophy: the view that Being is Positing ("Position")—that is, the view that existence is not the actualization of a logically conceivable possibility, but is rather the positing of something without any reference to its conceivability, a sort of pure positing or willing prior to any determinate content. Jacobi found this view expressed in an early work of Kant published in 1763, *Der einzig mögliche Beweisgrund zu einer Demonstration des Daseins Gottes* (*The One Possible Basis for a Demonstration of the Existence of God*, 1979; hereafter, *One Possible Basis*).³² Since the proof of God's existence in this work provides the basis for Jacobi's quarrel with Mendelssohn about how to interpret Spinoza's concept of God, it is necessary to briefly explain Kant's innovative "one possible" proof for God's existence. This brief excursus into Kant's proof for God's existence can also serve as an introduction to the declared subject of Mendelssohn's *MH*: the existence of God.

Kant argued in *One Possible Basis* that it was a mistake to begin with the *concept* of God as the most perfect being, as Descartes's ontological proof for God's existence had done, and then argue that because lack of existence would be an imperfection, God must necessarily exist—that is, that God's existence follows logically from the very concept of God. Kant argues that the best one can say when one begins with the concept of God as the perfect being is that *if* such a concept applies to any object, then that object must *necessarily* exist. Therefore, the question of whether God actually exists—that is, whether there is an object corresponding to the concept of God—is begged by the ontological proof. In order to prove God's existence, Kant says, we must begin with some actual thing that necessarily exists and then show that the concept of God applies to it. Kant begins his proof, therefore, by showing that it is necessary that *something* exists. In order for any concept at all to apply to an object, one must first have *something* that exists, since if nothing existed, no concept could possibly apply to any object. Possibility itself—the possibility that some concept *might* have an object to which it applies—would be impossible. So in order to get to possibility, one must begin with the sheer necessity of *something existing*. But what does *existing* mean?

Kant opened his treatise by arguing that *existing* is not a new attribute added to other attributes of a thing, making a possible thing into an existing thing. No,

existing is just a *positing* of a thing that *can* exist as a thing that *does* exist. “A dog exists” is not a proposition that predicates “existence” of a dog, but rather it posits that an object corresponding to the concept *dog* exists. This positing is to be distinguished from the positing of predicates as belonging to a possibly existent object that instantiates a certain concept. The latter sort of positing is what Kant calls *relative positing*. Kant uses the example of the sea unicorn (*Seeinhorn*, or “narwhal”). To say, “A sea unicorn is a toothed whale with a long tusk” is not to assert that sea unicorns exist but, rather, to posit a relation between certain properties that define the sea unicorn (size, being a member of the whale genus, having a certain shape). However, if one says, “A sea unicorn exists,” one is *absolutely positing* the object itself. Kant argues that one cannot conclude from any concept’s properties that there is an actually existent object corresponding to the concept, although if the properties contradict one another, then one can conclude that no such object can exist. Kant explicitly states that his understanding of existence as absolute positing is opposed to the Wolffian understanding of existence as a “complement to possibility,” a sort of added-on predicate to those that define the concept.

If it is the case that possibility itself would become impossible if there were no actually existing *something*, then *absolute positing* logically precedes *relative positing*. It is necessary to posit something absolutely in order for anything else to be possible. The *something* that is necessary to posit absolutely is something that necessarily exists. The *something* that *necessarily* exists if anything else *can* exist must be something *posited without relation to any concept whatsoever*. “All possibility presupposes something actual in which and through which everything conceivable is given. Accordingly there is a certain actuality whose annulment itself would totally annul all internal possibility. But that whose annulment or negation eradicates all possibility is absolutely necessary. Accordingly something exists in an absolutely necessary fashion. From this much it is obvious that the existence of one or more things lies at the base of possibility itself, and that this existence is in itself necessary” (Kant 1969, 79). By asserting the primacy of existence over possibility (“essence” or concept), Kant overturned the fundamental axiom of Wolffian ontology, the primacy of possibility over existence. Jacobi honed in on this revolutionary redefinition of the relation between existence and possibility in his critique of Mendelssohn. He claimed that Spinoza had already understood the Kantian point about the primacy of existence over possibility and had asserted that God is nothing more than a bare “*something*” that exists necessarily: not a Person, not a willing Subject, not a providential Creator. Kant himself argued that the concept of God as a being possessing a perfectly good will and a perfect understanding does in fact correspond to the necessary

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something that must exist for anything else to be possible. But Jacobi insisted that it is only a logical sleight of hand that transforms the necessary *something* into the living personhood of a self-revealing God. Kant, however, claimed to show in his essay that the necessary *something* is the very thing to which the concept of God as the most perfect being applies. Kant offers us, as it were, the ontological proof in reverse: start with *something* that necessarily exists and arrive at the concept of God. Perhaps because he saw that this procedure required him to say that God, in Himself, was bare existence, pure and unthinkable (because no possible concept applied to it) being, Kant's essay concludes with a caution to the reader. If the “unfamiliar” proof of God's necessary existence that he has offered strikes the reader as providing a necessarily existent God at the cost of the predicates most cherished in our concept of God (providential goodness, for example), then Kant suggests that the reader adopt the tried-and-true (but not entirely rigorous) proof based upon “the things of this world” that offer “evidence of a rational creator of great wisdom, power, and goodness” (231). The last line of Kant's essay offers this salutary advice: “It is thoroughly necessary that one be convinced of God's existence; but it is not nearly so necessary that it be demonstrated” (239). This is the spirit that infuses Mendelssohn's *MH*, but Jacobi would have none of it. Jacobi accepts the idea that God's actuality consists in absolute positing or willing, but he interprets this as the divine will that brings each thing into being and lends it its power to continue, for however short a time, to exist. In the human being, Jacobi believes, this divine will is felt as a *revelation* of God's continuing love. “This is the *Majesty of the Lord*,” Jacobi says near the conclusion of *Spinoza-Letters*, “*the Countenance of God*, to which mortal eye cannot reach. But in his goodness He descends to us, and through his grace the Eternal One becomes a presence to man, and he speaks to him—to whom he gave breath through his mouth—*through man's feeling for his own life, his own bliss*” (212). Jacobi's entire point can be put this way: *We are not “convinced” of God's existence. God is not a something, but a someone. We feel His reality in our love for Him, who calls us to Himself when we forgo the need for rational proofs or demonstrations.* All the rest is Spinozism. For Kant and Mendelssohn, Jacobi's position seemed tantamount to the silencing of reason in the name of blind faith.

Jacobi did not make it easy for men like Kant and Mendelssohn, committed as they both were to the Enlightenment project of a religion of reason, to warm to his call for a different approach to God. His tone was polemical and frequently harsh, and he never quite managed to clarify how he both embraced Kant's revolutionary overturning of Wolffian ontology and at the same time rejected Kant's demonstration of God's necessary existence. Without men-

tioning Kant's proof, Jacobi claimed in his correspondence with Mendelssohn that Spinoza's God was just sheer self-positing Being lacking all conceptual determination. Explaining Spinoza's doctrine, Jacobi says, "Individual things therefore originate (*immediately*) from God *only externally and infinitely*, not in a transitive, finite, and transitory way" (149). Spinoza's God, in other words, does not will to create each finite being. Spinoza's God has no direct, immediate relation to any single being in the world. Such a God, Jacobi argued, was the only possible God that speculative reason could conjure for itself. Jacobi wanted to expose reason's God—that is, God as undetermined self-positing Being—as a completely *impersonal* God and therefore no God at all. Jacobi claimed that before Kant's essay had shown what reason's "one possible demonstration" of God's existence would look like, Spinoza had already developed an entire system based upon the understanding of Being as absolute self-positing. In Spinoza's system only God exists, because only God has the power of positing; indeed, Spinoza's God is nothing more than this power. Spinoza's God is the *causa sui*, the cause of Himself, and has no relation to a world or humanity outside of Himself. When speculative reason builds its system upon the most logical and consistent understanding of Being, it will annihilate the existence of everything but the self-positing God, and it will strip God of any other attribute than self-positing power. Only the *feeling* of God within oneself can persuade a human being that God has a direct relation with each existent thing: "I feel such a power as the inmost life of my being . . . [T]he way to knowledge is therefore a *mysterious* one—not the way of syllogism" (211).

In a rather confusing move, Jacobi countered Spinoza's conception of God not by attacking the idea that God's being is absolute self-positing, but by claiming that finite beings have, in a limited way, this absolute power of self-positing. Jacobi thus salvaged Kant's notion of absolute positing, but he gave it his own interpretation. Finite beings become objects to which a concept (like *dog*) can apply by positing themselves or determining themselves as such objects. An existing dog is a dog, Jacobi would say, because of its power to unify all the predicates that pertain to the concept of dog in one living, material embodiment. But, unlike God, the dog did not posit itself into existence absolutely. Of course, the dog had parents who were also dogs. But it is a mistake, Jacobi claims, to interpret the relative positing represented in the proposition "This animal is a dog" as explained by the proposition "This barking, four-legged animal is the offspring of a union of a male and a female dog." One cannot explain why this particular animal is a dog by referring to the chain of causes that brought it into being. The proposition "This barking, four-legged animal is a dog" is

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true if and only if a power of unifying the properties of the concept (barking, four-leggedness) is embodied in the animal, and that power is neither a part of the concept *dog* (since existence is not one predicate among others), nor is it the product of a chain of prior causes (since the power of sheer existence is a limited form of God’s absolute power and therefore derives directly and immediately from God and not from the dog’s parents, for example).

The living power in each dog, Jacobi would say, is an expression of God’s absolute power. In the dog this power is sensed as the drive to survive, to preserve its dog-life. The highest expression of God’s power is found in humans in their consciousness of the power itself, in their consciousness of themselves as *free* to transcend the chain of cause and effect leading to their present existence and to unify their lives around a purpose that is not simply self-preservation. Unlike the dog, a human being has the power not only to will its sheer existence but also to will its existence for the sake of a higher principle. But when human reason reduces God’s gift of existence in him to nothing more than a dog’s self-positing, as Spinoza did (according to Jacobi), it flattens existence into a dead concept. The revelation of God’s absolute power is dissolved into an empty name, and God Himself becomes a dead concept. That reason cannot help but betray God’s self-revelation is what Jacobi tried to persuade Mendelssohn of in his correspondence. Jacobi was not a systematic thinker, and his exposition was, to say the least, confusing. Furthermore, Jacobi was (I would say deliberately) ambiguous in his use of the term “revelation” (*Offenbarung*), sometimes equating it with *Christian* revelation. Mendelssohn had good reason to be puzzled by the letters he received from Jacobi.

Mendelssohn, who had critically reviewed Kant’s *One Possible Basis* more than twenty years earlier (Mendelssohn 1764), thought that Kant’s “one possible basis” to demonstrate God’s existence, depending upon an interpretation of Being as undetermined self-positing, was fundamentally confused. Mendelssohn devotes considerable attention to defending his own conception of existence as a secondary complement of possibility in *MH* in Lectures V and XVII (see esp. par. 15). He rejects Kant’s attempt to demonstrate the existence of God on the basis of the necessity of *something* existing rather than nothing. Kant was not offering a new way to understand Being, but, quite the opposite, only a repackaging of the old way of understanding “nothingness.” According to Mendelssohn’s Wolffian ontology, a thing to which no possible concept applies is not a thing at all, but merely “nothingness.” Thus Mendelssohn agrees with Jacobi: if speculative reason starts from pure self-positing Being, it will get nowhere, because it is starting with “nothingness.” Kant himself abandoned the proof

offered in his earlier essay precisely because he thought it had mistakenly taken Being as absolute positing to be separable from any finite, contingent thing.³³ The tragedy of the Spinoza Controversy is that both Mendelssohn and Jacobi were, however differently, only trying to defend their belief in a God of *revelation*: Jacobi believed God revealed Himself within every human being who felt called to posit his existence for the sake of something more than sheer survival; Mendelssohn believed God had revealed Himself to Israel when He asked the people at Mt. Sinai to dedicate themselves to His laws. Mendelssohn hoped that his and Lessing's *Bildung* project could provide a rationally constructed political and social framework within which revelation would never be a source of strife. Mendelssohn's last work, dedicated "to the friends of Lessing," is a final testament to this hope, but it is also a demonstration that reason cannot create a safe and neutral terrain beyond revelation. Reason itself is a party to the strife. Reason, Jacobi insisted, is revelation's enemy.

In recent years Jacobi's work, so clearly important for the future direction of German philosophy, has been the object of renewed attention,³⁴ but Mendelssohn's *MH* and *TFL* have remained relatively unstudied.³⁵ The philosophy of *MH* and *TFL* does indeed fall within the ambit of the Leibnizian-Wolffian school, but neither work is some musty schoolbook. Mendelssohn's deepest conviction is that *reality is the common possession of all thinking beings, because they construct it in common*. Mendelssohn rejects Kant's division between the "thing in itself" and the thing as it is sensed and conceived. The things of the world have all their reality in being the objects of percipient beings, some of whom are also endowed with the power to bring rational order to their perceptions. However, the common reality of all percipient and rational beings is only a fragment of an infinite mind, the mind of God, in which all possible things are viewed at once, and those among them that fit together into a harmonious whole are selected as "the best" and endowed with existence. It is the task of rational beings to work together to judge the world in accordance with the common truth that it holds and also to judge it to be "the best" world, because, precisely, it is the common world in which all things can together live and flourish. Mendelssohn is no Pangloss, oblivious to the ills of the world. But he is convinced that strife arises when human judgment is guided by a partial vision of the world rather than by an enlarged vision when one's own viewpoint is taken to be a privileged and uniquely true viewpoint. And Mendelssohn is equally convinced that the enlarged view of the truth can only be achieved through a commitment to constantly reexamine all accepted "truths":

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One can even go so far as to say that knowledge ceases to be knowledge of the truth as soon as it becomes an established law accepted by one and all and no one finds it any longer necessary to test the foundations on which it rests. It is true that such doubts, once they have been awakened, sometimes lead to the denial of all foundational principles. Such doubts not infrequently have a frightful influence on the morality and the actions of human beings. But the prejudices into which truths sometimes devolve when inertia overtakes the spirit of inquiry, or the blind faith with which we rely upon certain established laws without ever putting them to the test, all this leads to superstition and fanaticism, things that are no less dangerous to the happiness of humanity. Atheism and superstition, skepticism and fanaticism: one as well as the other are diseases of the soul that threaten it with moral death. Not infrequently Providence prescribes one disease to counter the other in order to restore the body to health. So we have to listen with patience to every doubt, accept every objection with equanimity, even if it threatens to destroy our entire system. According to the natural cycle of things, truth leads to complacent calm, calm to inertia, and inertia to superstition. When this point is reached, it is by a blessing of Providence that the spirit of doubt and of the most exacting inquiry is newly revived so that, in challenging all our fundamental principles, we can be led back once again to the truth. (Lecture VIII, par. 7)

Lessing had clearly taught in the Parable of the Three Rings that no single viewpoint can ever lay claim to the truth. The truth is always common and is built up out of our common conversation and critical reflection, in which we enlarge our minds in an effort to bring them into conformity with God's mind. The conversation, however, is endless, for God's mind is infinite and we are only finite. This faith in the endless task of conversation in building a common world is Mendelssohn's greatest legacy. It was the faith that imbued his friendship with Lessing with such power as it had to inspire his contemporaries. It was the faith he hoped to place on a firm foundation in *MH* and that he sought passionately to defend in *TFL*. It is a faith well worth attending to today.

Notes on the Translation

This translation of *MH* is based on the first edition of *Morgenstunden, oder Vorlesungen über das Dasein Gottes* (1785). This text is also the basis of the *Jubiläumsausgabe (Juba)* edition of *Morgenstunden*.¹ I have indicated the pagination of the first edition by numbers within square brackets. It is obviously very difficult in a translation to provide an exact indication of the original text's page breaks, so I have tried to position these bracketed page numbers just a little before the actual page break in the German text, either where the last full sentence on the German page or the last clause before a semicolon is found. Whenever the German page ends with a paragraph break, I have placed the bracketed page number at the end of the corresponding paragraph in the translation. In the *Jubiläumsausgabe* edition, each page includes the corresponding pagination range of the first edition in square brackets at the top of the page. Readers can therefore use my in-text square-bracketed page numbers as a guide to navigate their way to the corresponding German text of the *Jubiläumsausgabe* edition.

The translation of *TFL* is based on Moses Mendelssohn, *An die Freunde Lessings* (1786). This edition is also the basis for text in the *Jubiläumsausgabe* edition (published with *Morgenstunden* in vol. 3,2 edited by Leo Strauss). I have followed the same procedure as with *MH* in indicating page numbers within square brackets.

Mendelssohn appended some notes to *MH* that were written by his friend J. A. H. Reimarus.² Rather than include these notes in this translation, I have chosen to make them available through the University of Illinois Library's scholarly digital repository, the Illinois Digital Environment for Access to Learning and Scholarship (IDEALS), with the permanent unique identifier <http://hdl.handle.net/2142/27713>. In 1784, Mendelssohn composed *The Case for God; or, Providence Justified*, but it was never published in his lifetime.³ *The Case for God* contains a longer exposition of some of the claims Mendelssohn advances in *MH*, Lecture XV. My translation of *Sache Gottes (The Case for God)* is also available on IDEALS, with the permanent unique identifier <http://hdl.handle.net/2142/27714>.

Notes on the Translation

I have chosen to number all the paragraphs in *MH* and *TFL*. These numbers do not appear in the original text. In both my introduction and commentary, I refer to passages in *MH* and *TFL* using the paragraph number rather than the page number of the translation. Since the paragraph breaks in this translation correspond exactly to those of the original, this numbering system, together with the pagination of the original given in square brackets, should make it easy for readers to find the corresponding place in the German original should they need to.

Mendelssohn's German style was widely recognized by his contemporaries as offering a model of clarity, precision, and literary elegance in philosophical prose. It was my goal to do some justice to all of these qualities in this translation, but I hope that I have never sacrificed clarity and precision for the sake of whatever literary elegance this translation may have managed to achieve.

Clarity and precision in philosophical prose is very much dependent upon the clarity and precision of the conceptual distinctions that make up an author's philosophical system. One of the most difficult translation problems I faced had to do with the frequent references that Mendelssohn makes to cognitive states in which the individual feels convinced beyond any possible doubt of the truth of his cognition. Consistent with his epistemology, in which the most perfect exercise of one's cognitive faculty establishes the truth of one's cognition (and not its correspondence with an objective state of affairs), Mendelssohn does not make a clear and precise distinction between the individual's complete and perfect conviction of the truth of his cognition and the actual truth of his cognition. The single word *Evidenz* does the work of describing both one's complete and perfect conviction in the truth of one's cognition as well as the highest possible level of truth that a cognition can attain. Depending upon the context, Mendelssohn sometimes is more interested in describing the level of conviction than the level of truth that a perfect and complete cognitive state achieves, but he frequently uses the same word, *Evidenz*, in both contexts. I have chosen to mark the difference in emphasis by translating the word sometimes as "certitude" (emphasizing the conviction in the truth of the cognition) and sometimes as "certainty" (emphasizing the truth of the cognition). I have avoided the translation "self-evidence" because it seemed to me that this captured only the connotation of "certainty" and not "certitude."

Finally, Mendelssohn's few footnotes are marked with an asterisk as they are in his text, and, as in the original, they are placed at the foot of the page.

For Further Reading

There are two important but very different interpretations of Mendelssohn's relationship to Judaism and the rational theology of the Enlightenment. One interpretation stresses Mendelssohn's commitment to the universal rational theology of the Enlightenment over his commitment to Judaism. This interpretation is advanced by Alan Arkush in *Moses Mendelssohn and the Enlightenment* (1994). One may find Arkush's position succinctly expressed in this sentence from his introduction: "Mendelssohn's defense of Judaism was, I believe, more rhetorical than real" (xiv). The other interpretation stresses Mendelssohn's commitment to Judaism over his commitment to rational theology, and this view has been given its most forceful defense in David Sorkin's *Moses Mendelssohn and the Religious Enlightenment* (1996). Sorkin and Arkush attempt to make sense of two aspects of Moses Mendelssohn; the ambiguities and tensions of both aspects were earlier rendered in all their complexity in the works of the great Mendelssohn scholar Alexander Altmann, but especially in Altmann's magisterial study *Moses Mendelssohn: A Biographical Study* (1973).

More recent scholarly treatments of Mendelssohn have attempted to get beyond the need to choose between his loyalty to Judaism and his efforts to participate in Enlightenment culture. They have pointed to internal tensions within both his contemporary Judaism and the Enlightenment culture of Germany that allowed him to construct a new vision of an enlightened Judaism that would serve as a critical fulcrum to transform German culture from within. Instead of seeing Mendelssohn as torn between two stable and conflicting identities, these newer works argue that he was refashioning both identities to take advantage of the dynamic and fluid tension existing between them. This dynamic view of Mendelssohn's authorship can be found in Jeffrey Librett, *The Rhetoric of Cultural Dialogue: Jews and Germans from Moses Mendelssohn to Richard Wagner and Beyond* (2000); Willi Goetschel, *Spinoza's Modernity: Mendelssohn, Lessing, and Heine* (2004); and Bruce Rosenstock, *Philosophy and the Jewish Question: Mendelssohn, Rosenzweig, and Beyond* (2010). Special notice should be given to Micah Gottlieb's recent *Faith and Freedom: Mendelssohn's Theological-Political Thought* (2011). Gottlieb's book is a sympathetic and nuanced treatment of Men-

Further Reading

Mendelssohn's version of the German Enlightenment project that offers a clear and accessible analysis of the major lines of argument in *MH*. A good discussion of Mendelssohn's natural theology as a critique of Christianity is found in Erlewine 2010 (43–68), and an excellent overview of Mendelssohn's metaphysics is now available in Freudenthal 2011.

Leo Strauss prepared the *Jubiläumsausgabe* edition of *MH* and *TFL*. He prepared a lengthy introduction to both texts (115 pages) with extensive notes (another 52 pages). In my commentary I have occasion to discuss Leo Strauss's views about Mendelssohn's last writings as he expresses them in his introduction and notes to the texts. Let me say here that despite the extraordinary breadth and depth of his acquaintance with Mendelssohn and the entire philosophical milieu of the German Enlightenment, Strauss was hardly an unbiased reader of Mendelssohn. He claims that Mendelssohn is a perfect exemplar of the Enlightenment's assault on "orthodox" faith, in accordance with which God makes unconditional demands upon the individual in His commandments. In contrast with this orthodox faith, Mendelssohn's rational theology proclaimed a God whose goodness made no claims upon the individual (*der anspruchlose Güte Gottes*) (lxxiv). According to Strauss, Mendelssohn defended his undemanding God in order to promote the "demands of the self-reliant Ego" (*Ansprüche des selbständigen Ich*) and the "substantiality of the individual" (*Substantialität des Individuums*) (lxxxv). Thus, Strauss places Mendelssohn within the Lockean tradition of liberal democratic individualism that he criticized in *Natural Right and History* (Strauss 1950), with its prioritization, as he sees it, of subjective rights over obligation. The hero of the final pages of Strauss's book is Edmund Burke, who was "too deeply imbued with the spirit of 'sound antiquity' to allow the concern with individuality to overpower the concern with virtue" (323). Mendelssohn, a typical modern thinker, according to Strauss, abandons virtue for individuality. Strauss's sympathies lie instead with Jacobi and his counter-Enlightenment attack on the pretensions of self-reliant Reason. In the final sentence of his introduction, Strauss has the audacity to declare that Lessing himself would not have been ashamed to have penned Jacobi's satirical response to Mendelssohn's attempt to turn his beloved friend into a defender of "purified" Spinozism in Lecture XIV of *MH*. Despite his great learning, Strauss was perhaps the least appropriate scholar one could have selected for the job of presenting before a new generation of readers Mendelssohn's passionate defense of religious tolerance and his call for the critical rational scrutiny of all forms of orthodoxy.

Morning Hours

or, Lectures on the
Existence of God

1785

Preliminary Remarks

- 1 The following reflections about the existence of God are the end result of much reading and pondering. The study of this subject had long been an important one for me. But during the past twelve to fifteen years I have found myself, due to a grave impairment, quite incapable of making any further headway in this study. A certain weakness of nerves has forbidden me during all this time to make any intellectual exertion, although I have found it more difficult to penetrate other people's thoughts than to pursue my own. This strikes my doctors as somewhat peculiar. The upshot is that I am acquainted with the writings of the great men who have in the meantime advanced themselves to the forefront of metaphysics, *Lambert*, *Tetens*, *Plattner* and even the all-crushing *Kant*, only from the imperfect reports of my friends or from learned, though seldom very informative, notices.¹ As a consequence, this branch of knowledge remains for me at the point where it stood around the seventy-fifth year of this century, for it has been since then that I have been compelled to keep my distance from it. The fact that I have never yet been able to bring myself to bid a final farewell to Philosophy has meant that I have fought a constant battle against myself. How sad! Philosophy was in better years my most loyal companion, my sole comfort in all the vexations of this life, but during these last years I have had to give her a wide berth on every road as if she were my mortal enemy. Or, what is even more difficult to bear, I have had to avoid her as if she were a dear but plague-infected friend who herself warns me away from all contact with her. I have not had sufficient self-denial to obey her. From time to time furtive encounters between us have taken place, but never without the sting of repentance.
- 2 During this time, my son J. was growing up.² Early signs of promise made it imperative to introduce him without delay to the rational knowledge of God. At first I allowed him to read and gather ideas at his own pleasure. It is my opinion that the study of philosophy, just as the learning of languages, should begin with practice and end with precept. To master a paradigm is neither useful nor pleasant if it is not at the same time accompanied by practical application. But how can one do this without a store of material with which to work? In the beginning, therefore, I let my son collect his materials until it came time for paradigms and

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rules. Only then was I in a position to offer him whatever guidance he needed for a systematic and methodical reflection upon the significant body of material he had assembled.

3 I made up my mind to devote myself to the task of offering my son guidance during those few hours of the day when my spirits are generally bright, the morning hours. It gave me additional pleasure that my son-in-law S., whose family had been our close friends for many years, and another young man, W., wanted to share in our undertaking.³ These three young people, each possessed of a gifted mind and, what is an even greater treasure, a good heart, came to visit me in the morning hours. We conversed about the truths of natural religion. Sometimes, if I was pressed, I would hold forth with a set lecture on one or another related point, but, as one may easily surmise, all this took place without any of the constraints found in an actual school. The young people were free to interrupt me, to raise objections, and to respond to one another. I would break off my instruction for as long as they argued among themselves. In this way the collection of reflections whose first installment I now place before the public came into being.

4 I am aware that my philosophy is no longer in currency. My philosophy has too much of the odor of the school in which I educated myself and which, during the first half of this century, was perhaps all too eager to maintain its position of preeminence. Despotism of any kind incites rebellion. The estimation of this school has seriously declined. Along with it, the estimation of speculative philosophy in general has fallen. In recent times the best heads in Germany talk about every kind of speculation with scornful dismissal. People now strain relentlessly after facts, take a firm stand only upon the evidence of the senses, gather observations, amass experiences and experiments, perhaps with too little care for the broad fundamentals. In the end, the mind becomes so accustomed to running the hand and the eye over things, that it considers nothing to be real unless it yields to such treatment. Hence arises the tendency to materialism that today is becoming ever more widespread. The other side of this craving to feel and to look at things, when it is directed toward objects that by their very nature cannot be felt or seen, produces a tendency to religious fanaticism.⁴

5 Everyone would admit that the damage to speculative philosophy is too far advanced merely to give the wheel a push in order to raise back up that which has been for so long trampled beneath our feet because of the turning fortunes of time. For myself, I am all too aware of my frailty even to consider effecting such a far-reaching revolution. The task awaits stronger powers, or the profundity of a *Kant* who, one hopes, will with the same spirit rebuild once more what he has torn down. I content myself with the limited goal of leaving behind for my

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friends and those who follow after me an accounting of what I have held to be true in regard to the subject of these reflections. I also had a special incitement for publishing this work at the present moment. I will have an opportunity to advert to this more directly in a subsequent installment. How quickly this will appear, I am now not yet able to say. It will primarily depend upon the favor with which the public receives this first installment.⁵

LECTURE I

■ ■ ■

What Is Truth?

- 1 My dear friends! When we set out to search for the truth, we thereby assume that the truth may be found, and that there exist secure marks whereby to distinguish it from untruth. We have therefore first of all to answer these questions: (1) What is truth? (2) By what marks will we distinguish it from appearance and falsehood?
- 2 Whoever does not speak differently than he thinks tells the truth. Truth-telling is therefore the correspondence between our words and our thoughts, between signs and the things they signify. [6] Now, since our thoughts are in a certain way related to their objects as a sign is related to what is signified, some people have generalized this account and have wanted to place the essence of truth in the agreement of words, ideas, and objects. They have said that actual things are the originals, that our ideas are their copies, and that our words are, as it were, the silhouettes of our ideas. If the copy contains nothing more and nothing less than what matches up with the original, and if the silhouette correctly indicates what is contained in the copy, then there is a complete agreement among all three, and this is what they call truth.
- 3 Even if this account is perhaps not incorrect, it seems nonetheless unfruitful. If truth is agreement, then falsehood is disagreement. But is falsehood due to a disagreement among the ideas themselves, or between them and their originals, their objects, to which they approximate? [7] Now, there is no way to compare ideas with their objects—that is, to compare the copies with the originals.¹ We have always present to us only the copies, and it is solely through them that we are able to hazard a judgment about the originals. Who can tell us whether the copies are faithful, or whether they contain more or less than what in fact matches up with the originals, or even whether any originals exist at all that the copies resemble? We see, then, that this approach at least is not going to give us tokens by which to recognize what is true and distinguish it from what is false. Let us, then, pursue a different path.
- 4 As far as truth in speech goes, we can let the previous explanation suffice. It lies in our power to compare our words with our thoughts and ideas, and to see how far they are in agreement with one another. As for thoughts when taken

by themselves, they have two possible aspects. The object that is intended by a thought is either something that may or may not be conceivable² or something that may or may not be actually in existence. [8] First, about thoughts insofar as they may or may not be of things that are conceivable: they may be divided into (1) concepts; (2) propositions; (3) deductions. Concepts are true if their properties do not subvert one another. True concepts, therefore, have properties that can be conceived of in conjunction with one another. The concept of a circle is true since the properties by which it is specified do not contradict one another. So also the concept of doubt, for example, is a true concept. It specifies the condition of a being who falls short of perfect knowledge and who, because of a lack of sufficient evidence, has no more reason to affirm a proposition than to deny it. The concept of justice, even of the most perfect justice, is a true concept since all the properties that come together in it do not subvert one another and are, therefore, jointly predicable of a thing that is conceivable. But the concept of a certain velocity than which none is greater is a false concept, because it entails the concept of a certain distance than which none is greater and the concept of a certain duration of time than which none is smaller, but these concepts are not of things that are conceivable, neither separately nor when they are conjoined.³ Likewise, the concept of the greatest possible injustice, or of the greatest possible depth or height, or of a desire to do evil for evil's sake, are all false concepts.⁴ [9] We discern in the words used to define the concepts a conjunction of properties that contradict one another and are not jointly predicable of any conceivable subject.

5 Propositions merely assert of a subject one of the properties that are contained within the concept within which the subject is encompassed. Propositions are true if they assert of their subjects no other properties than those that pertain to their subjects' concepts. Truth in propositions, no less than truth in concepts, can therefore be posited to be the concord among all a concept's properties when they are taken all together or when they are taken separately and asserted as predicates of the concept.⁵

6 All deductions are founded upon the correct division of concepts. One can represent the entire structure of human knowledge using the image of a tree. The extreme endpoints of the tree are formed by its buds; the buds are joined together on twigs; the twigs join together on the branches; and the branches finally meet together in a trunk. [10] If one assumes that the capillaries running through the trunk, like those that run through the branches and twigs, continue into every sub-branching division, and that every subdivision adds new capillaries to the one from which it breaks off, we have a rather apt image of the relationship obtaining among our concepts. All individual things come together to

form various kinds; kinds come together in genera; genera in classes; and finally classes are united in a single core concept whose properties are inherited by all subgroups. That which pertains to a more inclusive concept must also pertain to the concepts included below it. However, whatever pertains to lower concepts as theirs uniquely can only be attributed with equal right to that single sub-branch of the more inclusive concept and not to all other sub-branches. Herein rests the entire persuasive power of our logical deductions. The properties of the core concept apply to all the branches, and those of the branches to all of the twigs that spring from them, and so forth until we reach the farthest points, the individual things. [11] Going backward, the unique properties of the twig can only be ascribed to that one subdivision of the branch, just as those of a branch can only be ascribed to that one part of the entire trunk.

- 7 The truth of deductions, then, likewise consists in the possibility or impossibility of uniting in a single thought without contradiction certain concepts and their properties. Insofar as our thoughts are looked at from the perspective of what may or may not be conceived without logical contradiction, their truth consists in the agreement of their properties among themselves and with the consequences that are derivable from them. All the branches of human knowledge that, like mathematics and logic, treat only what is thus conceivable or not conceivable attain certainty though the law of contradiction. The law of contradiction carries the highest degree of persuasive force. In the strictest forms of proof, we merely separate apart concepts and trace out the properties of the conceptual trunk throughout all of its branchings, comparing the properties that are common with those that are unique, and thereby we persuade ourselves that the properties are or are not conceivable when taken together. [12]
- 8 All knowledge, insofar as it treats what may or may not be conceived without contradiction, is the result of the correct employment of reason. Only a lack of reason or its incorrect employment can lead us into falsehood and allow us to confuse what is conceivable with what is inconceivable. Further, truths of this type possess the common characteristic of being necessary and unchanging, and they are therefore time-independent. They admit to neither “was” nor “will be.” Everything is, or is not. Concepts that admit to conjunction without contradiction never cease to do so; those that flee from one another are nevermore to be joined in partnership.
- 9 However necessary and unchanging these truths may be in and of themselves, we are nonetheless conscious of the fact that they do not reside permanently within us. Their presence in our minds is time-sensitive and subject to alteration. [13] At a certain time in the past we did not possess these concepts, then afterward they arose in our minds, and a time will come when perhaps they

will again be gone. They are alterations of our thinking being, and as such one can ascribe to them an ideal actuality. These alterations are not, as little as are we who are the ones being altered, necessary; rather they have a contingent and changing being. They are necessarily able to be conceived, but we do not necessarily always conceive them. So, too, we ourselves are *from all time* beings whose existence is conceivable, but we are not therefore *for all time* actually existent beings. The sphere of actuality is therefore more narrowly drawn than the sphere of things that are conceivable. Everything actual must be something conceivable, but there is a great deal that is conceivable to which actuality will never be attached. The source of the actual is therefore not the law of contradiction: not everything that is not self-contradictory and is therefore conceivable has for this reason established its claim to be actualized. We must search for another ground principle to establish the boundary line between the actual and the not actual with the same exactitude as the law of contradiction divides the conceivable from what is not conceivable. [14]

10 Let us see how we arrive at the idea of actuality, and with what reason we assure ourselves that certain things possess actuality, or at least believe we have such assurance. Each human being is himself the first source of what he knows; one must therefore take oneself as one's point of departure when one wants to give an accounting of what one knows and what one does not know.

11 The first things of whose actuality I am assured are my thoughts and representations. I ascribe to them an ideal actuality insofar as they reside within me and are perceived by me as alterations of my power to think. Every alteration presupposes something that is altered. I myself, therefore, who am the subject of this alteration, possess an actuality that is not merely ideal, but real. I am not merely a modification, but the modified thing itself: not merely thoughts, but a thinking being whose condition is altered through its thoughts and representations. [15] We have here, then, the source of a twofold existence, or actuality: the actuality of the representations and the actuality of the thing that does the representing; alterations and the basis of the alterations. Both of these are things of whose actuality we at least believe we have adequate assurance.

12 Just as I myself am not merely a thought that changes but a thinking being that endures, so we are permitted to believe that our various representations are not only representations within us but also pertain to external things, things that are different from us and are the anterior cause of our representations. Just as a thinking being, as we have seen, is not merely certain thoughts but has its own subsistence and real existence, even so can the object of our thought have an actuality that is self-standing and not merely ideal. There are numerous things

that can be thought of that have their own enduring actuality and whose image can for a while reside in us and for a while perhaps not reside in us. [16] We end up, then, with a threefold way of looking at actuality: (1) in regard to a thought whose actuality we have called ideal and that is merely an alteration; (2) in regard to the thing that thinks or the enduring substance in respect of which the alteration happens; (3) in regard to the thing that is the object of thought, or is the anterior cause of the thought, to which we are in many cases inclined to ascribe a real existence, just as we are so inclined to ascribe it to ourselves. But how are we assured that these things outside of us also have an actual existence and are something more than mere thoughts within us? However much nature itself may force us to put our confidence in the actuality of most things, we still would like to know the reason why this confidence seems warranted beyond any doubt.

13 First of all, let us take the case of the senses and the diverse appearances associated with them. We are inclined to consider something outside of us to be actual when it makes an impression on our senses, but we are also aware that our senses occasionally deceive us. [17] They occasionally mislead us into believing that what appears to be present before us really is there, when later we become aware that these appearances had been mere semblances inside us and had lacked any ground in the external world. They were imaginings, dreams, illusions, to which is merely attached an ideal actuality and whose ground in the external world was nowhere to be met, at least not up to that moment.

14 In order to deal with the resulting doubt [about the actuality of external objects], we usually pursue the following path. First, we attempt to find agreement or concord among our various senses. For every additional sense that suggests the existence of some object, we grow more confident in believing in its actuality. I have in my vision the image of a rose, I reach for it and feel it, I bring it to my nose and smell the very same thing I have smelled and felt many times before in connection with the image of a rose. I observe the same object at different ranges, in different conditions, and through various media, all of which I know alter the sensible appearances of the object. [18] I observe the objects of sight through water, through air, through magnifying or reducing lenses; the objects of hearing through amplifying or dampening instruments; the objects of touch I bring to different parts of my body. I attend to the impressions the objects make upon me with each variation, and I distinguish what is similar from what is dissimilar in all of them. I make inquiries about the impressions that these objects make on other people when they are within the range of their perceptibility. The more that we find concord among all of these reports about the object, the more secure is our belief in its external actuality. The more disagreement we

find, the greater is our doubt or, more likely, the greater is our conviction that these sensible appearances of which we are conscious are only thoughts inside us that have no basis in the external world.

Should we in this way be convinced of the actuality of the sensible object, we next bring to bear in relation to it all the truths of mathematics and logic that are known to us. [19] We first of all specify all the predicates that attach to the object by virtue of the incontrovertible propositions that connect these predicates to the object's concept. Furthermore, we exclude from the object all the properties that, by virtue of the law of contradiction, could never be ascribed to it. In this way we construct true propositions whose subject is provided through the evidence of sensible cognition but whose predicates, by virtue of the application of mathematical and logical rules, are just those that are able to be thought in conjunction with the subject. From these true propositions we proceed forward through rational deduction, and in this manner we build up the systematic edifices of applied mathematics and applied logic into a theory of nature. Further, the more frequently two sensory appearances follow each other in time—that is, the more frequently we observe that on the heels of appearance *A* there has occurred a different sensible appearance *B*—the more ground we have for concluding that there is a consistent connection between these appearances. [20] And when we are sure of the sensible actuality of appearance *A*, we then are confident in our expectation of appearance *B*. For example, the more often we observe that an object, as far as what it looked like, how it felt, and how it tasted, resembled bread, and also on every occasion had the effect of nourishing our body, the more confident we become that we can expect this effect from any sensible object that resembles bread, even if we have not yet tested it with all our senses as in the previous cases. Or the more we perceive that an object that has the visible and tactile qualities of a rose also produces a certain smell and a certain taste, the more we regard as trustworthy our expectation that every flower that presents itself to our senses of sight and touch as a rose will also produce the sensations of smell and taste associated with a rose. This is how and why the number of basic and ancillary propositions that we make use of in the physical sciences and also in our daily life expands without limit. Beginning with the actuality of one appearance, we conclude that all sensible appearances that are consistently conjoined to this one also have a share in actuality. [21] To be sure, our conclusion lacks the axiomatic certainty that we would call "mathematical" or "logical," but it does have a measure of conviction—we call this "induction"—that is based upon probability theory. In what follows we will more closely examine the basis of this conviction as well as the degree of certainty that it warrants. For the present I will make do with one example that

LECTURE I

illustrates these general concepts about the nature of truth. I consume a spice, and it imparts to my palate the taste of salt. Others who consume it also have the same sensation. In addition, it appears to our sense of sight as having the form usually associated with salt. I examine it with a microscope, and its granules have the structure of salt. I place it in water, and it dissolves just as salt usually does. At this point, I expect that a chemical analysis will produce an outcome identical with what is expected from salt. [22] But I don't let things rest with this presumptive expectation: I go on to actually investigate a sample of the substance in various chemical interactions. When finally my expectation is confirmed, I conclude with a high degree of conviction that all the rest of this substance will produce in my body the same set of effects that experience teaches me have been produced in other human bodies by similar means. From the multitude of confirming experiences, I come to expect further confirmations in similar cases, with a greater or lesser sense of certainty depending on the number of confirming cases I have experienced. [23]

LECTURE II

■ ■ ■

Cause. Effect. Ground. Power.

¹ I am going to push on with my effort to track down the first source of our knowledge of actual things, even if I risk exhausting you all with these hairsplitting exercises. At least once in the course of one's life one needs to gather up all the subtleties that one can into one neat pile and then sweep them out of doors if one wants to escape the coils of sophistry. We have seen that the frequent succession of two appearances gives us warrant to suspect that they are joined together. We call the antecedent appearance the "cause," and the posterior appearance the "effect," and we become persuaded that they are able to be joined together in a logical statement—that is, that in the concept pertaining to the cause, as the subject, there is something to be found that allows the effect to be understood as the predicate. [24] This something or property from which the effect can be inferred we call the *ground*, and we say: every effect is *grounded* in its cause. With the same rules of inference we conclude that when two appearances are paired together, they must be subordinated to a third appearance that is their common cause, but whether it is their immediate cause or is more distantly related to them cannot be determined.¹

² One notices here a triple source of knowledge. Even an animal expects similar consequences from similar situations, but the sources of its knowledge are different. The mere association of ideas accomplishes for animals what experience does for the common mass of humanity and what reason does for the scientist. An animal, for example, will hesitate before committing itself to a sloping surface, because it fears that it might slide down precipitously. The frequent repetition of the same situation has linked the ideas in the animal's soul in such a way that when it views a sloping surface, the idea of dropping and sliding down becomes quite powerful and generates fear. [25] A human being, on the other hand, is not merely ruled by whatever momentary impression happens to be the most powerful, but rather he learns from frequent experience the following reasonable maxim: heavy bodies slide down sloping surfaces. He surmises on the basis of the rules of inference that when he works out all the details about the nature of a sloping surface, he will find something that makes the possibility of precipitous descent comprehensible. The scientist derives his knowledge of

the ground of this possibility from the principles of mechanics, and he brings the general maxim closer to a purely rational piece of knowledge.

3 In the fear of committing oneself to a sloping surface, a fear that the animal and the human have in common, there lies a hidden syllogism that can gradually be lifted from animal faith to a purely rational truth. The premise *This is a sloping surface* is given by the sense of sight. Because of the association of ideas that repeated sensations have firmly established for the animal, the image of its falling becomes without any further mental work the ruling idea in its soul. [26] The image then acts upon the animal's locomotor capacity. But reason finds in the premise a great deal to work out. Sight gives us the appearance of a sloping surface. What if sight deceives us? The possibility of being deceived by sight certainly exists, since we have been hoodwinked by it before, and quite frequently to boot. It is only the concord among the repeated appearances of the surface when (1) its distance from us is varied, (2) or we change our angle of sight, (3) or we view it through different visual instruments, and in all of these cases the surface produces the impression of a slope, and (4) when we use touch or any of the other sense organs that give information about spatial and extended objects and we get the same impression; it is only under these circumstances that we are justified in saying that the surface not only *seems* sloping but *actually is* sloping. When in so many different ways and under such different conditions the repeated perceptions of the surface are thus in concord, we may then conclude that an object outside of us exists that contains within itself the ground for this concord. [27] Philosophical knowledge adds no new evidence beyond the ordinary to support this conclusion, but rather it seeks to justify, by applying the basic principles of the art of reasoning, our right to draw this conclusion and to use it in other types of argument that we call induction and analogy.

4 The sight of a sloping surface evokes the image of our sliding downward, an image that has been connected with the same sight on a frequent basis. The least reflective individual will not allow himself to be ruled by every new intense image, but he rather sets up for himself experiential maxims—for example, that *from a sloping surface, etc.*—although he can offer no other ground for it than that he has seen it frequently to be so. He has concluded a connection between a sloping surface and falling from their repeated conjunction, and he has constructed for himself a principle that serves him as a maxim every time he encounters the relevant situation. If he learns something from similar experiences—for example, that one can more easily split things using a wedge or that one can more easily lift things by turning the screw of a jack—these remain for him separate maxims that he puts to use without ever suspecting that these things are worth further thought. [28] The scientist pursues a deeper knowledge, and

he seeks, as far as he can, to connect these maxims to knowledge secured by reason. For example, in these maxims of experience he finds one and the same natural set of laws at work: the law governing the weight of bodies and the law governing the transmission of movement to them through other bodies with a variety of figures altered in different ways. Insofar as these natural laws are applied with different results when the figure is altered from a slope to a wedge to a screw, he explains these results on the basis of the fundamental principles of geometry—that is, according to the laws of what may or may not be conceived without contradiction—and he discovers that motion imparted to an object by a wedge or a screw can be understood as following the same principle as motion imparted by a slope.² From this perspective, the scientist's knowledge becomes a purely rational certitude. He sees the connection between the subject (figure) and the predicate (motion) at least clearly enough to no longer have to merely suspect an outcome that experience has taught him to expect. [29]

5 But none of us has a sufficiently clear and complete grasp of the scientific knowledge of the general laws of nature and the laws of weight and motion that underlie our merely experience-based maxims about bodies and motion to be able to apply them to any given change in figure and to recognize all the consequences such a change produces. Sensory appearances and their concord have permitted us to conclude that there is an object out there that is the basis of this concord. This object is what we call a “body,” but our knowledge of its properties does not extend so far as to allow us to conclude the existence of weight in general or of a general power of movement whose relation can be logically expressed in a simple law. The general laws of nature—*All bodies have weight* and *All bodies have the power of movement*—however they are expressed, are for the scientist still ultimately experience-based maxims whose universality is based only on induction. [30] Because with repeated tests these two laws have always held true, the scientist concludes that there exists an inner causal connection between the subject (body) and its attributes (weight, power of movement), even though he has never been able to directly perceive this connection. But with the help of his reason the scientist comes to be able to transform separate experience-based maxims into general laws of nature. The basis for his conviction in their universal application is established neither through scientific study nor purely rational reflection, but rather through a process of induction that must stand in place of pure reason.

6 This is not to say that induction is so imperfect as to fall short of being persuasive or cogent; quite the contrary, in many cases it extends so far as to give us complete security and to free us from every doubt. Every one of us, for example, expects with unquestionable certainty that he will die, even though the basis

of his conviction is only imperfect induction. [31] And no one is prevented by even the smallest sense of propriety from conducting some secret business in the presence of an infant, even should his life or his happiness depend upon its secrecy; he has not the least anxiety that the child or some household pet who happens to be watching will betray him. And what supports his so sanguine sense of security? Not any rational knowledge that has been scientifically acquired, but merely an imperfect induction that, however, comes so close to being perfect that it provides him with a full measure of confidence.

- 7 This affective aspect of our knowledge is really a matter for the science of psychology and character. As soon as we are dealing with the knowledge of the sort of things whose actuality is possible but not necessary, the quality of our knowledge is mixed. In part it consists in the immediate experience of something or a sensory perception that arises within us by itself; and in part it consists in the comparison of these perceptions and the mental work we do when we notice similarities among them or when we seek their underlying general principles. The principles may either be grounded in reason or in an induction whose level of conviction depends upon how perfect or imperfect—that is, complete or incomplete—is the evidence that supports it. [32] The inference can even come to be felt to have such a degree of obviousness about it that it leaves no room for hesitation and provides us with such security that we otherwise can expect only from pure reason. To separate out the different ways that pure reason, or mere experience, or one's inner sense, each help to bring about a particular level of conviction is a concern for the student of psychology and moral character, and we cannot go into any detail regarding this matter here. When the Macedonian ruler Alexander the Great accepted medicine from the hand of his doctor without the least suspicion or hesitation, he displayed his instinctive trust in their proven friendship.³ His trust in the character of his friend was certainly of a very mixed nature. In part it was based on his knowledge of human beings in general and in the motives that move the human will to action; in part it was based on experiences and observations concerning friendship that he himself and others had previously gathered; [33] and finally, it was based on his repeated tests of the honesty of his friend that in the end no slanderous report could make him suspect. All of this knowledge is assembled from inward perceptions, their methodical workup through scientific deliberation, repeated experiences, and from the inductive inferences built upon these experiences. From the distillation of all these elements there grew in Alexander an unquestioning and firm conviction that no suspicion could touch and that falls little short of the cogency of a mathematical truth.

- 8 Therefore every conviction that has to do with the knowledge of things whose existence is possible but not necessary—every conviction, in other words, that

is not a purely rational piece of knowledge—is based upon the concord of the various senses under a multitude of circumstances and alterations and upon the frequent conjuncture of different sensory appearances, one close upon the other. We need finally to investigate the reason we are justified in forming an inference under such conditions. In my treatise on probability theory I have laid out clearly and in great detail the truth conditions governing analogical and inferential arguments and how we are moved to conviction by these sorts of argument. Our present discussion calls for a brief review of the essential points of this treatise. [34] I recommend to you, however, for the sake of your greater comprehension of the topic, an examination of the treatise itself and the truth conditions it enumerates. This examination will prove useful to us as we proceed.⁴

9 If the properties of a given object or event *A* leave it undecided as to whether a second object or event *B* is expected to follow it or not, and whether it does or does not follow upon it depends upon determining factors that are external and inessential to both *A* and *B*, then we can with equal justification assert and deny that *B* will follow *A*. In this case, either assertion is doubtful and each has the same degree of probability. So, for example, either heads or tails may fall when one tosses a coin. Since the outcome of the toss depends upon movements of my hand that I make without any premeditation, I have equal justification for betting on either heads or tails. In any given number of tosses, the probability is that tails will appear as often as heads, and when two players are betting on the outcome, each has as much hope of winning as the other. If in a number of tosses we see continuously one and the same outcome, we are led to suspect the existence of some inner determining factor that favors the one outcome over the other. And if my opponent always tosses the coin with the same side facing up, then I may suspect that he is not playing by the rules and letting chance determine the result of the toss, but that he is deliberately fixing the game by some method he knows for giving the coin an unobservable bias. My suspicion deepens with every toss I lose. Let us try to more exactly express the calculation supporting my suspicion. [35]

10 As many tosses as he makes, my opponent has exactly that number of chances of losing. If, for example, he bets that tails will always fall in a certain number of tosses, then in two tosses he has two chances of losing (with a heads on the first or second toss) and only one chance of winning (if tails falls on both tosses). I can give him two-to-one odds on his bet that he will get two tails in two tosses, since he has only one opportunity of winning but I have two. His hope of winning has a level of certainty of one in three, and mine is two in three. [36] If we wanted to divide up the kitty without waiting for the outcome of the tosses, I

could rightfully demand two-thirds of the amount while he could only expect one-third.

¹¹ If we were to bet on the outcome of four throws, then his chances of winning are one in four, and mine are three in four.⁵ With every additional throw that we include in our bet, my opponent's chances of losing increase by one, and my chances of winning increase also by one, on the assumption that I win the kitty if heads falls on any throw. My opponent's hope of winning depends upon only one outcome—namely, when every throw comes up tails. In 100 throws, therefore, my chances of winning are 100:101 and his are 1:101—put generally, in n throws, my chances are $n:n+1$ and his are $1:n+1$.⁶

¹² If the outcome [of the bet on 100 tails falling in a row] turns out nonetheless to be in my opponent's favor, this result may come out of an honest effort on his part to let the game play itself out as it may. The probability of this result is $1:n+1$. [37] But considering the probability of $1:n+1$ alone, one can certainly suspect that either something is amiss with the coin or that my opponent was giving a secret small bias to his toss and that an explanation of this sort will turn out to account for the surprising outcome. The larger the number of throws, the smaller is the ratio of $1:n+1$. As the ratio becomes smaller, my opponent's chance of winning [the bet on all tosses being tails] grows smaller, and my suspicion grows stronger that something other than chance accounts for the result [if he wins the bet]. My suspicion, however, never can become absolute certainty that the result was not due to chance, unless n would be infinitely large. Then the ratio of $1:n+1$ equals $0:1$.⁷ This means that in this situation my total certainty [of winning] equals 1 and my opponent's chance [of winning] equals 0. So long as n is a finite number, there remains some measurable chance that my opponent won the bet fairly, and the suspicion that the game was fixed does not reach the level of incontrovertible certainty. [38]

¹³ It is upon these simple laws for calculating odds that the greatest part of our knowledge of things whose actuality is possible but not necessary rests.

¹⁴ The more frequently phenomenon B follows upon phenomenon A or accompanies it, the more reason we have to ascribe this to an underlying connection between them. If they were only conjoined because of accidental causes, then every time we repeat the test [of seeing whether B follows upon or accompanies A], the opposite may also happen. And altered circumstances should also have altered the results. Since we find that this does not happen, we have reason to believe in the existence of an underlying connection with a level of conviction that stands in relation to certainty as the number of observed cases n stands to $n+1$. If in every case phenomenon B follows upon phenomenon A , we may postulate that the basis for this connection can be found among the invariable properties

of *A*, because were the basis to be found among its variable properties, then the absence of the connection would not be excluded. [39] We surmise, then, that the inner, invariable properties of *A* have brought about phenomenon *B*—that is, we conclude the existence of a causal connection, designating *A* as the cause and *B* as the effect, and designating the invariable properties of *A*—or, in other terms, that which in *A* does not alter through time—as the power of *A*. When we have observed that bodies expand as they approach a fire, we postulate that among the invariable properties of fire we will find the underlying reason to explain the expansion. We attribute to fire a power of expanding bodies, and we expect the very same relation will hold true between fire and bodies that we have not yet actually seen in the vicinity of a fire. The degree of our certainty about this connection grows as the multitude of cases we have observed grows, and when the number of such cases is very large, as we have seen, the degree of our certitude is hardly distinguishable from what we feel when something seems self-evidently obvious.

15 We believe that when two phenomena invariably are found together at the same time, both are the effects of a common cause, whether (and we are equally justified in assuming either to be the case) immediately preceding both or with intermediate causes intervening. We expect to perceive one [of the two phenomena] whenever we perceive the other. [40] The color and feeling of bread has been so often observed to be connected with a certain taste and a certain effect upon the nourishment of our body that we are justified in believing that both sets of properties are the consequences of the inward nature of the bread, and that with any given piece of bread we see and feel we may expect the same taste and the same nourishing effect. The inward nature by virtue of which bread produces the effects we ascribe to it we call its “power.”

16 This is the source of all the laws of nature that have come to be accepted by us as such. They are general propositions in which we express the sometimes directly observed and sometimes inferred causal connections that permit us to calculate a particular result in any given situation to which the general laws can be applied. Because of their inner causal connection, similar subjects will have similar predicates. The law of weight is a general proposition that covers all the observed differences among bodies when they fall downward or when they are lifted upward. [41] The researches of Newton, Galileo, and others combine this law with the whole realm of logically conceivable truths governed by the law of contradiction—that is, they combine the physical laws concerning bodies and weight with the principles of mathematics and logic. In this way scientists construct the theory of gravitational attraction between bodies, enriching our knowledge beyond our every expectation.

- ¹⁷ When different events, *A*, *B*, *C*, and *D*, could all be explained as deriving from a certain source, *E*, but might also be thought to separately derive from just as many separate sources, the probability of a single common source is the greater probability and becomes increasingly greater as the number of events grow, and ultimately the probability approaches certainty. I see that a group of people are running toward a certain place, or perhaps they are only turning their eyes in that direction. Each of them may have his own separate reason for what he is doing. But the mere fact of the concord among their actions allows us to conclude there is a common cause. Or say that I have observed the behavior of one man in numerous situations. On each occasion his action might be derived from a separate and distinct ground. [42] But perhaps it is also possible to quite naturally understand that all the behavior I have observed can be, let us say, the product of an ambitious character. I am then allowed to conclude with a degree of probability that grows with every confirming observation: this man is ambitious.
- ¹⁸ It is upon this basis that the truth conditions of the hypothetical method are established. The greater the number of natural events, and the greater the variety of the circumstances under which they occur, that a single postulated cause is able to explain, and what is more, the greater the simplicity of this explanation, so much greater is the evidence supporting our postulation of this cause, and so much more probable is the postulation itself, and with so much more justification is it accepted as true. One is tempted to believe that this touchstone of the hypothetical method can only be valid if we ascribe the world's arrangement to a rational and wise Cause who must have chosen to achieve his intentions through the most direct means. [43] In fact, only if this is the case, according to one of our modern sophists, do you have a right to believe in a simple arrangement over a complicated one, or to trust that it is so cleverly designed as to achieve a surfeit of ends with a minimum of means. So, the sophist's argument goes, the touchstone of the hypothetical method is itself a hypothesis.⁸ But if we go only with the concepts I have so far introduced, there is no need for this extra hypothesis, however much we might otherwise be persuaded of its truth. Rather, it follows from the very nature of human understanding that we resist ascribing an observed concord among things to mere chance, but we always search for a cause whenever we discern harmony and concord within diversity. The probability with which we accept the reality of this concord is directly proportional to two factors—namely, the number of concurring instances and the simplicity of the cause hypothesized to explain their concord. Our belief can, as we have seen, reach such a level of conviction as to be nearly indistinguishable from what we take to be self-evidently obvious. Diverse natural phenomena allow us

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to discern a harmony among them that can be explained on the assumption of a certain hypothetical cause. [44] Should the hypothesis turn out not to be true, and should there be no commonly shared explanation, and should the various phenomena need to be accounted for with just so many various hypotheses, then the concord among the phenomena is the result of pure chance. It is contrary to the nature of things and to human reason, it is contrary to the laws that lead us to give our assent to the truth and prefer the probable to the improbable, it is contrary to all this for us to hand over the appearance of concord to chance and to let it be the offspring of what is random and haphazard. [45]

LECTURE III

■ ■ ■

Self-Evidence—Immediate Knowledge. Rational Knowledge—Natural Knowledge.

- 1 We are now coming closer to our two guiding questions: What is truth? And, how can we assure ourselves that we have actually gotten hold of it?
- 2 The sum of our knowledge can be divided into three classes: (1) Sensory knowledge, or the direct awareness we have of changes that transpire within us when we see, hear, feel, and so forth; or when we experience pleasure or pain; or when we have a desire for or aversion to something; or when we judge, conclude, hope, fear, and so on. All of this I place in the column of direct knowledge stemming from the outer and inner senses, although the added reflections, considerations, and refinements of reason are so often and so intimately connected to the senses that the boundaries separating them cannot anymore be recognized. [46] (2) Knowledge of what is logically conceivable, or in other words, those judgments and conclusions that can be derived from the immediate knowledge of the senses by the proper use of our understanding; the thoughts into which we analytically dissolve those [immediate] feelings; *rational knowledge*. And (3) knowledge of the *actual world* outside of us, or in other words, the perceptions that we have because we find ourselves in a physical-actual world in which we undergo changes and also bring them about.
- 3 The totality of our knowledge is bounded on all sides by doubt and uncertainty; within, it is saturated with error, prejudice, and uncertainty. All of this shows us that our mind's power is limited and that our psychic faculties come bound up with weakness and impairment. For this reason our knowledge has effects and consequences that in part are based upon our abilities and in part upon our impairments. [47] All illusions affecting our sight and hearing stem from the fact that our sensory capacities are limited and conditioned by the particular physiology of our different sense organs. All the falsehoods that may be found in our rational knowledge result from the weakness of our understanding and the limitations of our capacity to think clearly; and the errors we make in relation to the actual world of contingently existing objects flow, as I will explain below, from the same sources. We can therefore allow the following

generalization to be posited as a valid one: *truth* is every piece of knowledge, every thought, that is the product of our mind's unimpaired powers;¹ however, insofar as our thought is the effect of an impairment, insofar as thought has suffered some alteration due to the reduction of our unimpaired powers, we call it *Untruth*. When the responsibility for the untruth lies in an impairment of those powers of our mind, in a defect in our understanding or our reason, we speak of it as an *error*; but when we are misled by the deception of mind's so-called lower powers, the falsity of our knowledge is called an *illusion* or a *trick of the senses*. [48] Every single piece of knowledge is in part true and in part untrue, because it is the result of the working of a power that has inherent bounds and limits. The untrue, however, is either an error or a sensory semblance, or a combination of both.

4 At their foundation, error and sensory semblance have but a single source. Error lies in the region of what our mind has worked upon and analyzed into concepts, whereas sensory semblances lie in the region of what the mind has not yet worked upon. The latter, sensory semblance, is nearly the same as what is immediately known, and the more it approaches this kind of knowledge, the less corrigible it is. Incorrect judgments and false conclusions can be ameliorated through the correct use of reason and in this way converted into truths. The sensory semblance remains, however, incorrigible: however much we may be persuaded that the color green is compounded of yellow and blue, that a tower we see in the distance is not as round as it seems, [49] however certain we are that Copernicus is right that it is not the sun but the earth that moves, the sensory semblance remains always the same and is not altered by our convictions. Illusion is too closely related to immediate knowledge for it to be corrected by the use of our understanding or our reason.

5 Imperfect inference is in principle one of the main sources of tricks of the senses. We connect the impressions of the different senses, and we expect one whenever we become aware of the other. Sight and touch are so often linked that we expect a similar feeling from objects that happen to look alike. We presume there is an inward similarity when we perceive an outward one. We conclude that the feelings will be similar because we have so frequently perceived a connection between two phenomena. From signs we draw conclusions about the signified object; from the close conjunction of two events, we conclude that each must have a deep connection with the other; [50] we abandon ourselves to imperfect inferences that by their very nature have the power to trick us. All this is the consequence of the incorrect use of our powers and the fault of logical mistakes in our inferences. When they are unraveled and made explicit, they are seen to have the same nature as all the rest of our erroneous thoughts. So long, however,

as we let the tricks of the senses remain unexamined, so long as they are still so immediately bound up with our sensory knowledge, they have the incorrigible power of sense-based convictions and will never be altered through the use of our mind's higher powers. Upon what basis, for example, do I believe that a tower some distance away that seems to be round actually has the shape I see? Apparently, this belief is based upon the illusion that an object of sight does not change its shape as its distance from me changes, that it would present itself to me in the same way when I am close to it and able to touch it, and, finally, that I have frequently perceived that other people agree with me in my judgments and so will agree with me in this one too: a purely imperfect inference that I take to be perfect. [51] Why do I put my faith in a piece of bread that is laced with poison, consuming it without any hesitation? Unarguably it is because I abandon myself to the frequently observed inner connection between the bread's ability to nourish me and its outward appearance. I presume an inward similarity when an outward one presents itself to my senses. Once again, an imperfect inference has betrayed me. I see the picture of a rose swaying in the wind, and I hold fast to the certain expectation that it will present itself no differently than would a real rose to my senses of touch and smell. How does this illusion differ from what happens when my prediction that a certain thing will be found to be the same as another turns out to be mistaken and based only on a false resemblance? Both are in principle logical mistakes of inference. It is only that one of these expectations is fixed so firmly in my mind that no amount of rational persuasion is able to displace it. It lies in the region of ideas that have not been worked upon by the mind and that can never be removed no matter how much work the mind applies to the task.

- 6 There is an illusion by virtue of which people ascribe pain to a limb that they long ago have lost. This illusion seems to fall in a special category, but it is in truth able to be explained in the same way as the others. [52] Strictly speaking, the feeling of pain has no defined location. It has no accompanying characteristic that points to a particular space or place, no characteristic that signifies something extended or possessing a figure. Only through its connection to sight and touch do we locate pain at a particular place in our bodies. And how could it be otherwise? The pictures we have in our mind's eye of our limbs are basically nothing else but composite images constructed from various visual and tactile impressions.
- 7 Whenever we feel pain in a part of our body that neither our sense of sight nor touch is able to reach, we are unable to assign it a specific location. We feel pain, but we do not know in what part of the body it is situated. Should you, for instance, want to know which exact tooth it is that is causing you such intense

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pain, you need to feel around with your finger to learn which tooth it is that, when you touch it, causes you to notice a difference in how the pain feels. [53] Or it happens quite often that when we feel a certain pain, we perceive first of all that a spot somewhere on our body feels differently. Then we touch this spot with our fingers, and we find that we can change the way the pain feels. The pain is lessened or increased as we touch the spot or put pressure on it or rub it. Because of this we identify this spot on our body as the site where our pain resides. This is how we create a deep, inner connection between the feeling of pain and the spatial image of that limb that we have constructed through our senses of sight and touch of that limb. On whatever occasion thereafter we may again feel this pain, it is not only through an association of ideas that we call up the spatial image of the limb; rather, we also expect that touching or manipulating the limb will produce the same effect as before. In other words, we take this limb to be the cause of the pain. It is for this reason that children, before they have firmly established the requisite association of ideas, are rarely able to accurately say what hurts them or where it hurts. [54]

8 If indeed the spatial element in our feeling of pain is an effect of an association of ideas, if it arises merely from the frequent conjunction of two phenomena and our surmise that one is the cause of the other, then it is easy to see that, first, this surmise of ours, like every other conclusion based upon an imperfect inference, is liable to deceive us. Thus, we very often ascribe our feeling of pain to the wrong place. Indeed, the actual presence of the limb is not required for the association of ideas to take place. If the spatial image of the limb has been so firmly linked to a certain pain that the succession of the one upon the other has become a single, undivided sensation, if the spatial image arises whenever we feel the pain, then either the limb itself may still be part of our body, or we may be able to persuade ourselves that, based on what we can see and touch, the limb is missing. But our association of ideas carries on along the same path as before, unhindered by our very clear conviction that the limb is in fact missing, and we continue to ascribe our feeling of pain to a place that no longer exists. [55]

9 When researchers in the field of physiology want to explain this phenomenon, they satisfy themselves by saying that pain does not reside in the outer limbs but rather in the brain, where the nerves converge together, or wherever the gathering point for all our feelings happens to be found. On this account a sensation can continue to be felt the same as before as if no change had taken place despite the fact that the external nerve ending from which it originates no longer is present. This explanation satisfies the physiologist. But the theoretical scientist goes further. He notices that the spatial image we have of the nerves and

the brain can itself be attributed merely to our senses of sight and touch. The inner feelings we have of desire and aversion, or well-being and pain, have nothing in common with any three-dimensional figure. Only through the repeated conjunction and close succession of these different phenomena that have become bound together so firmly in our mind do we conclude that a causal relationship exists between them. [56] Through its frequent repetition and its long-standing familiarity, this conclusion comes to be felt with the force of an immediate and instantaneous sensation, and it carries on along its own course in blithe disregard of the better and clearer evidence of our senses. The conclusion is drawn, the illusion is accomplished, before our more slow-moving reason can do anything to thwart it; and likewise it happens that in very many cases habit rushes ahead of reason and brings to pass that which reason can only belatedly disavow.

10 All the mimetic illusions of the applied and fine arts flow from the same source. They are grounded in the connection between the sign and what it signifies and upon the conclusion that we are used to drawing on the basis of imperfect inferences. When we grow accustomed to the connection between a sign and what it signifies because of their frequent and repeated concurrence, when the succession of ideas acquires the force of an immediate and instantaneous feeling, then our senses lead us directly and without any hindrance to infer from the sign the presence of that which it signifies and to expect to perceive that which is signified whenever we perceive the sign. [57] However strongly we may be led to one conclusion by our clear knowledge of what is actually present, the sensory illusion leads us along its own independent path toward the opposite conclusion. The imitation works its effect upon us even though reason tells us that what we see is merely a simulacrum. We may be ever so certain that the actor before us is not really the jealous Moor who kills the innocent Desdemona; we know for a fact that the marble Laocoön does not feel the fangs of the serpent closing in his flesh, the effects of which the artist has rendered all the way down to the very toes of his feet; but if we let it be our intent to give ourselves over to the pleasure of the illusion, then our sensory apprehension carries on its usual game: it leads us to conclude from the signs of suffering, the reality of the suffering, and from the signs of voluntary actions, the intentions and the motives behind them. In this way we find ourselves showing concern for persons who are not real. We become actual participants in feelings and actions that are not real, because in order to enjoy the spectacle we deliberately ignore their unreality. [58]

11 If it were my intention to pursue the subject of psychology further here, I would take the opportunity provided by these considerations to discuss with you the following question: to what extent do the senses have their own separate

power? I would show you through a number of examples that sensory apprehension has mixed in with it a variety of mental activities that we normally view as being performed by reason. Common sense, although it seems to be acting all by itself in our appreciation of a beautiful object, actually presupposes the operation of our reason, which, without our conscious awareness, must have been active beforehand. I would proceed to a comparison between common sense and reason, and by adducing a sufficient number of examples, I would hope to persuade you that common sense and reason are, at their base, one and the same. I would hope to show you that in the case of our sensing something, there is a mental activity that must transpire before we actually know that we are sensing a certain object. That same activity transpires also in the case of our thinking something, and then it is described as *reasoning*. The difference is simply this: in the case of our sensing something, common sense takes rapid strides and goes rashly forward, with no fear of falling to break its stride. [59] Reason, on the other hand, goes about, as it were, with a cane to feel its way before it dares to take a step. It shuffles along the same path with, to be sure, greater caution than does common sense, but also not without fear and trembling. Both can be led off into side paths, both can stumble and fall, but reason will have a more difficult time of getting back to its feet.

12 To pursue these thoughts further would lead me too far from my intended goal, so I must content myself with having shown that with every sensory illusion there is always a logical error at its source. A false semblance can have several sources, each one accompanied by an error in the employment of our reason. Misled by an incorrect conclusion based upon an imperfect inference or by an unsatisfactory analogy that posits a causal connection between two things that lack any such connection, our perception convinces us that there is an object where there is none, or that a certain object possesses properties that it in fact does not have. In a word, a sensory illusion and an error of reasoning both have a single source, both flow from a weakness in our cognitive faculty. [60] Both flow from a limitation in our power to form representations, in one case leading to the falsity of our perception of an object and in the other to the incorrectness of our reasoning about an object. The same cause can have two outcomes: false semblance or error. We are able then to assert the validity of the following general proposition as an answer to our initial question: *Truth is all knowledge insofar as its basis is the unimpaired capability of our mind; untruth, on the contrary, is knowledge insofar as it has suffered an alteration due to an impairment in, or the reduction of, our unimpaired power.* [61]

LECTURE IV

■ ■ ■

Truth and Illusion.

1 As I was coming up the staircase now, it seemed from all the shouting that you, my dearest friends, had gotten yourselves involved in some kind of altercation. Can you return your daggers to their sheaths and put your dispute on hold for now, or is the battle related somehow to the subject of our morning conversations?

2 “You know,” J. answered, “that during these hours, as Pope says, we ‘leave all meaner things to low ambition and the pride of kings,’¹ and we begin each day with such thoughts as concern us more closely.” “That is how an English poet it expresses it,” I replied. “A Viennese poet might put it this way: ‘We are not talking about the ambition or greed of princes, but about the release of an ancient river nymph from mythic times whose eyes had been blindfolded and whose hands had been enchain’d by the god Mars.’ [62] And now she needs to be set free by the art of statecraft with the aid of Eris or Belona.”² “That may be well and good for him,” he said, “but we are not Viennese, and we dedicate our morning devotions to that heavenly goddess, if I may employ a similar poetic mode, who deserves to have a temple also here on earth, although few mortals would know how to find the mountain trail that leads up to it. Princes ought never to have drawn their swords on her account, although she was compelled to supply them with a pretense for many a bloody scene. Neither Eris nor Bellona is ever permitted to cross the threshold of her temple. But Eris has on occasion set herself up as a guide to it and has even frequently succeeded in leading the friends of my heavenly goddess right up to the outer portals of her temple. It all depends on Eris’s orientation, as people say: if she is attracted to heavenly Amor, who entices her along the path, then she actually can guide a mortal right up to the doors of the temple and, thereafter, depart in modesty. [63] But if the god Ambition leads Eris on, in his impetuousness he will kick up a cloud of dust in front of her and so obscure her view of what lies ahead that the one who is following behind her is liable to come up flush with the portals of the temple and then pass them right by. Indeed, should the portals happen to be open, this unfortunate mortal might follow the sly god Ambition into the temple only to find he has been somehow turned around and led right back into the waiting arms of Eris.”

3 “You have plowed with my own heifer,” I said, “so I can easily solve your riddle, my dear son.³ Your quarrel was about Truth, and I hope that on this occasion Eris was attracted to Amor, the god to whom these morning hours are dedicated. And now let me bring an end to our allegory and ask simply: was your dispute about the account of truth that I braved with you yesterday?”

4 “Just so,” he answered. “It seemed to some of us that the distinguishing features of truth that you advanced were not quite sufficient to distinguish it from sensory delusion. [64] Didn’t you say that knowledge counts as truth if it follows from the unimpaired capacity of our mind? And that insofar as our mind suffers a change through the diminution of its capacity, it veers toward untruth?” “Right!” “This untruth, you then posited, is called error when it is a consequence of understanding and reason, but if it flows from a reduction of our sensory capacities, it is called a trick of the senses or an illusion. Wasn’t that it?” “Exactly. So now, S., please explain which case you brought forward as a counterexample that throws this account into doubt.”

5 S.: “Imagine that I see the image of my friend in the water, and then, turning to the right, I actually see my friend standing beside me. The very same sense that in one case offered me a semblance to recognize in the other case offered to me the truth. We cannot say that in the one case it was the sense’s unimpaired capacity, and in the other case it was the sense’s reduced condition that produced the appearance. [65] The sense itself as well as the organ of sight fulfilled their duty in both cases and performed the task they were designed to perform. Why is it, then, that regardless of this fact I feel compelled to consider the first case as a semblance and the second case as truth? Let me add another case. Is it not due to the unimpaired capacity of our sense of sight and according to the true laws of optics that I see a rainbow shimmering in those clouds over there? Yet for all that, the rainbow, as we know, is a mere semblance and neither reality nor truth. But if the criterion for truth that you offered were decisive, then it ought to be able to be brought to bear in these and similar cases.” “Granted,” I replied. “A touchstone that anyone offers to us must be sufficient in all cases to distinguish what is authentic from what is false if we are going to be able to rely upon it with any certainty. And you, my friends, who stood the charge as S. marshaled his attack against my account, did you have anything to say in its defense, or did you deliver it over to suffer its fate at his hands?” [66]

6 Now W. spoke up: “We weren’t yet entirely driven from the field of battle. We seemed to recall that you yourself had raised similar problems in your lecture and had resolved them by using your criterion. However, we hoped to hear you speak directly about the cases that had led S. to doubt your account. So let this be the subject of your conversation with us today, if that meets with your

approval.” “Very well,” I said. “It happens that this is the very best way to get into the material I had planned for today anyway.

- 7 “You said, my dear son, that the sense of sight, operating in accordance with the identical laws of optics, provides in one case the image of your friend to recognize and in the other case the actual friend. Both are therefore the effect of the unimpaired capacity of the sense, but nonetheless they are not both the *truth*. Wasn’t that what made you suspicious of my proposition?” “Precisely that.” “You know how defense lawyers argue on behalf of their clients’ innocence by either denying the facts of the case or shifting the blame to someone else? [67] Well, I am going to use the second tactic. I maintain that the sense of sight is not responsible for the illusion, and, so far as it is responsible for anything in both cases, it tells the truth and nothing but the truth. As a sense appearance, the image in the water that you see has no less truth than the other. Both are effects of the unimpaired capacity of the sense and can, in accordance with my definition, neither trick nor delude.” “Who, then, should be held guilty of this piece of enchantment?” he asked. “If both visual images tell the truth, how is it that one shows me my friend where he is not, but the other one offers him to me here where he actually is present.” “*Is present*,” I answered. “Here is where the difficulty lies. What do you mean by *being actual* and *being present*?” He seemed to think it over a little, and finally said: “If you wouldn’t mind not asking *me*, you could ask *him*. *He* answered that question once before, I am pretty sure.” [68] “I am only asking for what comes first to mind, not for an exact definition. I just want to know what are the features that allow you to tell that one image is an illusion and the other one is the actual image of your friend? Isn’t it like this: that the familiar voice of your friend doesn’t come from out of the water but from beside you? And that you have to stretch out your hands to your right if you want to embrace your friend or take something from his hand? Aren’t these and similar sorts of things the signs by which you distinguish semblance from existence, mere semblance from actual substance?” This was granted, and I pushed on: “The sense of sight was therefore not responsible for the illusion. It was a subsidiary mental judgment that misled you. You were expecting that from the visual image would also come the auditory and tactile appearances that are very often connected to it, and things didn’t turn out according to your expectation this time. [69] The basis for this expectation was an imperfect inference, a conclusion *from many to all*, or *from often to always*, and when this conclusion proves deceptive, it is manifestly an effect of a weakness, of a deficiency and reduction of our cognitive capacities.

- 8 “The same account holds in the case of the rainbow, the second instance that you brought forward. The brilliantly radiant colors it displays lead you to expect

that they are supported by a solid object, yet theory and actual experience have persuaded you that the colors only float shimmeringly in the moist haze out of which clouds are composed, and with every new position you assume, the rainbow also changes its location. Here, too, it is not sight, insofar as it expresses an unimpaired sensory capacity, that deceives you. Habit and the expectation that similar effects follow upon similar causes have led you astray, and you have placed your trust in an inferential procedure that does not always prove reliable. Truth remains the consequence of our unimpaired cognitive ability; and untruth, on the other hand, is a consequence of an impairment with which cognition is unavoidably bound up.” [70]

9 And now we can take up the second question that I have set as the subject for this morning’s discussion. With what degree of certainty can we be assured of any truth? Where is the touchstone by which we can determine whether a certain cognitive state we possess or believe we possess is the consequence of our mental power or is rather the consequence of some reduction in its power?

10 I come back to the triple division of our cognitive states: sensory cognition, rational cognition, and the cognition of actual objects in nature. All direct sensory cognition—or, as others call it, *intuitive cognition*—whether it consists of the impressions of the outer senses or the perceptions of the inner senses, carries with it the highest degree of conviction. Considering them as representations in the mind, one finds in them neither error nor illusion. Whenever I hear a sound, see a sight, or have a feeling, there is no doubt that I actually do hear, see, or feel. [71] Also, whenever I sense pleasure or pain, or experience hope, fear, sympathy, love, hate, and so forth, there is no error possible about the fact that I have these experiences. Error follows upon the misuse of one of the higher mental faculties that only come into play with and serve the interests of reason and the cognition of nature. Direct, intuitive cognition stands in need neither of reason nor of the understanding, and it cannot be misled by any misapplication of these. And what about deception or sensory illusion? We have seen that our senses can only deceive us when we infer something about objects that are outside us, when our cognition is supposed to be a *presentation* [*Darstellung*] and not a mere *representation* [*Vorstellung*].⁴ In this case our sensory cognition is liable to the same errors of inference as happen with rational cognition and on occasion lead to mistaken outcomes. Just as error is produced in this kind of cognition, so it is produced in sensory cognition: through habits of association and through tricks and illusions of the senses. [72] So long as we remain in the realm of sensory cognition—that is, so long as we do not consider sensory cognition to be a presentation but only a representation—it admits of neither doubt nor uncertainty. It has, taken by itself, the highest degree of self-evidence.

- 11 The same degree of self-evidence beyond all doubt attaches to whatever can be deduced from these initial basic ideas by employing the rule of what is and is not conceivable—in other words, whatever follows as a consequence of applying the law of contradiction to immediate, intuitive cognition. The law of contradiction is a condition for any possible thinking in general. We would have to abandon all thinking and all investigating if we did not consider the law of contradiction to be valid or if we did not wish to accept all the implications of this law. Errors may indeed creep in, but they are errors in calculation arising from the misuse of the law of what is and is not conceivable. In the everyday act of calculating, we can incorrectly employ otherwise completely trustworthy rules and arrive at mistaken results. [73] Everyone has experienced this. For every question that may arise about a result, one needs both a check and a proof. The proof actually indicates what the result had to be when the solution procedure is followed.⁵ The check, however, can only show in this case whether the result that has been proved to be correct was actually arrived at correctly. The proof, as one knows from everyday calculation, provides the highest degree of confidence. All the checks in the world, however, are insufficient to dispel all doubt that our calculation was done correctly. The case is the same with all pursuits of knowledge that employ strict rules of proof upon whose demonstrations we rely with the highest degree of confidence. I am talking about mathematics and logic. The rules of thinking and forms of demonstration by which one truth is derived from another possess the most cogent certainty. [74] One can check whether the rules and forms of demonstration were correctly applied, but the potential for the failure of any check leaves room for a small degree of uncertainty. The theory is secure past any doubt, but in its application many mistakes in calculation can creep in to produce erroneous outcomes.

- 12 The certainty of direct sensory cognition extends also to the domain of beauty and moral feelings. Here, too, taste has a sort of incorrigibility. Where you sense beauty, beauty must be there to be met. When some idea or action uplifts your soul and lets you sense your own highest worth, it must in fact be uplifting. Since taste and moral feeling are not forms of rational cognition, they are liable to neither error nor mistakes in calculation. But what about illusion? We have seen that this only occurs when the mind steps outside itself and draws a conclusion about an object—in other words, where one can distinguish between a presentation and a representation. [75] As long as sensory cognition is limited to its inner feelings as feelings, then what the feeling seems to be is what is its truth, and exactly as much as I believe I feel is how much I feel. The most perverse taste, then, can neither deceive nor delude, so long as we remain within the sphere of subjective feeling. Falsehood can enter only with an evaluative judgment in

which one runs the risk of a kind of mistake in calculation that can result in an erroneous appraisal. A correctly formed taste weighs all the elements of an idea or an object, compares an overall view of it with narrower and partial views, puts each in its proper light, balances its beauty against its faults, and passes judgment upon the impression made by the whole. A faulty taste, on the other hand, lets the lights and shadows fall in an unbalanced and misdirected way, takes hold of a partial and narrow view, overlooks what ought not to be overlooked, and passes judgment based upon an incorrect appraisal of the worth of the whole. Faulty taste emphasizes only one of the many elements of taste. Such a feeling is true on its face, but any judgment that is based upon it is misguided. [76]

13 Helvétius attempts in one of his posthumous writings to demonstrate the misunderstood assertion that all human knowledge springs from sensory impressions.⁶ He limits himself merely to the workings of the outer senses, and he desires to explain the entire body of all our concepts as the play of nerves in our brain. He believes thereby to have proved the necessity of denying that the mind possesses any general concepts. Everything in the brain is a sense impression. And in order to evade the problem raised by the fact that the words of a language possess general meanings, he declares that language is merely a system of signs. Words, he says, are like signs in algebraic problems or like numbers in a calculation that have in themselves no intuited content but are merely symbols that, through replacement and equivalence, can be used to produce correct solutions. In just this way, words could be employed as empty signs and symbols. As a result, language would become a useful tool for correct thinking and for constructing a rational discourse. [77] Just as we work comfortably with the assumption in algebra that there is a value that corresponds to each sign [in an equation] and that the solution will be no less correct with those assigned values than the solution arrived at with the signs alone,⁷ so in a similar way, he asserts, we have learned through the repeated use of our language to be comfortable in our assurance that we can assign a sensory impression of a certain type to each word without in fact having to think of or represent the word to ourselves as anything more than an empty sign. Our reckoning with words assumes that our sensory impressions have the same relations among themselves as we have established among our words as the signs that stand for them. Thinking is the process of coming to a conclusion that is really the final sensory impression produced by our word signs. As a consequence of this hypothesis, all human language would be a mere collection of empty, algebraic signs that we shuffle and recombine in accordance with certain rules.

14 It seems to me that if this hypothesis were true, we could arrive at rational conclusions by using our language, but we could never arouse any feelings with

LECTURE IV

it. A mere system of symbols as is used in numerical calculation or algebra leaves our emotions unmoved. [78] It can generate neither love nor hate, neither fear nor sympathy, or, to put it most generally, it can generate neither pleasure nor pain. We would be left as cold and indifferent by the production of our most gifted playwright or by reading a poem or a speech as we are by an algebraic problem and solution. How does it then turn out that we can bring forth through language such extremely powerful effects of whatever sort we may wish? Feelings do not lie. What we feel, we know we feel with the greatest certainty based upon immediate, intuitive apprehension. Our general notions and the words that represent them must not consist merely in an intellectual apprehension of signs, but there must be attached to them something intuited, something immediately grasped, that can awaken our emotions as well as our intellect and that can arouse our feelings of pleasure and pain. [79]

LECTURE V

■ ■ ■

Existence. Waking. Dreams. Delusion.

- 1 When the poet returns to his dear mother earth, his homeland, from the borderless kingdom of his poetic imagination after he has rambled there long enough, he lifts his voice in song: “Hail to you, my maternal land, I see you again, my earth!”⁷¹ We likewise have returned from a similar journey to a land of possibilities and ideas back to this actual life in which we find ourselves more comfortably at home. We might also lift our voices in a similar song and continue on our way with confidence and courage if the skeptics had not done their best to dig up the roadways beneath our feet and to lay traps for us to fall into. So it is precisely here where we must be most cautious and advance not one step forward before we have reconnoitered the territory. [80]
- 2 Let us then investigate the concept of existence down to its essential kernel, not in order to explain it with a phrase, but rather in order to explore its origin and examine how it develops within us little by little. Our thoughts, considered as such, are the first things that impress themselves upon us. We cannot for a moment doubt that they are actually present within us, that they are alterations of our very selves, and that they at least possess a subjective actuality. Thereafter it is our own existence that is a necessary condition without which no further discoveries, indeed, no doubting and no thinking, could ever take place. Descartes correctly posits as the foundation of all further reflection the proposition *I think, therefore I am*. If my inner thoughts and feelings are actually within me, if the existence of these alterations of my very self cannot be merely illusory, then we must acknowledge the *I* to which these alterations occur. Where there are alterations, there must be present a subject that suffers these alterations. *I think, therefore I am*. [81]
- 3 The philosopher could have with equal justification said, *I hope, therefore I am; I fear, therefore I am*; and so on. In fact, all the changes that transpire within ourselves bear the common feature, according to his theory, that he names with the word “thought.” He therefore includes all of these changes with the general expression: *I think*. And what about existence? If we take our bearings from ourselves first, as we must do in all that I know, existence is only the common term for *acting* and *being acted upon*. We are conscious of ourselves as, in every

moment of our life, either acting or being acted upon, and the feature that they both have in common we name *existence*. I have concepts and feelings, and therefore I am a conceiving and feeling being. I act or I am acted upon, therefore I am actually present. *I* must, by virtue of the most incorrigible conviction, grant the first premise, and thus the conclusion can, as a necessary consequence, never be subject to doubt. [82]

- 4 In accordance with our explication of the nature of truth and falsehood, all of this follows quite naturally. The immediate impressions of our outer and inner senses and everything that we can deduce from these on the basis of the rules of thinking can hardly be the result of an impairment on our part. Unquestionably, these things presuppose an unimpaired cognitive ability. Just as little can the subject within which this ability is exercised be a mere impairment, a mere defectiveness. A defect presupposes a being that is defective. Alteration without that which endures through the alteration is unthinkable. All of my subjective cognitions, considered only as subjective, have unquestionable truth; their ideal form of existence is one of neither mere semblance nor error. My own actuality is neither an illusion nor an error; hence it is the truth.
- 5 Do not think, my dear ones, that my intention with all of this abstract verbiage is to make the fundamental elements of our cognition more comprehensible. I am quite convinced that such verbal pomp more often than not makes matters more obscure. [83] Verbal explanations must come to an end if we are to finally make forward progress and not forever, as it were, be led about in circles. My entire effort is directed at awakening within you, by means of all the many figures of speech and turns of phrase that I use, the very same thoughts that I have within myself and that I find suited to my aims. If we were talking about things that could be perceived by the senses, and I was trying to help you to understand an explanation taken from natural science, I could set out before you, one after another, different individuals of the same species until I was certain that you had separated out the common feature they all share and that you had formed a concept of the species under which they all fall. But as the matter stands, we are dealing with things that cannot be perceived and cannot be set out except through words. Therefore I must offer you one after another figure of speech or turn of phrase, presenting you the subject from its many different sides, until the very thing I am hoping for takes place within your mind. I am very far indeed from wanting to give you explanations of existence, thinking, the *I*, and so on that you could find in a basic textbook. [84] I only want my words to lead you to your own reflection. After you have heard and compared all of my various words and expressions, I hope that I can awaken in you the thoughts that will take us together to our goal.

- 6 The existence of my representations, considered only as subjective, and also my own existence and the existence of all that can be concluded from these things according to the rules of what is and what is not logically conceivable, the existence of all these things is beyond any possible doubt. Each of these things, insofar as it is given through an immediate sensory cognition, leaves no room for any worry about its being the product of an error in reckoning. However, insofar as these things are joined with pure rational cognition through the application of rules of what is and what is not logically conceivable, doubt has not entirely been excluded from consideration: we have perhaps been misled into a false path, and by a misapplication of the rules, we might have drawn a specious conclusion or have made a faulty calculation.
- 7 In the range of the ideas that I am conscious of within myself, I am aware also of the sort that I am not only able to treat as mere representations but that I must at the same time hold to be presentations of external objects. [85] They are not merely alterations of myself that are only able to be found within me as their underlying subject, but I am forced to confess that they are impressed upon me by external objects with an independent existence. In my healthy waking state there is nothing easier for me than to identify ideas of this sort and to distinguish them from other ideas. Ideas of this sort manifest their identity with a cogency that forces itself upon our well-functioning sensory apparatus and that will not admit of being gainsaid.² On the other hand, if we are dreaming, or inebriated, or deranged, or carried away by emotion, we commonly invert these two sorts of ideas, and we treat a series of purely subjective representations as if they were the presentations of external objects. When we are awake, we are aware of our situation and we distinguish it from dreaming. As long as we are dreaming, we lack the parallel disposition. Indeed, it not infrequently happens in dreams that we have a residual doubt that what we are seeing and hearing might be mere dream work. [86] But quickly this doubt is overpowered by the apparent persuasiveness of the dream work, and our doubt disappears without being able to make us aware of our situation. Every one of you will have had the opportunity to confirm for himself the accuracy of my observation. Whenever in a dream a circumstance arises that seems out of place and in conflict with the laws of nature, we become alert and we ask ourselves: might all this not be a dream? No sooner does this doubt arise than it vanishes again without making us any wiser about our condition. The question is: Can a criterion be specified that allows us to distinguish representation from presentation? Can the judgment of our common sense that in our waking hours seems so incontrovertible be transformed into a systematic rational rule? And how does it happen that

while we dream, this criterion drops its guard against tricks and illusions and can no longer rescue us from deranged fantasies? [87]

- 8 You will recall that the doctrine of the interconnection of ideas about which I spoke with you one morning asserts that certain ideas are commonly found together or follow one another in a rule-governed orderliness. There is a certain subjective orderliness that arises from the nature of our wit, or of our imagination, or of our reason. Ideas that elicit other ideas by virtue of some shared similarity or resemblance or by virtue of a logical relationship between them of antecedent and consequence can occur together in this order whether we are awake or dreaming. We call this a subjective interconnection of ideas. But if they stand in a causal relationship with one another independently of us, they will be found together or follow one another because they are connected to one another as cause and effect in accordance with the recognized laws of nature. We call this an objective interconnection of ideas—that is, a sequence of ideas that does not merely depend upon one of the fully or partially functioning powers of our mind but that presupposes the existence of external objects of which these ideas are presentations. These ideas are grounded in the powers of these objects and their reciprocal actions and interdependencies. [88]
- 9 The waking condition is what we call the mental state in which the objective interconnection of ideas is the ruling one. By far the greater portion of mental representations in our waking state follow after and together with one another not in accordance with the associative laws of our mental faculties—that is, not because we happened once before to have experienced that conjunction of representations, or because our wit has noticed a similarity among them, or because our reason finds that they are only thus and in no other way able to be the objects of our thinking. Rather, their interconnection is due to the fact that they stand in a causal relationship among themselves in accordance with well-established laws of nature. How we happen to have acquired our knowledge of these laws of nature and these causal relationships has been previously explained by us. This knowledge is supported in the main by an incomplete induction—that is, a type of inference that moves from often to always and that in many cases can achieve a measure of certitude that is nearly the same as that which accompanies the most self-evident truths. The greatest portion of our ideas stand in this order and interconnectedness during our waking state. [89] Our mind does indeed have a tendency to depart somewhat from this objective order and to slip into its own subjective manner of connecting ideas. But since in our waking state the objective order of ideas is the ruling one, we are quickly called back from our subjective meanderings and returned to the order

of actually existing things. But the more that a representation holds a certain interest for us, the longer and more lastingly we are sidetracked by the subjective interconnection of our ideas and the more our waking is conjoined with a sort of dream state. We may especially notice the effects of this conjunction in moments of distraction, elation, or rapture. At times the power of a certain representation by which we are swept away is so great that it overwhelms the objective sequence of things and leads us completely outside the order of nature and into a subjective interconnection of ideas that resembles a waking dream. This is the state of stormy mental agitation, of religious enthusiasm and spiritual elation that lyric poets seek to emulate. [90]

10 In German we call this state *rapture* [*Entzückung*], with much import. The mind is, as it were, rapt away from the present, sensible sequence of things and transported into another one that is private unto itself.³ In the case of someone who is insane, we call this condition *derangement* [*Verrückung*], and for the same reason.

11 The propensity of the mind to follow a subjective interconnection of ideas and to hand itself over to wit or the power of the imagination is so strong and so natural that, without the pressing call of reality, of the actual world, it can follow no other sequence of ideas and can maintain itself in no other fixed direction than the one that wit and imagination provide for it. One can make oneself proof against this propensity through concentrated focus upon or sustained rational reflection about one single object. In concentrated focusing the mind fastens its attention upon an object, divides its various characteristics up into a number of essential properties, and reflects about how the connections among these properties conform to the rules of what is logically conceivable. [91] This is the order of reason that the mind must follow with secure and unwavering steps if thought is to make any progress at all. But for the most part, the mind by itself has too weak an interest in its pursuit of the rational cognition of an object to keep it fastened to the order of reason and to permit it to make secure progress. With every step, the mind would be sidetracked by wit or imagination and would never recollect its original goal if a powerful awareness of immediate reality first of all did not call it back to the actual world and then remind it of its intention to direct its meditative attention to one certain object. One can see why concentrated focusing is so mentally tiring and what special mental condition one must be in if one hopes to successfully engage in it. Rational cognition and the sequential order in which the mind arranges its ideas has no intrinsic interest for the mind apart from the interest in the goal it intends to reach. It follows its sequence of thoughts because it seeks to reach a certain endpoint. [92] This intended goal or endpoint is in most cases a supersensory object that

rarely is powerful enough to overcome the seductive appeal of the richly colorful imagery of our fantasies.⁴ The mind would not long remain firmly set on its goal if it were not held back from straying by a dim consciousness of reality. But the consciousness of reality must not be so powerful as to absorb the whole mind together with the idea of its goal, and thus to dim also the thoughts that would direct the mind on its forward path. Consciousness of reality should only recall the mind to its actual condition, and thereby recall it to its intended goal, that it might follow undisturbed the order of reason. The impression of reality must be neither too strong nor too weak, neither too lively nor too flaccid, if the mind is going to be able to maintain itself in a state conducive to focused concentration. An extremely intense consciousness of reality overwhelms rational cognition too much; an overly weak one, however, hands the mind over to the play of the imagination, and it wanders off in reverie. [93] Not everyone has the facility to sustain his sense impressions in this balanced tension as often as it may be necessary to do so, and no one has the facility to pull this off at all times and under all circumstances. Malebranche would avoid all strong sensory impressions and even would dim the daylight with a curtain in order to follow the steps of his meditations undisturbed. Euler, however, had the extraordinary ability, even in the midst of a throng of children and domestic servants, to resolve the most difficult algebraic questions and to compose the treatises that we so admire.⁵

¹² Where have we ended up? Have I not just confirmed the very thesis I started to expound by offering an example of it? I started out to indicate the difference between subjective and objective representations in order to find the mark whereby we distinguish the state of waking from a dream. Without having fully achieved this ultimate goal, my mind followed the lead of my imagination, allowed itself to engage in a description of rapture and enthusiasm, and from here it turned to the requisites of focused meditation. [94] And just now I was about to digress to the topic of the rules of the lyric poem. As a cross between meditation and enthusiasm, the lyric poem pursues its own path, which can be determined more or less from the preceding discussion. The beginning, where some interest leads the poet to break out in words; the development, wherein he pursues the ideas in the order that is generated from out of his focused concentration and inspiration; and the leaps or abrupt transitions from one series of ideas into another that is so much the mark of the inspired poet—all this I was about to explain in detail to you point by point, and thus imitate more the manner of the lyric poet than the teacher of philosophy. Fortunately, the sight of you called me back from this digression and reminded me of my original intent. In full imitation of the lyric poet, I will now abruptly cut the thread here in order to attach it in the next hour back to where it started to get lost in knots. [95]

LECTURE VI

■ ■ ■

The Connection of Our Ideas. Idealism.

- 1 Aren't metaphysicians, in fact, a strange lot? That's the question that many a person who saw us now would likely be prompted to ask. They deny themselves the pleasures of morning sleep, perhaps even interrupting the most delightful morning dream, in order to meet here under a linden tree in the hope of discovering the important truth that sleeping is not waking and waking is not a dream state—a truth that is as well known to every child in the bosom of his nurse as it is to them. However comical this may be, like everything comical, as we know, it has a serious side, and whether it is comical or serious all depends upon one's point of view. Common sense and reason both flow from a single source; they are one and the same cognitive power. It is only that reason goes slowly and, as Fontenelle says, takes lumbering elephant steps, whereas the former rushes as if with wings to its goal.¹ [96] It is not unworthy of the effort of philosophers to try to see how far they can distill rational knowledge from out of the precepts of common sense. The geometrician does not refrain from seeking the most stringent proof for the proposition that the straight line is the shortest distance between two points, although the cynic may with justice mockingly declare that even a dog must be aware of this truth when it goes in a straight line as it runs after its prey. "Even animal sense has its basis in some cognition," the geometrician replies, "and let us see whether we can distill from that sense some rational knowledge." So let us carry on with yesterday's inquiry, without fear of the ridicule that seems to attach to it. The waking state, as far as it concerns the mind, is, as we have seen, one in which the objective connection of ideas—i.e., the orderliness of causality and of the laws of nature—stands out in the strongest light and, as it were, exercises supreme rulership in the mind. This rulership assigns to every subjective connection among ideas its proper place in time and space, and distributes to all ideas their proper degree of clarity and force; [97] it directs the mind's attention, works the controls of movement, and even guides the course of reason in its sustained reflection. All the activities of the mind operate in a sort of well-tempered harmony, so long as the ambient impression of the present moment's reality provides the keynote on which it is built.

- 2 Now, this harmony and the execution of the tasks of the mind's established economy can be disrupted and put into disarray if the objective order of ideas is either too weak or the subjective order is overly powerful. The latter occurs in states of passion, intoxication, ecstasy, or delirium. In all of these states certain ideas have for the mind such an irresistible appeal that it follows them down all the byways and sidetracks they may take. The consciousness of reality, or the chain of cause and effect, has still enough force to steer one's attention and also the movement of one's limbs according to the will's discretion; [98] but one's interest in following the steps of one's subjective ideas at times wrests away the mind's supreme rulership for itself, leads the mind along a subjective pathway, and hands the mind over to thoughts and actions that are inconsistent with the actual state of things. Whenever one's sensory impressions are powerful enough to lead the mind back from its wanderings, one's reason sees that it has fallen into a labyrinth of error and it conceives the intent, even while still in a state of drunkenness or delirium, to leave off from its distracted stumbling. Sadly, the intent does not last long. Once the subjective interest renews itself, it weakens the sense of reality and reduces the individual back to his incapacitated condition. The mind is no longer capable of rational deliberation and gives itself up again to the leadership of its intoxicated sequence of ideas.
- 3 During sleep, sensory impressions are weakened, but comparatively also weakened are the images conjured by one's imagination. Neither the past nor the actual present is vivid enough to elicit consciousness of any sort in the mind or to have an effect on one's locomotor organs. [99] Everything appears in a much weakened light, in the same mixture of light and shadow, brightness and darkness, proximity and distance, as appears in a landscape viewed at dusk, or in a painting that is draped by a transparent veil. The lighting is softened, the impression is nowhere overwhelming or rousing, but everywhere the same, and of a similar effect. But if in this state any fanciful or recollected image happens to acquire a somewhat greater vividness, a subjective association of ideas can thereby be awakened in the mind and take possession of our consciousness. If it is not called back by a stronger consciousness of reality, the mind will pass from one series of subjective ideas to another under the laws of the imagination or under the direction of whatever attracts its interest, and things will appear joined together that in reality stand in no causal connection. The incompatibility of this appearance with the laws of nature will sometimes be noticed and lead the dreamer to even have doubts about what he is dreaming. [100] For reason to come into its own again, it is essential, as we have seen, that the mind be ruled by a sense of reality. But if the mind is allowed to follow its own subjective association of ideas, any intention it may have had to give itself over to reflective

thinking disappears in the blink of an eye: the mind at once leaves behind one whole chain of reflections and suddenly finds itself drawn into a very different way of connecting things together, in which one can find not the slightest trace either of its prior reflections or even of the intention with which it had begun its reflections in the first place. This state of mind we call dreaming. Dreaming is a kind of displacement of the mind into a different way of connecting things together than that which applies in the world around us. The only difference is that in dreaming, impressions from outside do not have enough power to have an effect upon our locomotor organs. However, it remains possible that during sleep the images of the imagination can become sufficiently vivid that they are able to have an effect upon the locomotor organs and produce voluntary actions. [101] The sensory impressions may remain wholly or mostly weakened, or at least those that would cause us to awaken may never reach sufficient vivacity, so that our dreams are permitted free play to set our bodies into motion and make us do things that we otherwise can do only in waking. This condition is a disease that is called sleepwalking. The freely executed actions that take place in this state take place by virtue of the subjective association of ideas. From reality these actions derive only as much input as has an immediate bearing on their goal. The sleepwalker seeks to avoid the objects that he immediately comes up against, or he tries to move aside objects that stand in his way, and he does this with all the more alacrity if the objects there are things that, when he is awake, he habitually handles with unconscious ease. The wider impression of the outer world through which the mind orients itself in relation to its surroundings and by which it is called back into full wakefulness can nonetheless be missing. [102]

4

The mind's focused concentration, as we have seen, is disrupted if an image of the imagination achieves greater vivacity, or some other interest becomes more distracting, than the mind's pursuit of its resolve to focus its concentration. But when this does not happen, the mind can stay true to its purpose and maintain its concentration without interruption, carrying on its reflections in accordance with the laws of reason. We see that this can happen even in delirium or dream, at least when neither a distracting interest nor the vivacity of a pictorial representation comes in collision with the requirements of rational thinking. There are not a few examples of deranged persons who, when there is no demand upon them to attend to the details of a situation, and when their illness grants them a capacity for all but the most strict reasoning and reflection, often manage quite well and are able to work out the most ingenious and elaborate thoughts with reason and order; and there are even cases of dreamers who have carried out a proof in a dream, which they previously did not succeed at when they were awake. [103] However strange all of this may seem, it can be made somewhat

more understandable if one takes into consideration the specific differences that obtain between dreaming and waking and if one recalls the real obstacles that otherwise stand in the way of rational thinking when one is dreaming.

- 5 Democritus says, not without reason: when one dreams, each of us possesses his own world, and when we awaken, we all cross over to a common world.² In dreams, every one of us holds a different set of things to be objectively true, a set of things that at the very least have not happened exactly as we imagined them, and whose sequential order follows merely subjective rules for the association of ideas. They are fragments taken from different systems, which together do not constitute a whole. The entire objective truth that these fragments contain is the existence of the dreamer himself, a point that seems cogently evident even in a dream, past all possible doubt. All other things are mere alterations of this dreaming being. They have merely an ideal existence, without any external object. Every dreamer has crossed over into his own world. [104]
- 6 The ideas of the waking individual, however, are images of things outside of us that are actually present, appearing according to the rules of the order in which they are actually produced outside us; they all belong to a common world. They are variously modified, although not in all subjects equally, but according to each subject's condition and location, but this variation in itself shows the unity and identity of the object that is being represented. They are like different paintings of a landscape, made from different angles. The paintings must be different if they are to be true, but only that which is similar in them has objective truth; that which is dissimilar in each, on the other hand, is a consequence of perspective: it is true insofar as the painting is taken to offer one view of the landscape, but it is false if we take it as a complete representation of the landscape.
- 7 In a similar way we will need to distinguish the true from the illusory in the representations of the waking person. [105] An object that we are aware of through only one sense acquires for itself merely the presumption of actuality, a presumption that is based on our habit of associating the sensation with other sensory phenomena. This presumption can, however, prove to be deceptive. It might be the case that we have mistaken a painting [of an object] for a presentation of [the object itself]. But as more senses come to confirm our belief that we are seeing the presentation of [the object itself], as we see it from various distances and through manifold media, the more certain is our conviction in the object's actual existence. The reason for our presumption no longer rests upon the limited support of a single sense, because its agreement with other senses points to a source common to them all. But a doubt still remains as to whether the limitedness of our cognitive range overall might not mean that it falls short of that common source and therefore leaves room for deception. Perhaps I am

so constituted as to see and hear and feel things and to believe these things to be actually existing, when in fact they are merely processes within myself for which no outside object exists. [106]

8 But as more people come to agree with me in finding things to be as I find them, the greater becomes my certainty that the cause of my belief does not lie in my particular constitution. The cause must lie either in my unimpaired cognitive power, and thus be a true representation, or in common limitations of all human cognition. The probability of this last case decreases if I come to be convinced that even animals recognize things in exactly the way that I do, although, to be sure, relative to each animal's position and perspective. But these relative differences, taken all together, allow us to recognize that one identical object is being presented from various angles. And if we could be convinced that beings superior to us cognize things in exactly the way we do, relative, of course, to any differences due to their exalted status, the certainty we place in the existence of things outside of us would grow in strength to the point of the highest cogency. [107] We would have nearly complete inductive support for the certain assurance with which we accept the existence of things outside of us not as a consequence of our restricted circle of vision or a result of some other defect of ours, but as founded upon the integral unimpairment of our cognitive power, which is common to all thinking beings. This alone can be the common ground of so widespread an agreement across such a manifold assortment of creatures. Each one always apprehends and counts as real the same object, despite the manifold organs by which, and the different perspectives from which, the object is in each case perceived. But although the knowledge of what is real may be a consequence of our cognitive power, there is no reason to doubt the truth of this knowledge if indeed we were correct in what we previously determined to be the differences between truth, error, and deception.

9 If we could be convinced that our understanding, in its highest capacity, makes present for itself the things that are outside of us as real objects, our assurance of their existence would have gained the highest level of cogency, permitting no further increment. [108] This is no mere speculative fancy that I am introducing you to so that I can bore you. Once we have convinced ourselves of the existence of a supreme being and of its properties, a way will open before us to gain some idea of the infinitude of this being's cognitive grasp, and from this idea to refute with a greater measure of truth, and perhaps even with a kind of scientific demonstration, the pretension of the idealists and thus to prove beyond challenge the actual existence of a sensible world outside ourselves. For the present, however, before this can happen, we restrict ourselves merely to the propositions with which the idealist stands in agreement with us. He admits

that the thoughts going on in him, as alterations of his own self, acquire ideal existence for themselves. He can, furthermore, not deny that he himself, as the subject undergoing these alterations, is actually present. Others, different from him but limited beings just as he is, can claim with equal right their own existence and their own actual presence besides his own. [109] He does not deny their existence unless he falls into the absurdity of the egoist, who ascribes only to himself the right to claim an actual existence. I will subsequently have the opportunity to tell you why I simply call this opinion an absurdity. For the moment I am dealing only with the idealist, who admits to the existence of thinking beings besides himself and who does not arrogate to his humble self alone the merit of being the sole substance that has a purchase on reality. Within the full expanse of his own knowledge, as well as in that of the combined knowledge of other thinking beings, the idealist joins with us in distinguishing the subjective sequence of things that is true only in him, from the objective sequence of things that is commonly shared by all thinking beings, relative to their locations and viewpoints. The characteristic traits of this objective sequence, which he recognizes in his waking state, are for him, as for us, undeniable. But are these traits also marks of the truth? Are there actually outside of ourselves sensible objects that provide the basis for why in our waking state we think the sequence of objective thoughts in the order we do and in no other order? [110] The full expanse of our objective thoughts also includes ideas of inanimate substances, physical beings, that present themselves to us as located outside of us. Does this presentation also have truth on its side? "No!" the idealist answers; "it is due to the short-sightedness of our sensory perception that we think so; it is an illusion of the senses whose source lies in our natural impairments. My better reason convinces me," he says, "that no substance can possibly be physical." The dualist, however, believes that the idealist's thinking has fallen into error because of his mistaken premises. The dualist believes that there are both physical and psychical substances, the former, however, being not entirely like what they seem to us to be, for the limitations of our cognitive faculties alter the way they come to be represented. Nonetheless, in the many and varied images of these physical substances not everything is a matter of perspective, not everything the result of the limitedness and the narrowness of our viewpoint. [111] The element of agreement in all of these copies points rather to a common source of the agreement located outside of us, which is the original behind these copies. The dualist certainly admits that his senses sometimes deceive him, but he does not consider everything they tell him to be mere illusion. Rather, he believes that much derives from the unimpaired strength of his mind's power of thought, and this he takes to be the truth. The idealist responds: "I have

an immediate idea of a substance that can think, and that can be the object of thought, when I recognize myself as an existing being. I have a passable idea that other substances can and do exist besides me that also can think and that can be the object of thought, that can form representations and themselves be represented. But what sort of a concept can I form of a substance that has only material properties, a substance, in other words, that would be only an object of thought without itself ever thinking?" "Your reason," the dualist answers, "gives you no basis upon which to deny the existence of such a substance. [112] Just as there are numerous substances that think and are the objects of thought, and just as, according to our confession and faith, there is one supreme substance that only thinks and whose infinitude can be conceived by no other creature, just so, in a complementary vein, there are substances situated outside us that are the originals of our sensations and percepts, though they themselves lack the ability to form representations, material beings that can only be thought but can never think." "But what kind of properties," the idealist then asks, "do you ascribe to this substance? Are not all sensible properties that you ascribe to it merely modifications taking place within yourselves alone? You assert, for example, that matter is extended and capable of motion. But are extension and motion anything more than ideas derived from sensation, specific alterations of your representational faculty, alterations of yourselves of which you are conscious? What allows you, then, to drag these ideas outside yourselves and attribute them to an original source that is supposed to be situated outside of you?" "If this is your difficulty," the dualist answers, "it lies more in language than in actual fact. When we say a thing is extended or capable of motion, these words have no other meaning than this: [113] this thing is of such a nature that it must be conceived of as extended and as capable of motion. To be *A*, and to be thought of as *A*, is for both language and logic the same thing. So when we say that matter is extended, capable of motion, and impenetrable, we are saying nothing more than this: there are originals outside us that present themselves to every thinking being as extended, capable of motion, and impenetrable."

10 It would never occur to any of us to ascribe these sensory concepts or phenomena that are the reflected images of matter to matter itself. We only say that the representation we have of material beings, as extended, capable of motion, and impenetrable, is not a consequence of some weakness or impairment of ours, but rather that this representation arises from the unimpaired power of our mind and that it is common to all thinking beings. Therefore, it is not merely subjectively true, but is rather the objective truth.³ [114]

LECTURE VII

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Continuation. Quarrel of Idealists with the Dualists. Truth Drive and Approbation Drive.

- 1 In the last lecture I tried to bring clarity to the quarrel between idealists and dualists and to show you how in the end this quarrel hangs on a very fine distinction. The advocate of idealism holds all the phenomena of our senses to be accidents of the human spirit [*Geist*], and he does not believe that outside the spirit one can find a material original in which these accidents have correlated attributes. On the other hand, the dualist says: “I find that in these sensory phenomena, which you call accidents of the spirit, there exists so much agreement among the different kinds of senses, and between one individual and another, and even between humans and animals, that I believe I am entitled to posit that the basis for this agreement does not lie in myself, but in something that is located outside of me. As accidents within me, sensory phenomena are reflected images of this something, [115] and like all such images that arise from a single perspective, they have a certain one-sidedness, but that does not deprive them altogether of truth. The material original contains the basis for the truth of and the agreement among all these reflected images. This material original arouses in us the idea of extension, motion, shape, impenetrability, and so on. Therefore, this original itself is extended, capable of motion, impenetrable, and able to assume certain figures. One lets oneself be deceived and led astray by empty words if one wants to understand something more than that by the expressions ‘to be extended,’ or ‘to be capable of motion,’ or ‘to be impenetrable.’”
- 2 An advocate of the spirit system recently replied in the following manner to me after I invited him to join the dispute: “Are you not rather the very one who has brought on the linguistic confusion that you seek to involve us in? All the properties that you attribute to this original are, by your own confession, mere accidents of the mind. But we want to know what that original itself is, not what effects it brings about.” [118] “Friend,” I replied, “if this is your earnest wish, it seems to me that you ask to know something that is absolutely not an object of knowledge. We are standing at the limit, not only of human knowledge, but of

all cognition in general, and you want to go still further, but you do not know whereto. When I tell you what effect a thing has or how it can be affected by something else, do not ask what it is. When I tell you what concept to use in order to categorize a thing, then the further question, What is this thing in and of itself? has no good reason to be asked. Philosophers for ages have often been tortured with questions that are in principle unanswerable because they consist of empty words that carry no meaning. Thus the atheist asks, ‘What is God really?’ Show him what God has brought about, show him all the glory of creation and all the beauty and perfection that it contains. Tell him that God has brought all this about and has produced it through His wisdom. [117] Tell him that He preserves and governs all of this according to the laws of His wisdom and His goodness, of which he may find a trace in each mote of dust in a sunbeam just as much as in himself. But all of this does not satisfy him. He goes on to ask: ‘But what is God Himself?’¹

3 “Remember,” I continued, “that the materialists, who hold all simple spiritual beings to be chimeras, believed they had driven us into a corner with a similar question. ‘What in the world is that thing,’ they say in their folksy way, ‘what in the world is that simple, spiritual being of yours that allegedly has neither size nor figure, neither color nor extension?’ In vain do you direct the materialist back to himself and ask him to pay attention to what is going on within him, as he thinks and feels, desires and deplores, acts or suffers. All this gives him no pleasure, and it does not resolve his question about what a soul is if it is not something bodily. He does not reflect upon the fact that we know nothing more about the body itself than what it does or suffers, and that apart from a thing’s doings and sufferings nothing further about it can be conceived. [118]

4 “I will avail myself of the same weapons,” I continued, “with which we collectively fight off the materialist in order to meet the idealist’s objection as well.” “What is the original lying behind all sensible qualities after you take away from it all the effects it may have upon sensate beings?” I answer, “That is something that cannot be asked about, because it must lie outside any concept, and therefore, given the terms of the question, the original cannot be an object of knowledge. You are looking for a concept that would actually be no concept, and therefore something contradictory. Here we are standing at the limits of knowledge, and every step that we want to take further is a step into the void that can lead to no goal.” “Then let us stop here,” replied my philosopher and said no more. I fear that in the end the famous quarrel of the materialists, idealists, and dualists will turn out to be a mere verbal dispute, more a matter for lexicologists than for the speculative philosopher.

- 5 I at least would not find this very surprising. [119] It would not be the first famous dispute over which men had broken up into rival camps, each hating and even persecuting the other, where, in the end, the feud turned out to be merely about words.² Language is the element in which our separate concepts quicken and grow. They can exchange one language for another, but they cannot leave language behind without risk to their life.
- 6 I would now be able to end my lectures, insofar as they are intended to be preparatory to my exposition concerning the existence of God, if I did not have one topic more to touch upon, from which I hope to reap no small benefit in what follows. What we have examined thus far only dealt with knowledge insofar as it may be true or false. But one truth-bearing cognitive act can differ from another by virtue of whether it arouses pleasure or displeasure in us. The mind recognizes the beautiful, the good, and the sublime by the joy and pleasure they elicit. The ugly, the evil, and the imperfect, however, arouse repugnance and disgust. [120]
- 7 It is customary to divide our psychological faculties into those related to cognition and those related to desire, and to count the sensations of pleasure and pain on the side of the desiderative faculty. But it seems to me that between cognition and desire lies approbation, or acclamation, which is the mind's own sense of pleasantness, which is actually far removed from desire. We contemplate the beauty of nature and art with delight and satisfaction but without the slightest fluttering of desire. Indeed, it seems that it is a particular feature of the beautiful that we contemplate it with quiet satisfaction and that we enjoy it even when we do not count it as one of our possessions or have any desire to possess it. Only then, when we consider the beautiful as having some possible connection to ourselves, or when we view it as a good worthy of possession, only then does there awaken within us the desire to possess it, a desire that is quite distinct from the enjoyment of beauty. [121] And since the thought of its possession or of its having some other connection to ourselves does not always accompany the sense of the beautiful—and even when it does, the true lover of beauty is not always moved to look upon the beautiful with acquisitive longing—we may conclude from this fact that the sensation of beauty is not always associated with desire, and it can therefore not be considered to be an expression of our desiderative faculty. If one wanted perhaps to say that the desiderative faculty is responsible for the tendency to keep a beautiful object at the center of one's attention because of the pleasure it brings, I would have no objection in principle to raise against this point. However, it seems more fitting to apply a different description [than "desiderative"] to the particular faculty of sensing pleasure or displeasure. This

faculty is, admittedly, the seed of desire, but it is not yet desire itself. A different description would distinguish the pleasure-sensing faculty from the emotional disquiet associated with what we call “desire.” [122] I will therefore in what follows call the pleasure-sensing faculty the *faculty of approbation* [*Billigungsvermögung*] in order to divide it off from both the cognition of the truth as well as the desire for the good. It is, as it were, the bridge between cognition and desire, and it joins these two faculties together in a continuous transition that, to the one experiencing it, seems imperceptible.

8 We can therefore consider cognition from two different perspectives: either insofar as it is true or false, and this I call the “material” side of cognition, or insofar as it arouses pleasure or pain and leads to approbation or disapprobation, and this I call the “formal” side of cognition, because through it one differentiates one cognitive act from another.

9 The material side of cognition admits no gradations. One concept cannot be more or less true than another. If we accept that truth is always the result of the mind’s unimpaired cognitive power, then there is no “more or less” when it comes to truth. The truth may be compared to an invariable magnitude; it is an indivisible unity, which is either completely present or not present at all. For this reason, too, one seldom hears the word “true” in its comparative form. [123] Indeed, the comparative term, “truer,” is just as unusual as the superlative, “truest.”

10 The formal aspect of cognition, however, has not only a scale of gradation, but its essence consists mainly in comparative assessment, in the more or the less. We may understand this formal aspect of cognition if we examine it in its fundamental nature. We will find that all cognition right from the start is accompanied with a sort of approbation. Each concept, merely insofar as it is cognizable, has something about itself that pleases the mind, that engages the mind in activity, and therefore, when it is grasped by the mind, elicits a sense of satisfaction and wins its approbation. There is no absolute or zero degree of evil or of ugliness, where the mind experiences no pleasure whatsoever. But as the mind can derive more pleasure from a certain concept or find itself more pleasantly occupied with it than with another, it may as a consequence consider that concept to be more dear to itself and value it more highly than other concepts. In this comparative valuation and in the preference of one object over another is found the very essence of beauty and ugliness, good and evil, perfection and imperfection. [124] That which our comparative valuation recognizes as the thing that is best affects our desiderative faculty and stirs it to action should there be no resistance interposed. This is the side where the faculty of approbation transitions into desire.

11 The false, insofar as it is a consequence of the impaired functioning of our cognitive faculty, is not only not what is actual, but, under certain conditions,

it is also inconceivable for it to be actual. With regard to the formal aspect of cognition, the situation is completely different. It is only the absolute or zero degree of ugliness and evil that are neither conceivable nor able to be found in actuality. Every other point on the scale, however, is not only equally conceivable and realizable, but, under the right circumstances, it can turn out to be the best thing possible, and then it is realized in actuality. The false is a mere negation and can never be found in actuality. [125] The ugly or the evil, however, insofar as each only receives its appellation through a comparative valuation, may be found in actuality, but only under the condition, as we shall see in what follows, that somewhere and sometime—that is, under certain determinations of time and space—it turns out to be the thing that is best then and there.

¹² There is yet one more distinction among these different ways of viewing cognition that I would like you to note, a distinction that seems to me to have important consequences. Both cognition as well as the faculty of approbation, are, as you know from psychology, expressions of one and the same power of the mind, but they are distinct in regard to the goal toward which they strive. The first moves out from things and ends up in us; the second, however, takes the opposite route, starting out from ourselves and taking aim at things that are outside of us. Let me explain myself.

¹³ Every force consists in the effort to bring certain possible effects into actuality, either in the substance itself in which this force resides or in another substance found outside it, which is then referred to as the passive or suffering substance. [126] The drive for cognition is of the first kind. It posits as its starting point that the truth is unchanging, and it seeks to bring the mind's concepts into harmony with it. The goal of its activity is the objective truth, and it undertakes to actualize within the thinking being such attributes as accord with that truth. By virtue of this drive for the truth, we seek to bring our cognition into harmony with the unchanging truth, with no reference to whether it is pleasing or displeasing. But this is not the way that the drive toward approbation is expressed. Once this is set in motion, its goal is not in us but in the things found outside us, and it undertakes to actualize in the outside such effects as are in harmony with our faculty of approbation, with our feeling of satisfaction, and with our wishes. The first drive seeks to refashion the human being in accordance with the nature of things, the second to refashion things according to the nature of the human.

¹⁴ On the basis of the distinction between these unmistakably contrasting drives, I think I can explain some phenomena that otherwise offer no little difficulty of comprehension. [127] How does it happen that a human being loves the truth but also fiction? How can such contradictory tendencies exist together in one person? At one moment the truth is dearer to him than his peace of mind, dearer

even than his life, and at another moment he lends a willing ear in order that he might be deceived by the silliest of children's tales or be transfixed by the most violent of passions. As much as he loves the truth, he sometimes just as much wishes to be deceived.

15 It seems to me that everything depends on the direction we give to our cognitive faculty. We either want to put our drive for knowledge into motion and in this way fully realize our cognitive ability, or we want to direct it on the path set by our drive for approbation. In the first case, truth is the goal of our desire, and every other consideration, however dear or important it may be to us, must yield to this goal. We want to know things in just the way that they are constituted, not in the way we wish them to be. We do not ask the geometer to spare us the details of his proof in order to have more time to enjoy our leisure hours. [128] We do not press the historian to invent facts in order to please our curiosity. When we seek the truth, only the truth can satisfy us.

16 It is another matter, however, when we intend to exercise our faculty of approbation and thereby to bring it to greater perfection. With this intention, a man loves to give free rein to his imagination. He refashions things so that they are in accord with his inclination, so that they put his sense of pleasure and displeasure into genial play. He does not want to be informed but to be moved. He willingly lets himself be deceived, and he lets things be represented as actual that are not in accord with his better understanding of the truth. His reason remains silent so long as he is busy following the pleasing allure of every byway of his fancy.

17 But whenever we find ourselves concerned with the facts of a situation and with the way things actually are, we harden ourselves against any deception, however it may gladden us, and we strive for the truth. Even if the most unfortunate news were to be conveyed to us, we would press forward until we were convinced of its truth, knowing in advance that it would only bring us great misery. [129] Consider with what dismay the miser who perhaps would have never dug up his hidden treasure hurries out as soon the slightest suspicion arises that it might have been stolen, and with what violent passion he seeks to ascertain the truth, and how happy he would have been had he just continued on in his delusion! Consider the case of the man who believes his friend in America to be alive and well and is therefore happy for him, though perhaps he has no hope of ever seeing him again. If the man were to receive the sad report that his friend has in fact been living under the shadow of death, he does not care in the least that he will no longer derive any happiness from his prior delusion about his friend's well-being, but rather he presses on until he is convinced of the truth of the report, even though he can expect that its confirmation will only bring him misery. "Unfortunate one," said the jealous Moor to the one who defamed his

Desdemona. "Unfortunate one, bring proof! Give me confirmation that Desdemona is unfaithful, or curse your birth! Ha! I was happy as long as I thought myself in possession of her fidelity. What did it matter to me if she squandered her charms on another soldier! [130] I knew nothing and suspected nothing, and was happy. You have placed the snake in my breast! Give me convincing evidence, or pray that you never saw the light of the sun."³ In the midst of the most violent emotions, Othello understands that his peace depends solely on his belief in Desdemona's faithfulness, and he knows that he would be happy if only he could continue to believe in his beloved's faithfulness, even if it were a delusion. But he feels that it is impossible to delude himself this way. His drive is for the truth, not for a belief. The goal of his desire is outside of himself and lies in the object of his love. Desdemona should not merely seem innocent, she should be innocent, and if she is not, he wants to be convinced of her perfidy even though this knowledge will bring him only misery.

18 I hope, my dear friends, that no one of us would hesitate to sacrifice his life in order to save a city from being torched in flames. [131] I hope no one of us would, from sheer wantonness, lead the entire host of a nation's innocent sons to slaughter. But when the evil is done and cannot be remedied by anything we might do, each of us would feel an irresistible desire to make what may be at best a difficult journey to go and inspect the fallen city or the corpse-strewn battlefield. How can one understand this? This, too, can be explained rather easily from the previous observation. As long as it rests on us whether something should become an accomplished reality, as long as it depends upon our approbation and our judgment, we refrain from doing any evil that is in our power to foresee and prevent. But once the evil is done and cannot be altered, then it ceases to be an object of our faculty of approbation and now arouses our drive for knowledge, and we want to see things as they are and not as we wish them to be or how we would prefer them. [132] As long as we are still able to act, the good is the object of our desire, and the thing that is best is the object of our practical will. We hope to be able to do everything that we think is good, and we really do what seems to us at the moment to be best. But when we no longer can change things according to our wishes, nothing more remains for us than to satisfy our drive for knowledge and to learn the truth, even if it means the greatest disaster for us. In a word, each person seeks the truth, gives his approbation to goodness and beauty, desires all that is the best, and does what is the best. [133]

LECTURE VIII

■ ■ ■

Introduction. Importance of the Investigation. On the Principle of Basedow's Principle of the Duty to Believe. Axioms.

- 1 As I stride closer to the goal now, dear children and fellow researchers of the truth, and as I prepare to investigate with you the subject of God and His attributes, I find myself in a dilemma, which, if I am to follow the precedent of our previous dealings, I cannot conceal from you. The dilemma is this: shall I share with you how deeply I feel about the importance of this subject and the influence it can have on the happiness and the peace of humanity? In all honesty, for me, were I to lose the sureness of my conviction about this, life itself would have no pleasure, and all of my good fortune would give me no joy. [136] With all my heart and soul I confess that I owe to my confidence in these truths all the cheer, joy, and happiness that any day may bring to me, and if you have observed that in the adversities of life I retain some calmness of mind, it is simply and solely due to this confidence. Without God, providence, and immortality, all the good things of my life are in my eyes worthless and contemptible, and my existence here on earth seems to me, if I may make use of a well-known and often misused comparison, like wandering all day in wind and storm without the consolation of coming at nightfall to the refuge and shelter of a hostel—or as Voltaire says, without this comforting prospect we are all swimming in the deep, constantly struggling against the waves, with no hope of ever reaching the shore.
- 2 If I were now to try to bring you to share in my mood, I would be in danger of destroying the impartial balance into which we must settle our minds if we want to investigate the truth. Our personal predilections shift the weight of the balance by which we judge the truth. [137] The partiality of our interest in the results of the investigation can at one time lend a certain weight to one side of the argument, and at another time it can subtract something from it. It is difficult to play the role of impartial judge when we ourselves stand in the dock, but it is just as hard on the other side to act as our own advocate when the judge begins to grow suspicious of us. Everything depends on the mood in which we find ourselves. In cheerful, jovial hours we are easy to satisfy. We give credence to what

we hope will come to pass. In a more melancholy mood, however, we are inclined to give credence to our fears. But the Areopagus court of reason,¹ before whose tribunal we now stand to plead our cause, should weigh and judge its cases not in accordance with its predilections, but by the severe balance of the truth.

3 Basedow once tried to introduce a new guiding principle into philosophy that he called the “duty to believe.”² [138] If there is a proposition, his principle declares, that is so linked to the happiness of humanity that without the truth of this proposition no happiness is possible, then we are obligated to accept the proposition as true and to give it our enthusiastic assent. He next seeks to prove that without God, providence, and immortality, humanity could never find any happiness, and he thereby believes that he has adequately substantiated these three comforting doctrines and made them safe against all doubts.

4 As much as this method seems to have to recommend itself because of its simplicity, and because of its real usefulness in many contexts, nonetheless it is of little benefit when the subject is the existence of a supreme being. In general, I recognize no duty or obligation in regard to belief when truth is to be distinguished from falsehood. One seems to confuse the two faculties that we took such pains to distinguish in the previous lecture, mistaking a reason for approbation for a reason to claim knowledge: one thus holds something to be true because one finds it to be good and desirable. [139] Now, in our prior propaedeutic lectures we have seen that our faculty of approbation proceeds outward from ourselves with the goal of transforming objects into the shapes that our wishes for them project, but on the other hand, the faculty of knowledge proceeds from things and their objective truth with the goal of making our thoughts and ideas harmonize with them. So it is obviously an erroneous move to go from one psychic faculty to the other, as when we assert the truth of something that meets with our approbation, and when we put our credence in and embrace as real that which we hope and wish for.

5 Duty and obligation have a place only in regard to our faculty of approbation. We are bound to do what is in accord with our happiness, and to refrain from that which is repugnant to it. In respect to the advancement of our knowledge, however, we have no other duty than the duty of inquiry. To inquire after the truth is a voluntary act that is directed by our moral knowledge of good and evil, and it therefore submits itself to moral necessity and obligation. [146] But the recognition and acceptance of the truth is not dependent on an act of our will. The necessity to accept the truth is not a moral but a physical necessity. We give our assent to what we know to be true not because we want to or should, but because we simply cannot help it.

- 6 The principle of Mr. Basedow, however, can be granted a place once we have assured ourselves on other grounds of the existence of a supremely powerful being, and that His providence rules over the destiny of humanity. If it is true that an all-good and all-wise being has brought us into existence, then by virtue of His unalterable attributes, He could not have fixed our destiny otherwise than for happiness. And if this happiness cannot come to pass if the human being is not destined to live on eternally, then his annihilation is in direct conflict with God's recognized attributes, and one has a valid reason to hold that the soul of the human being is immortal. [141] And this is how things stand with every truth about which we can demonstrate that without this truth no human can be happy, and as a consequence God would not possess the attributes that we are convinced He in actuality does possess. Only in this case can a reason for approbation become a reason to claim knowledge. A supremely powerful being can only have chosen as an object of His approbation and His will the thing that in accordance with His omniscience is best and most perfect. But if the discussion is about the existence of this all-good being itself, the reasons we have for claiming knowledge are separate from the reasons for our approbation. The guiding principle in each case goes its own way and leads to a different goal. If both our approbation of the good and beautiful and our recognition of the truth are frequently associated with the same expression, "to give assent," this is an ambiguity of language that the philosopher needs to be alert to.
- 7 So if we want be certain that the outcome of the very serious inquiry on which we are soon to embark is true, we must be all the more vigilant because of our stake in the outcome. [142] We must not permit our wishes to have any influence upon whether or not we let ourselves be persuaded of the truth of the outcome. In order to approach the certainty that mathematicians achieve in their inquiries, we must seek to imitate their impartial balance of mind. Unconcerned with whatever the outcome may be, the geometer sacrifices hecatombs to his god with the sole purpose of obtaining both certitude and certainty; he desires to be compelled to accept the truth of his conclusions whether he wishes to or not. Of course, his undivided love for the truth is not very difficult for him, because it comes to him without an internal struggle and without the sacrifice of his egoism. The result of his inquiry does not alter the system of his happiness, and his wish is fulfilled if only he can finally cry out, "the solution has been found!" In our case, however, our entire well-being hangs on the results of our inquiry. We tremble that the truth may stand in contradiction to our well-being. With every doubt our peace is threatened with extinction and our entire system of happiness with ruin. Who can look with a calm eye as the scale tilts when life or death is in the

balance? [143] Who trusts the steadiness of his hand enough to cut into the flesh of his beloved son in order to seek the source of a disease? Thanks be to Providence that from time to time it provides some select friends of the truth with the strength of mind to put to the test the very foundations of their happiness! What sacrifice and self-denial this calls for! They expend all their energies in order to awaken doubts that may cost them their own peace, they bring up objections against accepted tenets, even if this means perhaps embittering the remainder of their lives in this world. Without this sacrifice to the truth, all knowledge would very soon degenerate into prejudice and blind faith. The spirit of inquiry must be always newly revived and nurtured if the truth as we know it is to have any value in this world. Knowledge that does not lead to inquiry is sometimes far worse in its consequences than inquiry that ends without producing knowledge. [144] One can even go so far as to say that knowledge ceases to be knowledge of the truth as soon as it becomes an established law accepted by one and all and no one finds it any longer necessary to test the foundations on which it rests. It is true that such doubts, once they have been awakened, sometimes lead to the denial of all foundational principles. Such doubts not infrequently have a frightful influence on the morality and the actions of human beings. But the prejudices into which truths sometimes devolve when inertia overtakes the spirit of inquiry, or the blind faith with which we rely upon certain established laws without ever putting them to the test, all this leads to superstition and fanaticism, things that are no less dangerous to the happiness of humanity. Atheism and superstition, skepticism and fanaticism: one as well as the other are diseases of the soul that threaten it with moral death. Not infrequently Providence prescribes one disease to counter the other in order to restore the body to health. So we have to listen with patience to every doubt, accept every objection with equanimity, even if it threatens to destroy our entire system. [145] According to the natural cycle of things, truth leads to complacent calm, calm to inertia, and inertia to superstition. When this point is reached, it is by a blessing of Providence that the spirit of doubt and of the most exacting inquiry is newly revived so that, in challenging all our fundamental principles, we can be led back once again to the truth.

8

We only employ the popular method of arguing for the truth of our claims on the basis of their utilitarian value when we are presenting the tenets of natural religion. Here our aim is not so much to inquire after the truth but rather to disseminate truths that have already been discovered and to send them out to do their work in the world. These principles, of which we are constantly in need at practically every waking moment, should be always ready at hand and should automatically and directly be brought to bear upon all our inclinations, instincts, and passions. Our certitude in the truth of these principles must, as

it were, be rooted in the very depths of our soul, and they should come to be transformed into a kind of immediate knowledge that admittedly cannot match the clarity and certainty of a mathematical truth, but nonetheless exceeds it in strength and influence. [146] I will have occasion in what follows to discuss with you at greater length both the limits and the usefulness of this kind of popular knowledge. But now we will try as far as we can to employ the methods of the exact sciences as we reflect upon the existence of God. In our reflections we will seek to approximate the mathematician's certainty and the scientist's sureness of conviction. Here are some axioms that seem to follow naturally from what we have discussed so far. I recommend that you give them your closest scrutiny so that we may employ them in what follows without further scruple and refer to them as often as it may be useful.

Axioms.

I.

- ⁹ *What is true must be known as such through an unimpaired cognitive power.*
¹⁰ This is clear from the prior lectures and holds for concepts as well as for propositions and conclusions, whether they be rational or experiential truths. [147]
¹¹ All truth will thus be known as such by a supreme understanding, if there be one, with unsurpassed certainty, but by the understanding of every other being in proportion to its capacity, and insofar as it is not impaired by any error or deception in its cognition.

II.

- ¹² *That object whose existence cannot be known by any unimpaired cognitive power is not actually existent.*
¹³ Let *A* be a concept in the mind to which, insofar as it is an idea in a thinking being, there pertains an ideal existence—that is, it is an accident of a thinking substance, an alteration of a cognitive faculty. If no intelligent being can ever come to know, through its unimpaired power, that this *A* also has an actual objective existence, then the assertion of its objective actuality is always an untruth, either an error or an illusion. [148]

III.

- ¹⁴ *That object whose not-being cannot be conceived by any intelligent being is actually existent.*
¹⁵ Its non-being would be an untruth—that is, an error or an illusion.

Morning Hours

- 16 When of some conceivable thought *A* it can be shown that it is not conceivable without the thought of its real and objective existence, it is thereby proved that it must be objectively actual.

IV.

- 17 *If a proposition, A is B, is said to be true, a bond between the subject A and the predicate B must be able to be known through the exercise of the unimpaired power of cognition.*

V.

- 18 *This bond rests on either the material aspect in the cognition of the subject A, or on its formal aspect.* [149]

- 19 The reason why the predicate *B* is attributed to the subject *A* lies either in the nature of the subject insofar as it is or is not conceivable, or in its nature insofar as it is good or evil, desirable or not desirable.

VI.

- 20 *So if actual existence is asserted of a concept A, A is actually existing either because it is not otherwise conceivable than with the attribute of existence, or because it is not otherwise able to become an object of approbation and judged as what is best.*

- 21 The striving of our power in regard to truth—that is, the material aspect of cognition—aims at producing within ourselves attributes that are in harmony with the objective determinations of things; but the striving of our power in regard to the good—that is, the formal aspect of our cognition—aims at bringing to actuality the attribute that is judged to be best among a number of equally possible attributes. [150] This distinction has been adequately laid out in the prior lecture. Thus, if the sentence *A is B* is to be known as true and asserted by a thinking being, then the ground for this cognition and assertion lies either in the conceivability of the concept *A* so that *A* is an eternal and necessary truth—or, in other words, *A* exists simply because the concept *A* is a true concept—or the ground lies in the formal aspect of cognition, in the specific determination that makes *A* into a possible object of approbation and therefore able to be desired by a free causal agent and brought into actuality.

VII.

- 22 *It follows directly that if the proposition A is not B is just as conceivable as the proposition A is B, then the proposition A is B can become true if and only if that*

state of affairs is what is best and what was able to be the object of approbation by a cause that chooses it and brings it into actuality. Or, put differently, between two equally conceivable or possible things, only that one can become actual which is the best. [151]

- 23 If the concept *A* is equally conceivable both with and without objective existence, the ground of its existence does not lie in the material aspect of cognition but rather in its formal specification as good and desirable. This specific determination of a thing's goodness and perfection either applies to it always and unchangingly or only under certain circumstances and conditions. In the first case, the proposition *A is B* is a general and unchanging truth, a law of nature; but in the second case, it refers to a state of affairs that can only come to pass in actuality under certain conditions and at a certain place and at a certain time such that this state of affairs would be for the best and would itself be best at that time and place. Such are the various historical events, the news events, that happen only here and there, at a certain place and at a certain time. If, for example, bodies were equally conceivable as having or not having the general property of weight, then the proposition *All bodies have weight* would be true if and only if it were known as what is best and was thus an object of approbation regardless of time or place: [152] this makes the proposition into a general law of nature. But take the example of the discovery of gunpowder that took place at a certain point in time. The ground of this discovery at that time must be contained within the general constellation of the time and of the things that existed then. This ground explains why under the specific determinations of that time and place it was best that gunpowder was discovered then.³ Both are contingent truths, but the first is a contingent, eternal truth, and the second, however, is a contingent, time-bound truth that came to pass at a certain time and at a certain place. When a thing may be conceived of as having one of its attributes altered but, if it were to be thus altered, it could under no circumstances be the object of approbation, then that thing with this alteration can under no circumstances come to pass and attain actuality. There is no ground for the coming into being of the object with this altered attribute, neither in the material nor in the formal aspect of our cognition, and so it will be rather the contrary attribute, which by comparison is the better one, that will be true of this object. [153]

LECTURE IX

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Certainty of the Pure and Applied Doctrine of Magnitudes. Comparison with the Certainty of the Proof of the Existence of God. Various Methods for Such a Proof.

- 1 Pure mathematics demonstrates its claims without the aid of experience or of sensory cognition, merely by the laws of thought, or, as philosophers commonly say, *a priori*. The cogency of the proofs of mathematics is based on the explication of concepts. One dissects the concept *A* and finds the necessary connection of its properties with the concept of the predicate *B*. This yields the asseverative proposition *A is B*; their incompatibility with the concept yields the negative proposition *A is not B*. But both propositions assert nothing more than a connection between concepts, ideal entities, that is explicated according to the laws of what is conceivable.
- 2 The propositions of mathematics permit themselves to be only conditionally attached to things that are found outside of us. The actual things outside of us depend on the laws of what is logically conceivable quite as much as do the ideal entities, the concepts [that they instantiate]. [154] Things that are inconceivable apart from each other cannot be divided from one another by actual existence, and things that cannot be conceived together at the same time cannot actually exist at one and the same time. All propositions of mathematics, therefore, permit themselves with complete confidence to be applied to actually existing things, on the assumption that these things actually exist. If the subject actually exists, the predicate attributed to it by the asseverative proposition must actually belong to the subject, just as much as the predicate of the negative proposition cannot actually belong to the subject.
- 3 If any practical or applied use of these conditional mathematical propositions is to be hoped for, the geometer must be persuaded by sensible cognition of the actual existence of the subject of his practical interest so that he can assert with certainty of this subject any given predicate. His pure rational cognition can

take him no further than his conditional propositions. If a figure is a triangle, it has all the predicates of the triangle; [155] if there is an actual ball in front of you, it casts the same shadow on all sides. But that the figure in front of you is an actual triangle, or that the body in front of you is a ball, this must be accepted as true on the testimony of the senses. The certainty with which the geometer proceeds in the exercise of his science is no longer a purely rational certainty; rather, it is intermixed with the relative reliability of sensory knowledge, the certainty of which is of a different quality than is the certainty of pure reason, although it may concede to it nothing in the way of reliability. Concerning the nature and quality of the certainty of these various kinds of cognition, we have dealt in detail in our previous hours of conversation.

- 4 In our discourse concerning God, there is a speculative part that, as it seems to me, can be treated with the utmost rigor of the exact sciences. Here, too, we can explicate concepts with the certainty of pure mathematics, and we can dissect them into their simplest properties and relations. [156] But also we can only expect their conditional application to actual existence. If a necessary being exists, such and such properties must necessarily belong to it; if a contingent thing actually exists, according to our previously given explanation, it is because it has the ground of its existence not in itself, and so on.
- 5 We see that all of this, as with the propositions of pure mathematics, extends no further than the joining and separating of concepts, the division and analysis of properties, so that afterward we may order them in a hierarchical structure below or beside one another. Even the atheist can admit all of our speculations without ever being won over to the existence of a deity. In order to put the propositions of your speculative doctrine to use, you must first be won over to some actuality and therefore seek a way to move from the realm of ideal being over to the realm of actuality. Where is the bond that connects a concept to existence, a possibility to actuality? [157] Shall we, like the geometer, trust the testimony of our senses, or is there another way to move into the territory of actual things?
- 6 There are three different methods to answer these questions. One can build, first of all, on the evidence of the external senses, rely on their testimony about the actuality of an external, material world, and seek to prove that such a sensible world is not conceivable except as having a necessary, transcendent being; and now all the propositions that make up the speculative portion of our doctrine are accounted as justifiably held to be true as a consequence of this necessary being. There is a sensible world that is actually outside of us, so therefore there is an actually existing God outside of us as well as the world itself.
- 7 According to the second method, one trusts only the evidence of the inner sense, relies on its testimony that our own existence is an incontrovertible truth,

in order to conclude as a consequence the actual existence of God: I exist, therefore a God exists. [158]

8 The third method rejects the evidence of both the inner and the outer senses and takes a bold step from the realm of ideal being into the realm of actuality. This method dares to prove that a necessary being must exist because a necessary being can be conceived. It derives real existence from a mere concept and wants us to believe that the bond has been found that binds possibility and actuality. A God is conceivable, therefore a God also actually exists. Indeed this is a bold step, for in the entire domain of our scientific knowledge there is no example of this method of demonstration: one cannot derive actuality from a concept. Only if we are speaking about a necessary being are we supposed to be able to credibly pull this off. Contingent, finite things can be conceived without attributing to them actual existence. Although lacking real and objective actuality, they nonetheless can have an ideal existence. But not so the necessary and infinite being. [159] If it can be conceived, it must also have actual, objective existence. The first two methods in accordance with which some existence is presupposed is called the a posteriori type of proof; the latter, however, which deduces from the idea of a necessary being its existence, is named the a priori type of proof, the admissibility of which has been cast into doubt by various philosophers.¹

9 A posteriori types of proof have a certain kinship with the procedure of the practical geometer. Just as he assumes on the evidence of his outer senses the actuality of the subject, and from this argues for the actuality of the predicate without which the subject is not conceivable, just so in both a posteriori methods of proof one accepts on the evidence of the outer or inner senses the existence of a changeable world and then argues for the actual existence of an unchanging, necessary being without which that which is changeable is not conceivable. [160] If this be granted as being beyond doubt, one should think that the proof offered by these philosophers would have no less credibility and obviousness than the procedure of the practical geometer. That outside of us there exists an actual, sensible world; that in this world not everything stays just the same but is subject to change; that we are independent thinking beings that are changing constantly and not always the same—who would seriously doubt these things or cast them more into doubt than the existence of a triangle or a sphere that the practical geometer takes as given? If it can be so established that without the existence of an unchanging being no changeable being is conceivable, then the existence of an unchanging being would be incontrovertibly demonstrated, and the entire speculative part of our doctrine could be reliably applied to this unchanging being.

LECTURE IX

Yet you know that these assumptions, however incontrovertible they may seem, are not admitted by all philosophers. [161] Metaphysicians are not afraid to deny things that it would never occur to common sense to doubt. The idealist denies the actual existence of a material world. The solipsist, if anyone actually could be one, denies the existence of all substances other than himself, and the Spinozist says that he himself is not an independently existing being but rather a mere thought in God. And, finally, the skeptic finds everything a matter of uncertainty and subject to doubt. I cannot believe that anyone has ever maintained in earnest the truth of these far-fetched suppositions. It seems that one need only put reason to the test and ascertain whether it is proceeding apace with common sense and whether it can incontrovertibly substantiate all of its claims according to the laws of what is logically conceivable, something that every person holds to be more or less a matter of immediate knowledge, something simply given. One needs only to show how his position casts doubt upon the scientific validity of knowledge in order to shame the dogmatist, who seems so confident that his doctrine possesses the highest degree of intuitiveness attainable by pure rational cognition. [162] Whenever reason falls far behind our common sense, or even parts company with it entirely, and is thus in danger of falling into error, the philosopher cannot help but distrust reason. He is unwilling to follow it so far as to contradict common sense. He will rather impose a ban of silence upon reason if he finds that otherwise he would never succeed in returning to life's trodden path and catch up again with common sense. Let us make an effort, then, to come to reason's aid as far as we are able to and reestablish upon reliable grounds the proof for the existence of God that still seems to elude us. [163]

LECTURE X

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Allegorical Dream. Reason and Common Sense. Proofs of the Existence of God, According to the System of the Idealists, Based on Our Own Existence. Also Possibly Based on the Ideal Existence of an Objective Sense-World.

- 1 The reflections concerning reason and common sense with which I ended yesterday's lecture got entangled in my head with a story about a trip to the Swiss Alps that our guests entertained us with last evening. Reflections and story formed themselves in my imagination into a dream that has an almost allegorical meaning. We were traveling together in the Alps, and we had two guides, one male, the other female. He, a sturdy Swiss youth, strong of limb but not possessed of the most refined intellect; and she, tall and thin, earnest, with an inward-looking gaze and a dreamy, rapt countenance. Her garb was quite fantastic in appearance, and at the back of her head I could make out what seemed to be wings. [164] We followed the pair for some time and then we came to a crossroads. Here they appeared to part company from each other; he hurried with rapid steps to the right, and she, winged creature that she was, flew to the left. We stood in dismay on the path, uncertain which way we should follow, until one of us looked around and beheld a somewhat elderly matron approaching us with measured steps. When she came close enough for us to hear her voice, she said, "Take heart, travelers! You will not long remain without a guide. Those who have been assigned to you as guides are named common sense (*sensus communis*) and contemplation (*contemplatio*), and it happens that on occasion they part company for a short time, often from trivial causes. If the travelers are steadfast enough to wait at the crossroads and follow after neither of them, then both will come back so that I may settle their quarrel. In most cases it is the man who has right on his side, and, contrary to what you might

expect, the woman must usually submit herself to his better instruction. [165] And even if right at times is on her side, his stubbornness makes him unwilling to yield. After I have laid out before him the most compelling of reasons, he will laugh at me with his wide peasant's grin, make some ungracious remark, and return stubbornly to his way. Meanwhile, those travelers who trust me know which path they must follow." "By what name are you yourself known," one of us asked, "you who settle their quarrels?" "On earth," she said, "they call me Reason; but in heaven—" Here she was suddenly interrupted by a tremendous uproar. An enraptured crowd from the area gathered around Lady Contemplation and were fixed in their intention to drive out both common sense and reason. They forced themselves upon us with shouting and fury, then we shrank back in terror—and I awoke.

- 2 In simple truth, I have always used the following rule as my gauge and yard-stick: [166] Whenever speculation seems to have carried me too far from the high road of common sense, I stand still and seek to orient myself. I look back toward the point from which I set out and attempt to compare my two guides. Experience has taught me that in most cases right is on the side of common sense, so that reason must speak unequivocally on behalf of Lady Speculation if I am to follow her lead and turn my back on common sense. Indeed, reason must make it crystal clear to me how common sense was able to stray from the truth and fall into error in order to convince me that its insistent pressure on behalf of speculation is not merely a case of brute stubbornness.¹
- 3 If we apply this rule to the doubts that are raised by idealists, solipsists, and skeptics against the actuality of a material world, we find that their reasons are certainly not sufficient to compel our complete assent. Our overwhelming presumption is that upon continued reflection we will find truth to be on the side of common sense. [167] But for as long as the question remains open, our doubts do lessen our confidence in the claims of common sense. And since the first type of proof for the existence of God rests on the foundation of the actual existence of a material world, this proof at least seems to thereby suffer some weakening of its persuasive force by virtue of the doubts brought against its foundation, and for this reason it falls short of even that degree of confidence that the practical geometer places in his procedure. This point may be elucidated through the following observation.
- 4 Let it be supposed that the subject that the geometer has before him and to which he wants to apply his theorems has no objective actuality, and further let it be supposed that on the understanding of the idealists the subject is a merely subjective phenomenon; still, none of this hinders the practical geometer from employing his procedure with confidence in its reliability. He is assured that the

sensory properties and phenomena have among themselves the same relationships and connections as do the concepts explicated in his pure theory. [168] In his result he will have constructed and given determinateness to mere phenomena. He needs therefore only to assume as given these sensible phenomena in order to be assured of the results that his procedure links to them. Whether these phenomena also have outside them an actual material object, or whether this external object actually is like what the sensory phenomena represent it to be, these questions concern the practical geometer as little as they do the merely theoretical one. But in natural theology it is a different matter. Here, the objective existence of a being is supposed to be conclusively demonstrated. If this demonstration is not otherwise possible than on the presupposition of an objective material world, then before anything else we must dispel all doubt and scruples that those philosophers have raised against the acceptance of this presupposition. The agreement of the inner and outer senses, the agreement of all the senses, even the agreement of all people and of all living beings in the known world, although all this may lead common sense to accept the actuality of the external world and be quite justified in doing so; [169] all this does not completely dispel doubt with the persuasive force of a strict geometric demonstration. Despite all this agreement, doubt remains possible. The presumption, it is true, could not be stronger in favor of the actuality of the world. Apparently, however, it is not an utter impossibility that all this agreement about an actual material world rests upon an impairment of our sensory powers common to all human senses and perhaps all animals' senses, and therefore all this agreement is merely delusion. But in this case the inference as to the actuality of the external world is a mere consequence of a sensory delusion, and is therefore a falsehood.

5 You see, then, why the most profound philosophers have always preferred the second type of proof. In order to avoid getting involved with the idealists in the thorny question of whether the sensory properties within us have a corresponding material object outside of us—a question that can only draw us into a long quarrel—the second method only presupposes our own existence. [170] Or maybe I should say *my* own existence if we are talking to a solipsist, who admits no plural form in respect of actuality. Our immediate sensations, as we saw in the propaedeutic section, are possessed of the highest degree of certitude. The subjective, considered as such, admits to no doubt. The argument *I think, therefore I am* must even be granted by the solipsist, as more than one has been brought to see. I can therefore build upon the foundation of my own existence without fear of the slightest contradiction. And if one can argue from the existence of a changeable being for the objective existence of a necessary and unchangeable being, then my proof for the existence of God has the requisite *prima facie* cogency.

- 6 For the fact that I myself am a changeable being is something the most stubborn of skeptics would find it hard to dispute. And if in reflecting upon myself I am conscious that changes are transpiring within me, this, too, cannot be subject to doubt. [171] As they relate to myself, the subjective and the objective coincide, appearance and truth do not mutually exclude each other. What I experience immediately cannot be mere delusion but must actually transpire within me, and also, as far as it relates to myself, it cannot be taken from me as an object. So my existence as well as my changeability are beyond all doubt.
- 7 Here, too, the second method can claim an advantage over the first. The first method presupposes the actuality of a material world, and on the basis of daily experience it admits the world's changeability. The Spinozist, though he admits the existence of the material world, nonetheless finds that in its changeability there is a certain contingency that he believes he is not entitled to grant. The material world for him, considered as substance, is eternal and unchanging. Only the form, or its impression within us, is subject to change and therefore contingent. Now, it is indeed true that this doubt may also easily be advanced against the first method. [172] We ourselves remain always but parts or features of the whole; we belong to the universe, whose existence is supposed to be necessary, as its members. A substance, however, that in some one of its parts or features is changeable and therefore contingent must also be so as a whole.
- 8 But it remains the case that the argument [that goes from the existence of a contingent being to that of a necessary being] more obviously works in the case of the second method, where only my own existence serves as the premise. That I myself do not always stay the same is the report of my immediate inner feeling. The report of my inner feeling, subjectively considered, possesses the highest certitude, and if one speaks only about myself as an object, the report also possesses objective truth. Anyone who thinks himself to be changeable *is* changeable.
- 9 If I am changeable, then different and contrary predicates can conceivably be attributed to me as a subject. If I am inwardly conscious of myself as having just been standing and as now sitting, then both contrary propositions must be conceivable: I am sitting and I am not sitting; I am standing and I am not standing. [173] Despite the transition of time, the material aspect in the cognition does not change. What is conceivable at one time must remain conceivable also at any other time. But the transition of time may very well alter the formal aspect of cognition. What previously was not good, or at least not the thing that was best, can now, after an extended series of events, have become what is best. Conversely, that which was once the object of my approbation as what is best can now, in altered circumstances, have ceased to be the best, and for this reason it is now the object of my disapprobation.

10 In this way it becomes clear how in the transition of time contrary propositions can come to be realized and attain the status of truth. If yesterday the proposition *A is B* had been what was best in the sequence of things and had attained the status of truth, then today, after a certain prolongation of the sequence and under changed circumstances, the contrary proposition, *A is not B*, can be more in accord with the regularity and perfection of the world and therefore be what is best. [174] You have here a simple method for arguing from my own existence to the existence of an unchangeable being that has the best as its intention and freely brings it into existence. If time has changed nothing in the material aspect of the representations and can only alter their formal aspect, then the reason for the change that I perceive within me is not in their conceivability, but in their relative goodness and perfection. Insofar as they are objects of cognition, their relation to time is unchangeable. It is only as the object of approbation that their relationship to time can be different at different moments. But if goodness and perfection are to be the reason why something is actual, one must presuppose a being who finds pleasure in goodness and perfection and for whom they can serve as incentives to action. For now, let this much suffice concerning this method of proving the existence of God; I will deal more fully with it below.

11 At the present moment I want to share with you another consideration that was brought up by my idealist friend, the man with whom I usually talk about these sorts of things. [175] "You do us no justice," he said, "when you say that we idealists have to renounce the use of the first kind of proof. I would think we do not have to forgo it so completely, especially when the point of contention between us is laid out in the way it was recently. Even for the idealist the actual world is an actual world. We do not overturn the well-founded distinction between dreams and waking, fantasy or fiction and truth. The most nearsighted among us must perceive that events have a different sequential and concurrent arrangement in dreams, fantasies, and fictions than those we identify as true and actual in our waking state. The former events follow completely, or at least for the most part follow, the direction of wit, imagination, fiction, and so on—in a word, psychological laws that are subjective and peculiar to each of us. [176] What holds sway in one's waking state, as you yourself have correctly remarked, is the causal connection of things, the connection between productive cause and effect, in accord with the so-called laws of nature. This imagination of an actual world is common to all creatures that have the capacity for imagination and is repeated in each of them in a modified version proportionate to the power of the creature's given constitution and its current condition. In each such world-

image [*Weltvorstellung*] that attends every waking creature, one finds both truth and perspectivity. The truth is repeated in all of them and remains just the same. The perspectival aspect of the whole picture, on the other hand, is variable, determined by the creature's particular placement. The idealist merely denies the actual existence of an object that would serve as the original behind these true images. This original offers nothing additional for him to think. He does not know how to construct any images of it besides those that are already found within his mind. [177] Yet out of the idealist's world image there must follow and be able to be derived everything that follows and can be derived from the actual existence of the object as maintained by the materialists and dualists. The object offers these philosophers no more predicates than the world image offers the idealist. It therefore does not support any conclusions for these philosophers that the idealist could not with equal justification accept and assert as true. Picture if you will a room whose walls are all covered with mirrors, and an image of an object is repeated in every mirror according to its position. Let these mirrors enter into a dispute about whether the object that they present actually is found in the middle of the room, or whether the artist who produced these mirrors has also placed within every one of them the image appropriate to the position each mirror will occupy. How will they resolve this dispute among themselves? Considered as mirrors, they neither have nor can ever obtain anything more than images of the object. [178] On the basis of their images will they not be able to draw the very same conclusions, if they were able to think rationally, as would follow from the actual existence of the object? Must it not in fact be a matter of perfect indifference to them whether the object, of which they can neither know nor discover anything further, whether it may be present in the room or not?" "Well," I said, "let me now continue with the analogy. If these mirrors accept that both truth and perspective are found in their images, and that the truth that is repeated in each and all of them is the same truth for each and all, although the perspectival aspect is peculiar to each one of them alone, would not any further dispute among them be merely a verbal spat? If they admit that there is agreement among the images, what justifies their denial of an original that is the ground for that agreement? Or, indeed, were they to accept the existence of the original, what more can they ask for apart from this agreement in regard to the truth?"

If only my friend had accepted the axioms that I provided for you to review a few days ago, I would have pressed him even further. [179] I would have said: "If it is admitted that truth is found in the picture [of the world-image] that, subtracting the perspectival aspect, is repeated in every subject, then the truth is

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a consequence of their power of image formation, and this truth must be imaged forth in the highest being, if there *is* such a being, in the purest light and without the admixture of the perspectival. But if this being exists, then the proposition that *there exists such an original objectively and actually* is the purest and most undeniable truth.” [180]

LECTURE XI

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Epicureanism. Luck. Coincidence.
Number of Causes and Effects, without
End, with No Beginning. Progress to
Infinity, Forward and Backward.
Timelessness, without Beginning,
without End, and without
Forward Progress.

- 1 A changeable, contingent thing is something that one can conceive differently. For any change one can conceive it undergoing, one can conceive it not undergoing that same change. Both propositions contain the same truth value. In our thoughts we can assert contrary predicates of the same subject. *A is B*, and *A is not B*: both propositions can be true or come to be true, although not at a time and asserted of the same subject. But if each of these propositions contains exactly the same ideal truth value, how can they ever achieve actuality? What splits the difference now in favor of one proposition and now another, making it into an actual truth? How can that which has a number of different possible ways of being become actual in one certain way?
- 2 It happens by luck, says the school of Epicurus, through mere coincidence. Although this school does not resolve every question with this answer, it very soon comes to the point where it can give us no other satisfaction. We must examine, therefore, whether these words contain an answer to the questions we have raised. [181]
- 3 As you know, my earliest instruction was conducted in Hebrew, and I was accustomed to translating into Hebrew every unfamiliar word that I read or heard in any other language. I found no genuine ancient word in Hebrew for “luck” or “coincidence.” What the writers of later times usually employed to convey this meaning rather originally connoted destiny, providence, or fortune—in other words, something that a higher power without our assistance provides to us or places in our way. This is almost the opposite of coincidence and luck. Only in

the fact that neither coincidence nor providence involve human intentionality and causality are these two concepts similar. [182] This similarity is what seems to have led the translators from Arabic, whose task it was to clothe Greek concepts in Hebrew words, to choose a word in Hebrew that had a certain resemblance to the meaning they wished to convey. In principle, the terms “coincidence” and “luck” exclude not only human influence but also intentionality and causality altogether. And this is how in the German language we seem able to distinguish all of these words despite their similar meanings. “Luck” [*Ungefähr*] is more about the lack of premeditation, just as “coincidence” [*Zufall*] seems to be more about the absence of an efficient cause. A goal that is achieved unintentionally is merely a piece of luck, and one says about events that follow one another or happen concurrently without one being the immediate efficient cause of the other that their connection is due merely to coincidence. If a small child exchanges a piece in a game of chess and thereby manages to make a successful move, this was merely luck. [183] And the fact that this child later comes to be a good chess player could be a coincidence, lacking any connection with the earlier event. When I go out without the intention of visiting my friend, and then meet him on the street, this is only luck. And if this happens exactly at a time when he needs my solace or my assistance, we call this a happy coincidence.

4 Through our employment of these words we are essentially only saying that the events do not need to be traced back to a cause. By “luck” we merely want only to reject the influence of a final cause on the agents involved in the event, and by “coincidence” we reject the direct efficient causality of one event on the other, although we do not thereby deny that each of these events depends upon its own distinct causal chain. Indeed, the concurrence of the events is only attributed to coincidence when we list what happened on a certain date in history or “the news of the day” [*Zeitungen*], as we have come to call it. [184] Things that happen only once, or perhaps never, in history, or at least are never repeated in the same circumstances, can be joined together in a list of events that took place on a certain date without one having been directly produced by another, or even without being implicated with the other in any way. However, were they to occur more often, and always in the same connection and conjunction, common sense would soon conjecture the presence of a causal influence and expect similar effects to follow from similar causes. In my second lecture I separated out the various rational grounds that justify our making this conjecture, and I showed that even the animal mind is prone to form an expectation about the future and that this expectation has one and the same basis as human conjecture. Also, the ancients, as far as I know, rarely let themselves be carried away in their disagreement with common sense to the point that they denied

all causality, or brought it into doubt. Quite to the contrary, Epicurus himself accepted the necessity of the material cause, and for this reason he held that atoms were eternal. He also admitted efficient or productive causes and therefore ascribed to the atoms a movement by which all things in nature are produced. He went as far as to deny the existence of purposes in the cosmos or any influence of final causes within it. [185] Everything that is beautiful, magnificent, and sublime in nature he ascribed to chance. Chance shook the great bowl of atoms from side to side and threw it down blindly, and thus arose the things that we admire so much. And if they seem to be in harmony with final causes, this is only a matter of luck. The duck, say the Epicureans, did not get his webbed feet in order to be able to swim, but it swims because chance has given it webbed feet. And so also the stomach is not designed so that it digests food, but it digests because it happens by luck to have turned out to be a stomach. And this is the way things are overall, according to this fine theory, however much the doctrine of the natural usefulness of the parts of the animal body may conform to and gratify the prejudices of the popular mind. La Mettrie says: nature manages its affairs never so well as when it least thinks about them. [186] Nature, he says, is like that painter who, out of frustration at failing to render the foam around the teeth of a cavalry horse in battle, threw his brush against the canvas and by a stroke of luck achieved the very effect he was looking for.¹ However absurd this palaver may seem, my friends, you must know that La Mettrie put so much stock in this brilliant insight of his that he repeated it in every one of his writings, which, in their day, were all the rage. Unfortunately, I cannot permit myself now to enter into the doctrine of the final cause. I will discuss it in the sequel to these lectures, but at present I will return again to efficient causes.

- 5 We can concede that every event in the universe has its causes that bring it to actuality. But one may ask: how does it happen that one rather than another of two contrary properties of a changeable being comes to be actual? Epicurus will answer: because of the closest preceding efficient causes. [187] These causes, themselves changeable things, also possess properties that admit of contrary determinations, and so these causes in turn must trace the reason for their properties back to other efficient causes, and so on without limit. We at least can say that we do not see a barrier where we can come to a standstill, so long as we are dealing with changeable things that admit of various ways of being conceived. And this is true going forward also: every event has its effect, and just as nothing can be totally without consequences, so no effect will be without some further effect. Now the question arises: Can this infinite series of causes and effects exist by itself independently of a necessary and unchangeable being? Does this chain all on its own sustain itself with no beginning and no end throughout infinity,

or must it be fastened at some point to the throne of the Almighty in order to be able to come into actuality and be sustained through its connection with this necessary being? Various philosophers believed that they were able to demonstrate that a series without beginning is indeed logically conceivable but that it cannot ever come into actuality. They made use of the following reasons. [188]

6 Concerning a series without end, they said, it is obvious that it never could become actual, because its endlessness consists precisely in that it will never be complete—in other words, that it must always be extended further. Its endlessness can therefore never become actual, or have become actual. It remains always in a state of potentiality of adding on something further, and therefore that which is in a state of actuality is never endless. In the same fashion, they conclude, that which lacks a beginning is a mere thought that is never able to come into actuality. Because we imagine the backward series of causes as a length that in our thoughts we can extend as far as we like, we assert that it is without a beginning. In principle, however, this thought can never be transformed into something real. That which has no beginning, just as little as that which has no end, can never come into actuality. Both that which has no beginning and that which has no end require an eternity for their actual existence, and eternity cannot ever have come to pass. [189] We must therefore admit a beginning of things that itself needs no further beginning—in other words, a necessary being whose existence is not dependent upon efficient causes and whose perdurance is not a temporal unfolding without beginning, but rather is a timelessness, an unchanging eternity, that in its essence can have neither beginning nor forward progress nor end. Only the contingent events of the world admit of having a past and a future temporal dimension. The necessary being, just like all the necessary truths of geometry, has neither a past nor a future. One cannot say that geometric truths were or will be, but only that they are.

7 So what we have said about that which has no beginning cannot be applied to that which is timeless. That which we imagine to have no beginning must in fact start somewhere, but that which is timeless admits of absolutely no forward movement at all. A changeable substance is not simultaneously everything that one can ever assert of it; its existence resembles a line that experiences constant growth both spatially and temporally. The changeless, necessary substance is simultaneously everything that is able to be asserted of it, and its existence admits of neither growth nor diminution. [190] It is and remains unchangeably always the same thing. However compelling these arguments may seem, there are nonetheless many philosophers who cannot make their peace with them, and they advance various reasons for their discontent.

- 8 First, the analogy between the beginning and the end seems to them to not make complete sense. Although they admit that eternity will not be able to be completed and have come to pass at any specific point in the future, the necessity of a starting point does not yet seem to them to follow as a consequence of this admission. They imagine that a past with a starting point would define a time period that, because of its boredom, they find unacceptable.²
- 9 One seems, therefore, to assume that which first ought to be investigated. The question was whether a series without a beginning could be actual, and in the answer one takes it as given that no [time period] without a beginning could ever have gone by.³
- 10 Secondly, this method of proof involves us in difficult questions about the infinite in time and space—[191] that is, how far the idea of the infinite, both in respect to its divisibility as well as its extensibility in time and space, has application to reality. These questions are very difficult to resolve because of their subtlety, and it does not conduce to the establishment of a convincing proof of the existence of God to build upon such shaky foundations.
- 11 Finally, the difference between the infinity of power and the infinity of duration does not make complete sense to these philosophers. If, as they assert, infinite power—or in other words, the necessary being—can at all times be actually operative, they see no reason why that which is changeable might not be infinite in respect of its duration and extension. And if everything contingent allows itself theoretically to be analyzed into an infinite series of causes and effects both forward and backward, they can see no reason why every contingent thing could not actually be analyzed into such a series. If we grant that there is a supreme intelligence, we must therefore grant that every idea that can be analyzed this way is actually so analyzed by this intelligence. [192] Because of the nature of contingent things, each idea of something contingent leads out into a beginningless and an endless series of causes and effects into which it can be analyzed and unfolded. Therefore, these philosophers say, we do not completely understand why that which God holds in His mind when He thinks of something contingent could not also be actual apart from God. At least, they say, this way of proving God's existence lacks the compelling obviousness that we would like to be able to give such a proof. They have therefore endeavored to carry out this proof without getting involved in the question of whether or not a series without a beginning could be actual. Rather they have undertaken to prove more generally that a series without a beginning could become actual by no other means than through its dependence upon a necessary being. Of this I will have more to say in the next lecture.

LECTURE XII

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Sufficient Reason Grounding the Contingent
in the Necessary. The Former Is Somewhere
and Sometime, the Latter Is Everywhere
and Always. The Former Is Only in Relation
to Space and Time, the Latter Is Absolutely
the Best and Most Perfect. Everything That
Exists Is the Best. All Thoughts Belonging
to God, insofar as They Have the Best
as Their Goal, Achieve Actuality.

- 1 Without assuming the impossibility of a beginningless series, as I said in the final remarks of my lecture yesterday, some philosophers have argued for the existence of that which is necessary and unchanging from the existence of that which is contingent. This argument proceeds rather successfully. By virtue of the sixth principle that we laid out in our propaedeutic lectures, one can truly assert of a subject *A* that it possesses actual existence only insofar as it has some connection with this predicate, either because it cannot be conceived except as having actual existence, or because under certain circumstances it has become the thing that is best, and therefore, in just the way it is and in no other way, it had to have become the object of an act of approbation. [194] The Leibnizians call this the principle of sufficient reason, and therefore they say that everything that is actual must have a sufficient reason—in other words, why a thing has come into actuality at all must admit of being made comprehensible and rationally explicable and, moreover, why [the thing exists] in just the way it does rather than in any other way. Now, in the case of a contingent being we do not find this reason in the being itself. A contingent being's existence cannot be made comprehensible simply by virtue of the fact that its existence is conceivable. And its existence can just as little be made comprehensible by virtue of the proximate causes of its existence if these causes are themselves contingent and their own

existence is lacking foundation. For as long as we are dealing with contingent beings, we can find no sufficient reason that can enlighten us about the truth of their existence. Their nonexistence has not ceased to be conceivable. But if this is true in regard to the proximate causes of the contingent being's existence, the same point can be equally well made in respect to its remote causes. [195] However high we may climb up the ladder of things, we will never come even one rung closer to the sufficient reason by which its existence can be rationally explained. But if this is so, an immeasurable and beginningless chain of causes is equally incapable of containing this reason. The question about the reason for the being's existence is merely postponed, not resolved. It always reappears with the same urgency and the same force. An infinite chain of contingent things cannot establish the definitive truth of the assertion of any contingent thing's existence. In other words, an infinitely regressive series of contingent causes cannot contain the fully sufficient reason why any contingent thing *is* rather than *is not*; and, moreover, why it exists in just this way rather than another. Since, therefore, contingent beings actually do exist, there must be a necessary being that contains in itself the reason for all contingent things, but whose own reason for existing is not found outside itself, but is found in its own being, in its inner possibility. These propositions are set forth in the common textbooks. [196] Let us try to shed some light upon these propositions in our own manner by examining them in reference to our fundamental principles.

- 2 The existence of contingent things does not follow from their inner possibility; they are not actual because they can be conceived, for otherwise they would be absolutely necessary. But their existence also does not follow in a satisfactory manner from either their proximate or remote productive causes, and just as little does their existence follow from a beginningless series of efficient causes, as long as these causes are themselves contingent and do not exclude the possibility of their nonexistence. So, therefore, if contingent things are to be actual in just the way they are and not otherwise, the ground of the truth of their existence must be sought for in their dependence upon an absolutely necessary cause, by virtue of which the contrary truth—that is, their nonexistence—is impossible. Now, this contrary truth cannot be excluded as something that falls beyond the cognitive capacity of this necessary being. In other words, the existence of the contingent being is not due to the fact that its dependence upon the necessary being makes its nonexistence inconceivable. [197] If this were the case, it would itself have to be necessary and unchangeable. Whatever follows from a necessary truth in a necessary way must itself be necessary. In the capacity of a contingent being to be an object of cognition, one cannot find the reason for its existence or its dependence upon that which is necessary. If this were so, it would come

to actuality not merely at one certain place and time, but it would endure at all times and remain unchangeably exactly the same thing it is conceived to be, for as the object of cognition, it is unchangeable and eternal. Instead, therefore, its dependence on the necessary being is to be sought for in the fact that it has become an object of this being's power of approbation. In virtue of the contingent being's inner goodness and perfection, it must have come to be that which is best under certain circumstances at a certain place and time, and as such it must have become the object of approbation on the part of, and produced by, the necessary cause. [198] Only in this respect does any contingent thing's changeability admit of a rational ground; only in this way can it be made comprehensible why it comes to actuality at one moment in one way and at another moment in another way. It makes its appearance as soon as it has come to be that which, in the series of things, is what is best in just the way it is and in no other. In the approbation and free choice of the necessary being, one therefore finds the only true ground for the dependence of a contingent thing upon it. Only by this approbation will the existence of a contingent being at a certain place and time turn into an established truth. Only by this approbation will the contrary truth—in other words, the nonexistence of that contingent being—turn into something which for that moment is inconceivable and is therefore a falsehood.

3 But where will the reason for the existence of this necessary being itself be found? We have said that it is in its inner being, in its inner possibility—in other words, it exists because it is conceivable, and its nonexistence cannot be conceived and is therefore a falsehood. If we explicate the concept of a necessary being properly, we come to the a priori method of proof according to which the existence of a necessary being is deduced from its mere logical conceivability. [199] The elaboration of this proposition I will save for one of the future lectures.¹ For the present I must content myself with having demonstrated from the undeniable existence of contingent and changeable things that their existence depends upon a necessary cause and, indeed, upon the free choice of this free cause. Everything that is produced by an efficient cause moved to act through approbation is an effect of the will, and if this will proceeds in the direction of what is best on the basis of insight and grounds that are rational, then when this will acts, it is said to be a free choice. By claiming that the nonexistence of a contingent being is impossible on the condition that its existence is that which is best, I have not exposed myself to the objection that I have turned that which is freely willed into something necessary. I know very well that some philosophers have been moved to admit a sort of uncertainty in the very heart of free choice because of the force of this objection. They have been led to assert that the final decision of the will depends not upon any motivating reason but upon a sort of

chance. I, however, want to make this perfectly clear: [200] I recognize neither for humanity nor for divinity any other freedom except that which depends upon cognition and choice of that which is best. The power to know, to approve, and to choose this best thing is true freedom, and the idea that there is a power to act contrary to this knowledge, this approbation, and this choice is, in my understanding of the matter, an utter absurdity. If someone wants to call the fixed determination of free choice “necessity,” “coercion,” or “fatality,” let him do so, just so long as he does not thereby intend to abolish the differences that exist among the things themselves. Let such multivalent words as “necessity,” “compulsion,” “power,” and “impotence” serve as names for any miscellany of concepts that you wish; it is enough for me that you recognize that necessity is twofold, one type connected to truth and falsehood, the other to goodness and perfection. The first type is what people call blind necessity, the second, moral necessity. The first type presupposes neither the knowledge of what is best nor the approbation and choice of it, neither intention nor fixity of resolution. [201] With the second type of necessity, however, final causes accompany productive and efficient causes, and action only follows because it is in accord with the approbation and intention that drove us to act or, if you prefer, forced us to act. I acknowledge a compulsion or necessity of this kind also in respect to God, and I cannot let it distress me if someone chooses to call me a fatalist on this account. I return to the inquiry we were pursuing. How far have we come?

- 4 We had concluded that a necessary, unchanging being must exist, which has brought into actuality this changeable universe and our changeable selves by its free choice of that which is best.
- 5 Choice of that which is best presupposes cognition of it, and so this being possesses the power of cognition. Equally certain is it that this necessary being must also have the power of approbation, desire and detestation, reason and will, for to be completely lacking these properties makes both choice and the production of that which is best inconceivable. [202] And one can find an exhaustive treatment in countless textbooks of how every property that the necessary being may happen to possess is possessed by it to the highest degree and without any limits, and no one has yet managed to raise any significant objection against this. Have we thus proved that the necessary being must possess all the properties of both intellect and will in their highest perfection? The move seems too fast. Let us take a survey of the reasons that have led us here, to see whether the road might have been better paved!
- 6 If the sensorily evident proposition *The world of the senses actually exists* or (which is even less able to be denied) the proposition *I myself actually exist* must be an objective truth, I, as the subject of this proposition, must possess

a connection to existence, as the predicate of the proposition, and I cannot be conceived as exactly who I am, with all my individual attributes, apart from the predicate of existence, for every truth must be known as such through the power of the unimpaired condition of our cognitive faculty. [203] Now, the ground for the connection between myself as subject and existence as predicate cannot be found in the material aspect of the idea of me that contains all of my other predicates. Were this the case, I would exist because I can be conceived. I would have to remain as I am unchangeably.² Now, however, the subjective consciousness of my changeableness is beyond all doubt, and it is equally undeniable that a being that is conscious of itself changing must in fact be changeable. An immediate consciousness teaches me that I was previously different from how I am now, but as the passage of time in no way lessens the conceivability of the idea [of me that includes all predicates true of me at a given time], the contrary of what I was at an earlier time [that is, my not having the exact set of predicates I had] has not ceased to be conceivable now.³ The ground of truth of the previous proposition [that I exist] is therefore not found in the material aspect of the cognition, but in its formal aspect; the ground does not lie in the conceivability of the subject [that the predicates that are true of it at a particular time form a non-self-contradictory set of predicates], but in this goodness and perfection.⁴ The ground of the truth of the proposition [that I exist] is also, however, not in my absolute perfection, because I do not possess perfection without limitations. [204] This is a fact that my subjective consciousness establishes with the highest certitude. If therefore we are going to find the ground of truth for this proposition, it must lie in my relative perfection, in my being constituted as I am, that makes it possible for me, under certain circumstances and in a certain series of things, at a certain time and place, as who I am and not otherwise, to become that which is best. In this way and no other is it possible for us to offer a rational ground for our course of change; in this way and no other can it be understood how a contingent proposition that yesterday was not true can today come to be true. Under every condition of time and space, at whatever time and place it may be, something else achieves the quality of that which is best, and thereby it achieves the ground of the truth of its existence. This relative goodness of a contingent being can in no other way contain the ground of its actuality, except insofar as its actuality serves the purposeful intention of a free cause. As such, this contingent being can become the free cause's object of approbation. [205] The ground for my existence must therefore be found in a free cause, which recognizes and gives its approbation to me now and here, as belonging to the series of things that are the best, and for this reason the free cause has been moved to bring me to actuality. This free cause cannot itself be

contingent; otherwise we would not be one step closer to making the proposition [that I exist] understandable. We would need to search once more for the ground of the truth that connects the idea of a contingent being [that contains all the predicates truly asserted of it at a particular time] with existence. So we have to return at the end to a necessary being, in which the ground of the truth [of this being's existence] lies in the very conceivability of the being itself, a being whose objective existence is inseparable from its conceivability; a being that exists because it can be conceived.⁵

- 7 If the constitution of a thing as relatively good is supposed to contain the ground of its actuality, it must be purposefully and intentionally chosen. The necessary cause must have recognized and then purposefully and intentionally chosen the contingent being that acquires its existence from it. [206] Since for everything that the necessary being is, it must be in the highest degree of perfection, the cognitive power of the necessary cause will have to be the most perfect, and its choice the most free. It will therefore have conceived with the greatest clarity and perfection all the changes in time and place, and therefore all the attributes and characteristics, through which any contingent thing becomes that which is best in its time and its place, and it will have made this thing the object of its approbation with the level of effectiveness and effort that is most fitting. Now, the exertion of the power of approbation, as we saw in the seventh lecture, goes outward from the subject and has its goal in the object of cognition, and it seeks to bring this object into conformity with the ideas that the subject has of things insofar as they are its objects of approbation. The necessary cause, therefore, by virtue of its most perfect power of approbation, will cause to come into actuality at a certain place and time all contingent things measured out in accordance with their constitution and capacity to be, somewhere and sometime, that which is the best; and since the passage of time and the arrangement of places in space are changeable, so also must things be changeable that come into being. [207] Changeable things come into being only by virtue of the fact that they are so constituted as to become that which is best.
- 8 All that is, is the best [in two possible ways]: (1) that which is absolutely the best or the most perfect in its simplicity: the highest reality of all realities, the self-dependent being (*ens a se* [being depending on itself]); (2) that which is best, *secundum quid* [in relation to something]: the most perfectly realized unified whole, in the interconnection of many things, each of which, taken individually, is limited and imperfect, and each, through its connection with and contribution to this most perfect whole, becomes somewhere and sometime, as a part of the whole, that which is best; this is the world together with all of its changes that take place in time and space.

9 All the thoughts of God, insofar as they have that which is the best as their aim, achieve actuality: (1) The absolute best. God thinks himself with the most living cognition, with the highest self-approbation. His supreme power incessantly brings into being within Himself all the predicates that can be united in a subject, and these are as necessary as is His own conceivability. [208] (2) The best *secundum quid* [relative to something], or the hypothetical best. God thinks of His properties with the infinite variety of limitations under which they are conceivable. In other words, He thinks of all the possible gradations of His perfections together with the proportionally measured degree of His approbation and satisfaction. He thinks of all the possible connections of these limited perfections not in one single subject, for they are incompatible, but He thinks of them in their interconnection among many subjects. And in all the possible configurations of interconnections among many limited beings, there will be one configuration that, comparatively, is the best, and in this way every single thing within this configuration must be, at its place and its time, that which is best. God's thinking presents to Him this most perfectly configured interconnection, and it presents to Him all limited things in it that occur in time and in their ordered position, insofar as they are that which is the best, with the highest degree of His approbation. His power of approbation has the goal of producing the object, and His effort has the goal of bringing into actuality the object of what His thinking presents to Him in accordance with its ideally measured proportionality. [209] The power of the self-dependent being will therefore produce this limited degree of His perfection and its best possible configuration of interconnections, not within Himself, for they are not compatible with His [perfect] properties, but outside Himself, as independently existing limited substances, each with its course of change in its various places through space. With their distinct courses of change, these substances constitute, in their relation to the whole, that which is the best. God is the Creator and Sustainer of the best universe.

10 One sees here the transition from God's understanding to His attribute of being Creator and Sustainer of things outside Himself. What His thinking presents to Him, coupled with His approbation and His commendation, is a living cognition, and living cognition in the highest degree is the catalyst to His activity, to His effort toward production, toward the expression of His power.

11 Some philosophers have taken upon themselves the trouble of using this method to refute the curious pretension of the solipsists with demonstrative force. [210] It is true that common sense long before rejected the solipsist's pretension as an insufferable whimsicality; but the demonstrative method has its use, as we have seen, if one wants to turn the claims of common sense into

scientific knowledge by grounding them in reason. [Here is the argument some philosophers make against the solipsist:] If everything that God's thinking presents to Him as what is best also comes into actuality and enters the universe, the same universe that the solipsist imagines, then outside of God there are numerous other substances that belong to this universe and contribute to it as parts of its most perfect totality. But therefore outside the solipsist, too, numerous other substances must have come into actuality and have been produced by God. As a single substance, the solipsist cannot imagine himself to be an object of divine approbation and commendation, for he is conscious of his weaknesses and his shortcomings. Therefore, only in connection with the totality of the whole can his existence come to be what is best at a certain place and time. Only in this way can he become the object of God's approbation. Consequently, this totality, together with all substances that belong to it, must have achieved actuality if the solipsist imagines his own ego to have also achieved actuality. [211]

- ¹² Not only has this argument been used against the solipsists, but philosophers have also tried to use it to demonstratively persuade the idealists of the groundlessness of their opinion. A configuration of the interconnection among things in which matter, as the object of representation, actually exists must necessarily be more perfect than a configuration in which sensory qualities have no external object. In the latter configuration there is only a harmony among the representations within the minds of thinking beings, insofar as these representations are images that contain truth, but in the former configuration [with matter], the representations of thinking beings not only harmonize among themselves, but they also harmonize with the objects that are actually found outside themselves, objects that are the originals behind the represented images. In the matterless configuration, one image harmonizes with another, but in the configuration with matter, image harmonizes with the original. Greater harmony is greater perfection, so that a world in which one can encounter material things in addition to spiritual beings is a more perfect world than one that consists only of spiritual beings. [212] Since God only brings to actuality that which is most perfect, the world that He created is not only ideational, but it also contains actual matter, as is required for the greatest degree of harmony. You see for yourselves, however, that these arguments can support only the existence of an object corresponding to our representations of material things, but it remains undecided how far the subjective aspect of our sensory cognition interferes with and is transformed together with that cognition into the presentation of material qualities as appearances. In sensory cognition one can unquestionably find truth. But we find this truth combined with semblance, we find the original combined with a perspective, and our senses alone cannot separate one from the other. [213]

LECTURE XIII

■ ■ ■

Spinozism. Pantheism. All Is One and One Is All. Refutation.

- 1 The Spinozists claim that neither we ourselves nor the sensory world outside of us are things that exist independently and by themselves, but rather they are mere modifications of the infinite substance. No thought belonging to the infinite could attain actuality outside of the infinite and separated from its being, because there is only one substance with infinite power of thought and infinite extension. God, says the Spinozist, is the only necessary and also the only possible substance; everything else neither lives, nor moves, nor exists outside of God, but is a modification of the divine being. *One is All* and *All is One*.
- 2 However peculiar this opinion may sound and however much it departs from the well-trod path of common sense, it has always had supporters and friends among those with heads for thinking. Indeed, religious enthusiasts and atheists have found themselves united in their acceptance of this opinion, because, as a matter of fact, it does seem to join together these two opposite errors. [214] Upon first encountering it, one naturally views this opinion to be neighboring on atheism. But *Wachter* has shown in a certain treatise* that it has its origin in the enthusiastic raptures of the Kabbalah and is entirely built upon its foundations.¹ Let us not, however, cast our gaze upon all the consequences that are charged against this school as the burden that its adherents must bear, but rather let us examine the foundations upon which this school supports itself. We are soaring here unbound in a region of ideas that is vastly distant from the region of our immediate cognition. We are in a region where our thoughts allow themselves to be grasped only by virtue of the silhouettes of the words we use for them; indeed, we are only capable of recognizing ourselves in this region by means of these silhouettes. How easy it is to fall into error here! How great is the danger of mistaking shadows for the thing itself! You know how much I am inclined to explain all the disputes of the philosophical schools as mere verbal disputes, or at least as originally springing from verbal disputes. [215] Change the least little

* *Wachter, Spinozismus im Judenthum [sic].*

thing in the silhouette, and straightaway the whole picture takes on a different aspect, another physiognomy. So it is also with words and their definitions. The smallest deviation in the way one specifies the meaning of a fundamental term leads in the end to quite opposite results, and if we lose sight of our common point of departure, we end up no longer quarreling about words, but about the most important matters. We must therefore return to the crossroads where the Spinozist departs from us and takes his own path. In this way we may perhaps avoid the quarrel before we separate from one another.

- 3 What is our point of departure? What can we accept among ourselves as a settled presupposition that can serve as a canon of measurement in judging this quarrel? This much I know of the doctrine of the Spinozists, that they agree with us in the following propositions: *The necessary being thinks itself as absolutely necessary.* [216] *It thinks all contingent beings as resolvable into an infinite series, as beings that by their nature presuppose for their existence a regressive series without beginning and that in the forward direction endlessly advance the series into actuality.*
- 4 Thus far we can be fellow travelers with the adherents of Spinoza, but now the road splits. The contingent things of this series, we say, have their own substantiality outside of God, although they can only exist as effects of His omnipotence. Finite beings exist by themselves, to be sure, but are dependent upon that which is infinite, and they are inconceivable apart from the infinite, but still in respect of their subsistence they are not one with that which is infinite. We live and move and exist as effects of God, but not within Him. The Spinozist, in contrast, asserts that there is only one infinite substance. Because a substance must exist for itself, it must not need another being for its existence, and therefore it must be independent of all other beings. Since, however, no finite being could be independent, no finite being could be a substance. [217] On the other hand, the universe is able to be a true substance, since in its boundlessness it includes everything in itself, and therefore it needs no other thing for its existence and is, as a consequence, independent of all other beings. This universe, the Spinozist goes on to assert, consists of bodies and minds—that is, according to the doctrine of Descartes that is accepted by the Spinozist, there is extension and thought; there are beings that are extended and beings that think. Spinoza therefore ascribes to his infinite substance two infinite attributes—*infinite extension and infinite thought*—and this is his *One is All*, or rather, he says, the whole sum of infinitely many finite bodies and infinitely many thoughts constitutes one single infinite All, infinite in extension and infinite in thinking: *All is One*.
- 5 One rightly admires the intellectual rigor with which Spinoza expounds the fundamental premises of his system and how he binds even its smallest ele-

ments together into one geometrically consolidated structure. Grant to him his fundamental premises, and his structure rises impregnable before you. [218] You cannot remove even the tiniest stone from its position in the edifice. So we have to examine only those basic premises and see how far they differ from our ordinary concepts, and whether they differ in respect to the things themselves or merely in respect to the words.

6 In order to approach his system as closely as possible, let us not rebuke Spinoza right off for seeming to interchange the infinite in respect of power with the infinite in respect of extension—in other words, intensive magnitude with extensive magnitude. One might say that he assembles infinite thought out of infinitely many finite thoughts. In this way there can arise only an infinity in respect of extension. But if the infinite is to be independent, it must not be extensively infinite, but it must intensively have neither limit nor boundary. It must be infinite not in respect of extension but in respect of power if it is supposed to need no other being for its existence. I will touch upon this in more detail later. [219] Let us for now put the matter to one side so that we might examine the other basic premises of Spinoza's system more closely.

7 Many of Spinoza's commentators, and nearly all of his opponents, have previously complained that his explication of the word "substance" contains an arbitrariness that has caused Spinoza to depart from the commonly traveled path of our everyday speech. The sort of substantiality that he presupposes—namely, a self-sustaining existence that is independent and in need of no other being for its actuality—is a sort that we, like Spinoza, do not attach to any finite, contingent being. We also admit that such a self-sufficient substantiality only pertains to the infinite and necessary being, and that it could never be imparted from it to any finite being. But we distinguish that which is self-sustaining from that which exists on its own. That which is self-sustaining is independent and requires no other being for its existence. Such a being is therefore infinite and necessary; but a being that exists on its own may be dependent in the manner of its existence but nonetheless exist separately from the infinite. [220] That is, one can think of beings that exist not merely as modifications of another being, but as having their own stable existence and their own modifications. A substantiality of this second sort, we believe, can legitimately be ascribed to contingent beings. All that Spinoza derives, therefore, with geometric clarity on the basis of his explication of substance we can very well allow to be valid, but only in regard to that self-sustaining being to which alone belongs infinity of power and independent, necessary being, but it is not at all valid in regard to all those things that exist on their own. If Spinoza, on account of their manner of existing as dependent upon the infinite substance, does not want to say that

such things are substances, he would only be quarreling about words. So long as he grants that there is a real difference [between independent and dependent types of existence], we can invent another word for beings that have stable but dependent existences, in order not to let the real difference go unnamed. And with this agreement our dispute looks like it should be concluded.

8 But the point we have won hardly demolishes the doctrine of Spinoza, although it does at least call into question his proofs and their premises. [221] It shows that Spinoza has not proven what he hoped to prove. It therefore weakens the strength of his weapons, or directs them away from the targets at which he had pointed them. Instead of proving that everything that exists on its own is only One, he is, in the end, only able to maintain that that which is self-sustaining is only One. Instead of demonstrating that the entire totality of all finite things constitute a single substance, he can conclude in the end only that this totality necessarily depends upon the single infinite substance. This conclusion can be fully granted to Spinoza, but still our quarrel with him has not been resolved. The real point of our quarrel remains entirely untouched. His proofs are now valid, but they have not yet forced us to acquiesce to the truth of his system.

9 The following observation carries us a little deeper into the heart of the matter and touches not only the validity of Spinoza's proofs but Spinoza's doctrine itself. Spinoza, his opponents say, ascribes extension and thought to his infinite substance because everything can be reduced to these fundamental concepts according to Descartes's theory. [222] Extension, according to Spinoza, constitutes the essence of bodies, and thought the essence of our minds. But if we conjoin to extension also the concept of impenetrability, this creates merely the essence of matter. But form also belongs to bodies in addition to their matter—that is, movement together with all of its modifications.² Spinoza has therefore accounted for only the source of matter. Where should we locate the source of form? Through what means does the body acquire its movement, and organized bodies their structure—that is, their purposeful and regular movement—and every other body its shape? Where can the source of all this be found? Not from the whole, because the whole has no movement. The collective sum of all bodies, united in a single substance, cannot change place and has neither structure nor figure. So the source must lie in the parts. Consequently, the parts must also have their own separate existence as parts, and the whole must be in that case a mere aggregation of them. [223] But if, as Spinoza purports, the parts do not have their own separate existence, and if they are only alterations or various kinds of representation of the whole, they could have no other modifications than those that flow from the properties of the whole. So where does form in the parts come from if the whole offers no source for it?

10 A similar error in reasoning can be charged against Spinoza also in regard to the sphere of the mind. He has only provided for the material of thought and assigned to it as its source the properties of the infinite. Truth and falsehood for him originate in the properties of the simple substance. But where does goodness and perfection come from, or desire and aversion, pain and pleasure, in fact everything that belongs to our concepts of the faculty of approbation or appetite? If the whole is capable of no foreknowledge, no intent, no approbation, and no desire, whence do all these concepts arise in the parts that possess nothing of their own? [224] In his opinion are they mere modifications of the single substance? Now, it is true that Spinoza also would deny all freedom to the parts, dismiss choice as mere illusion, and make the power of voluntary decision that we believe depends upon us into the tool, if looked at truly, of ineluctable necessity. And since he has no need in his system to worry about things whose existence he denies, therefore freedom, willing, deciding, and everything that they mean to us are supposed to no longer cause him any difficulty. But notwithstanding all this, the fundamental problem he faces has not been addressed. All the trouble that Spinoza thinks he has evaded by eliminating freedom and voluntary decision only rears its head again in his system of perfect equipoise, to which alone he will grant the name “freedom.” [225] He recognizes no other freedom from compulsion than that which delivers one from every influence of motivating intentions and impelling considerations and from every possible contribution of the prospective apprehension of good and evil. Freedom from compulsion thus turns out to be what determinists call perfectly undecided equipoise. But when Spinoza understood that motivating reasons based on foresight and other impelling considerations give to even the freest choice its defining character and driving force, he staked the entire success of his system on the ambiguity of the term “necessity,” and he said that the choice or decision of any rational being takes place by necessity. On the other hand, Spinoza in this matter ignores the entire logic of his system and thinks he is compelled to go along with the determinists in everything they say about the meaning of the word “freedom,” and to do so without complaint, or else risk quarreling with them about words.³ His system does not force him to gainsay the kind of freedom that is associated with the knowledge of good and evil, and whose defining character is the prospective apprehension of that which is best. Since he cannot deny, at least in regard to finite beings, the difference between good and evil, between what is desirable and undesirable, between pleasure and pain, and so on, he must also admit all that follows from these concepts, even to the point of granting that they help to define the character of the finite being and that they influence the changes undergone by the thinking being. [226] If we therefore

do not wish to trade on the ambiguity of the term “necessity”; and if we define the concept more precisely, making a distinction between physical and moral necessity; and, as we have already established, we trace physical necessity back to its source in cognition; and, by contrast, we allow that moral necessity flows from approbation as its source; and if we then accept that Spinoza cannot deny that this distinction is intrinsic to the concept of necessity, then he must further admit that there is a distinction between the formal and the material aspect of thinking and that the property of thinking is not necessarily coextensive with the property of giving approbation, and that good and evil, together with the inclination toward the one and the avoidance of the other, must have a different source than that of truth and falsehood. But where are we to find this source if no trace of it is to be met with in the properties of the one and only substance?

11 We thus see that Spinoza’s system is inadequate in two respects. Spinoza has only concerned himself, in regard to both the physical world as well as the world of thought, for the material principle but not the formal. [227] It remains to be seen how much his system would approximate our own if he were to accept responsibility for the formal principle, too, and find in it the source of movement in the physical realm and of approbation in the realm of thought.

12 And now I want to turn to the point that I touched on above and fulfill the promise I made to develop it further. The difficulty is not an immensely complicated one. With his usual clarity and precision, Wolff advanced this objection in the second part of his natural theology against Spinozism, and, as far as I know, no supporter and no defender of Spinoza’s system has ever undertaken to answer the objection. I permit myself therefore to repeat it in an abridged form: Each and every property of a thing has a certain breadth and a certain power, or, in other words, it has both extension and intensity. By the addition of several like-featured things, the extension of that feature increases, but not its power. [228] If you add tepid water to tepid water, you have more tepid water, but you have not increased the temperature of the water. Combine one piece of shallowly grasped knowledge with other such pieces of knowledge, and you may acquire greater breadth of knowledge, but you have not achieved a deeper or more penetrating understanding of anything. A more extensive cause can indeed produce a stronger effect, as when more rays of light bring about a more intense illumination, but this is not due to mere addition, but rather to the inner reinforcement of the intensity of the light, which is effected by the combined aggregation of rays. But, normally speaking, a middling amount of light in many rooms provides no greater illumination than the same amount of light in a single small room. All of this is as clear as day to anyone who looks into the matter, and it is explained in superfluous detail in nearly every decent textbook of ontology.

If, therefore, finite beings are gathered into an infinitely large assemblage, they together constitute an additive infinity only in regard to their assembled size and extension. The intensity or the power of a shared property in the gathered whole still remains finite. Now, according to Spinoza himself, only that which is infinite in respect of power can be independent and in need of no other being for its existence. [229] He must therefore admit that in addition to the total sum of all finite beings, which can only be infinite in respect of extension, there still is one other infinite being that is boundless in respect of its power. And, finally, since in accordance with the articles of his faith there can only be a single independent substance, Spinoza will be forced to admit that what is infinite in its cumulative extension is dependent upon that which is infinite in the intensity of its power.

¹³ That something infinite in extension could never be independent, but must depend upon that which is infinite in power, the following consideration can also help to show. All distributed things, be they finite or infinite, never form themselves into true singularities, but only totalities, aggregations of multiplicities, never discrete individuals but only cumulative, collective beings.⁴ Even if we grant that extension is everywhere equally the property of matter, it is not always the identical extension; it constitutes no actual unity but is only the iteration of the same property down to the smallest parts of matter. [230] The same holds for heaviness, if one wants to make it an intrinsic property of body, and also for the generative or organizing power that is thought to be a property of any structured body. If a power at work in a whole is held to remain always identical in every separate part, and is grasped with one and the same concept, it cannot be an intrinsic property of a body without being distributively iterated, as it were, in every atom. It is certainly a single elastic power that is at work in the spring inside my watch that, up in the sky, gathers the clouds and drives them forward, but this singleness is only abstract; in every concrete instance, the power must be iterated in a different form in the different objects, and it therefore no longer remains a single power, but is rather a multiplicity.

¹⁴ If a multiplicity of things is ever to come together and form a totality and constitute one aggregation or one cumulative being, this can only happen in the representation in the mind of a thinking subject who embraces the plurality and gathers it under one concept. Apart from such concepts and looking only at the objects, there exist only singularities [*Einheiten*], each one on its own, a singular individual. Only in the representations in the minds of thinking subjects do these singularities come together to form totalities, or pluralities constituting one thing, aggregations. [231] A herd of sheep, looking at the sheep in and by themselves, consists of individual animals of one species; a sand dune consists

of individual grains of sand; but when they are aggregated and joined together under a concept in the mind of a thinking being, they become respectively one herd and one dune. Without thinking beings, the world of bodies would be no world, would constitute no whole, but would consist of nothing more than isolated singularities. I have dealt with this at greater length on another occasion and proved by this means that the soul cannot be material.⁵

¹⁵ In the realm of the mind a similar condition holds true. Even if the power of thinking is granted to be an identical property of every mind, it is still not the same single power that thinks in all of them. Rather, what we mean by the power or the property of thinking must be iterated across every object of thought and in every thinking being considered by itself. [232] In regard to its concept, the power of thinking or the attribute of thinking is one and the same thing, as Spinoza puts it, in virtue of which all of us think; but in regard to the actual process of thinking itself, this power must pertain to each of us in a special way if indeed it is true that we each think independently of the other, and it is not the case, as some scholastic philosophers are supposed to have believed, that we think as parts of a single power of thought pervading all of us.

¹⁶ Every thinking being, if it is finite, only thinks of a portion of the world and only has a perspective and viewpoint on the world. It does not encompass the whole world with the clarity of a complete vision. Only in the totality of all thinking beings, in the additive sum of them all, can one find, according to Spinoza, the whole world in its all-encompassing clarity. But this additive sum, this gathering together, this plurality constituting one thing, this totality, as we have seen, presupposes a thinking subject that grasps it, gathers it together, and then combines the parts into a representation in its mind. Without this unifying subject, the parts remain isolated and uncombined, always only a plurality, and only through the encompassing act of thought are they ever united. [233]

¹⁷ If, therefore, Spinoza holds that the universe, or the true substance, consists in the totality of all material and thinking beings, this presupposes the existence of a totalizing subject. This subject will combine together all the perspectives and all the ideas of finite beings in their infinite variety. This subject will be required to think of them all with perfect clarity, for every dimness in a representation leaves a gap, and the totality we are seeking would then be left incomplete. Without the world of finite minds, physical things would never form themselves into a system, but limited minds only make up fragments, so to speak, of the whole, and they must be combined together into a single system by an unlimited mind in its own infinite realm. That this boundless mind will be infinite in respect of its power, self-sufficient, and independent, is evident by itself. And following upon this, Spinoza would have led us from his idea of the infinity of the universe to

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the necessary existence of an individual being, infinite in respect of its power, whose thought encompasses the manifold variety of the world of bodies and of minds and combines them together into one system, and apart from which the infinity of extension cannot subsist. [234] Had Spinoza led us here, our quarrel with him would have been almost entirely left behind us. We would have taken the same turn at the crossroads.⁶ We would have had this noble thinker as our friend, since certainly a man who had dedicated his life entirely to the truth would not have opposed the truth out of stubbornness or vanity. We could have embraced him and walked a long way in company with him. Indeed, if Spinoza had granted us all this, we all would nearly have already reached the goal of our journey. [235] [See also Lecture XI, pars. 6–9 and commentary.]

LECTURE XIV

■ ■ ■

Continued Quarrel with the Pantheists. Convergence, Point of Union with Them. Innocuousness of Purified Pantheism, Compatibility with Religion and Morality, insofar as They Are Practical.

¹ “Not so quickly,” my friend Lessing would have broken in had he been present at our last lecture, “you people are still far from your goal, and you shout victory before your triumph has been secured. Even if all the points were correct that you brought against Spinoza, you would in the end have only defeated Spinoza, but you would not have refuted Spinozism. You would have shown that the system of this philosopher has its shortcomings and gaps just like any other system that has ever sprung from the mind of a mortal, and that the philosopher himself erred in the foundation he gave to the edifice of his doctrine, and that he omitted things without which this edifice cannot long stand. But have you thereby actually achieved the complete overthrow of all that Spinoza claims? [236] What if a later adherent of this great man attempted to fill the gaps and to make good the shortcomings? Or if we were, in the main, to relinquish our claim to the system and confess that we could not combine its elements into a geometric chain of proofs, would Spinozism—or, if you prefer, pantheism—have to be altogether abandoned on account of this fact? Notwithstanding everything you have said, couldn’t the thesis still be true: *All is One* and *One is All*?

² “And if I grant that you have refuted the system of your adversary; is yours thereby proven? Let us look more closely,” he would continue, “how far we have come. You say: ‘Spinoza cannot explain the origin of movement on the basis of his premises.’ Good! Which anti-Spinozist or theist knows how to give a better accounting of it? He invokes the will of God who is said to have imparted motion to matter. Spinoza also allows for all movement to have a similar source in something that he calls ‘will,’ although I admit I am unable to fully

clarify his remarks on this subject. [237] Perhaps the pantheist can avail himself of an expedient of this sort to explain the origin of movement, and even if he does not, it may simply remain without explanation. In the final analysis, an appeal to the divine will is not far removed from a confession of ignorance, and although theism may here have an advantage over pantheism, it is by far not a weighty enough advantage to decisively tip the scales in its favor. The difference between truth and goodness, cognition and approbation, together with all the consequences to be drawn from this difference, can legitimately be admitted by the pantheist. He can locate the source of the formal principle as well as of the material principle in the only substance of the Godhead. You see how much I can grant on his behalf without thereby abandoning the system. Moved by your objections or other similar ones, I willingly admit the validity of the distinction between the infinite in respect of extensive quantity and the infinite in respect of intensive power. [238] I admit also that the necessary being, as Spinoza himself says, cannot consist in the totality of infinitely many contingent beings, since this would mean that the necessary being is only infinite in its extension, but in the intensity of its power it would still be finite and dependent. I therefore accept together with you, as Spinoza himself would likely have also done, that the only necessary being, both in its unity and in respect of its power, must be infinite, and so we in our system, just as the theist in his, can locate not only the origin of truth, but also of all goodness, in the nature of the Godhead. Since then we"—I am still speaking in the name of my departed friend [Lessing]—"since we have somewhat changed the system, and we are now ascribing to the Godhead, just as the theist does, the highest perfection, we accordingly accept, together with the theist, that the divine mind holds within itself the clearest and most complete representation of all possible contingent things, together with their infinitely manifold qualifications and alterations and their differences in goodness, beauty, and order. [239] We further admit that by virtue of His highest power of approbation He has given His preference to the best and most perfect sequence of things. All this, in accordance with the system of the true theist, must have taken place in God's understanding and ceaselessly be taking place. Even the theist, therefore, must ascribe to the sequence of things that have actually come to pass an ideal existence in the divine understanding, and the pantheist can without qualification accept the same point in his system. The pantheist, however, stays put with this ideal existence, while the theist goes further than this and adds the following claim: God has also imparted to this actual sequence of things an objective existence outside Himself. The pantheist draws back to his more modest position, seeing no reason to grant this claim. How would you persuade him of this objective existence outside of God's understanding? Who

told us that we ourselves and the world that surrounds us have something more than an ideal existence in the divine understanding, that we are something more than mere thoughts of God and modifications of His primal power?" [240]

- 3 "If I understand you correctly," I would answer him, "you admit in the name of your pantheist the existence of an extra-mundane God, but you deny an extra-divine world, and so you turn God into a sort of infinite egoist."
- 4 "You have correctly grasped my thought [Lessing would say], and you know full well how little I care about the ridiculous colors in which you are trying to paint it. My pantheism resembles, if you will, a two-headed hydra. One of its heads bears the inscription *All is One*, and the other, *One is All*. You must cut off both heads at the same time if you want to slay the monster. Before you dare to undertake this herculean labor, be well forewarned of the weapons with which it can defend itself.
- 5 "Thoughts, the thinking being, the object of thought: these are three aspects whose differences we are conscious of as long as the activity of thinking is only potential—that is, as long as nothing is actually being thought. [241] As long as, in other words, the thinking being, as subject, has only the capacity for thinking and the object of thought has only the capacity to be thought, and from out of the relation of the object to the subject, no thought has actually yet arisen. As soon, however, as the activity of thinking actually commences, the subject enters into the most intimate connection with the object and begets the thought. This thought is located within the thinking being, and, insofar as it is a faithful copy of that which is thought, it cannot be distinguished from the object itself. Mark this well before you contradict my pantheist! You confess that in the actual activity of thinking, and insofar as the thought is true, the difference between its two aspects disappears, and the object of thought is indistinguishable from the actual, true thought and is therefore completely one with it. Now, the thought is an accident of the thinking being and cannot be separated from its substance; therefore, the thought is nowhere else to be met with than in the thinking being, as a mere modification of it. [242] So now in God, as we all confess, no mere capacity exists, but on the contrary everything has to be in the most active actuality; and, further, since all God's thoughts are true and correct, therefore, no thought in God differs from its original, or, rather, God's thoughts, which are alterations of Him, are at the same time themselves their own originals. The inner, continuously operative activity of the divine imagination begets in Himself unfading images of contingent beings, together with the infinite sequence of all their successive alterations and differences, and this includes us and the whole sensory world outside of us. Presented from this angle, pantheism, which you believe you had toppled, seems to me to be completely back on its feet. You

wish to enlarge upon the scope of your refutation? Show me what vulnerability remains! If you want to persist in your attack, you need to show that the originals outside of God do not have the same predicates as the representations or the images of them which are found in God. But you reject this even in your own system. [243] God's thoughts must be true to the highest degree and in fullest accord with their objects, and they must therefore have all the predicates which belong to their objects."

6 *All* the predicates, and I would especially insist upon this with my friend, *all* the predicates, but with the exception of those that belong to the original insofar as it is an original, and which cannot belong to the subject without it ceasing to be a subject. The correspondence between original and truthful copy that both our systems presuppose does not extend so far as to annul the difference constituted by the relationship itself. The most faithful image must not cease being an image; it would lose its fidelity if it were to become the original. If this is the point, my friend, on which our quarrel rests, then it will be, as I hope, quickly decided. I believe that there are unmistakable marks by which to distinguish me, as an object, from me as a representation in the mind of God; by which to most infallibly distinguish me as the original from me as a copy in the divine understanding. [244] The consciousness of myself as it is bound up with the complete ignorance of everything that does not fall within the circle of my cognitive power is the most telling proof of my extra-divine substantiality, of the originalness of my existence. God's mind in truth holds within itself the most precise measure of my powers, and therefore also of the extent of my consciousness. But this image of my consciousness is not separable in Him from the consciousness of His own infinity. This is not how it is with me, for whom there is bound up with my actuality so many things that I have no knowledge of, and that are nonetheless bound up with me as a part of my being. It is one thing to oneself possess boundaries and to be limited; it is another to know the boundaries possessed by a being different from oneself. The Supreme Being knows my weakness, but He does not possess it. I am far from asserting that the idea He has of me therefore ceases to be true; on the contrary, there is no other way for Him to be the most truthful being.

7 “Must something be added to God's thought if it is to become actual outside of God?” [Lessing might ask.] [245]

8 I think this question leads to the core of our dispute, and I want to explain myself as straightforwardly and clearly as I am able.

9 Thoughts, as an object of His power of cognition, are true in God in the highest degree. The untrue, as well as the error of sensory illusion, is found in the divine understanding only as the predicate of limited, contingent beings.

He knows me together with all my faults and weaknesses, including the errors of my mind and the illusions of my senses.

10 As an object of the faculty of approbation, God knows evil as well as good, and both in accordance with their truth—that is, in accordance with their exactly appropriate level of approbation and disapprobation—and He therefore also knows that which is best with the most powerful approbation and with the most vital cognition. This most vital cognition drives onward to actuality. [246] The most vital power in God, which is of infinite efficaciousness, effects within Himself the attributes that belong to Him, and it is the source of His own existence, He who is the absolute best. But since also the best in relation to something, *optimum secundum quid* [the best in accordance with something], as a thought in God, carries the highest level of comparative approbation, this thought must also drive onward toward actuality by virtue of its most vital power, but certainly not within Him, because in Him there can only be the absolute best, but rather separated from His substance, as an extra-divine sequence and interconnection of contingent things—in other words, as an objective world.

11 “But what does God add to His thoughts, to His ideas of the best, so that they come into actuality outside of Himself?”

12 Whoever could so fully understand how this happens that he could put it into words, oh dearest friend!, he would also understand how to accomplish it, and no one could demand such a thing from a poor peddler in hypotheses like myself. However, if we are talking about limited minds, I've already answered this question as much as I am able. [247] To the representation of a finite mind within God must be added its own consciousness, together with its ignorance of all that falls outside its limits, and in this way the mind becomes an extra-divine substance. More than this I know nothing about, and I cannot give you so much as a clue. What I know about the specific traits of a self-conscious being I know from my own case, because I myself am such a being, and I have my own consciousness. Whether the other limited beings in my environs have a substantiality that is like mine, whether, to speak in the idiom of Leibniz, all beings exist only insofar as they reflect themselves before themselves—that is, insofar as they have the capacity of representation—and whether their matter can only be called a sham substance, or whether there is a sort of substantiality that is characteristic of matter, this investigation would take me too far from my purpose and can now be set aside. At this time I must focus only on myself and thinking beings like me in order to settle the dispute with the pantheist. [248] In order to prove that not everything is a mere thought in the mind of the infinite, I need only to demonstrate that there are finite minds outside of God that have their own substantiality. I do not have to involve myself with other types of sub-

stances. Indeed, it is enough if I show that I myself have my own consciousness, and hence that I must be an extra-divine substance existing on my own. To win the case against the pantheist on these terms will no longer be difficult.

13 No being has an immediate idea of a greater reality than that which pertains to itself. If we want to think of higher beings, we only need to intuit in the immediacy of our consciousness the reach of our own powers, and then push their boundaries further and further outward in order to imagine more perfect beings than ourselves. Or we can completely remove from our intuited powers all of their boundaries in order to arrive at the concept of a supremely perfect being. The entire territory, however, of a reality that we ourselves do not possess to any degree is foreign to our cognition, and we cannot intuitively grasp it. This is a generally recognized principle of philosophy. [249] But equally true is the other side of the proposition: no being can actually alienate itself to any degree from its reality. I cannot represent to myself a being that has smaller and more limited capabilities than I, with the actual alienation and ignorance of everything that I in fact possess. If I try to imagine the sensory capacities of a blind man, I have to direct my attention only to the impressions and sensations of his other senses and thereby seek to weaken and dim the visual impressions, or else I can leave the visual images with their visual power intact but then deny them, together with all their effects and consequences, to the one who was born blind.

14 In the first case I gain an idea of his undiminished capacities; in the second case I grasp their limits. But the total absence of all sensory impressions, this I cannot manage to produce in myself. [250] Neither can God, by virtue of the fullness of His perfection, conceive any limited being with the actual alienation of His divinity. He conceives a limited degree of His reality, together with all weaknesses and disabilities that follow from this limitation. But He Himself remains unalienated from His infinite reality. God's thought, therefore, that has a limited being as its object, cannot reach the level of any particular, disattached as it were, consciousness. From the truth of the divine thought nothing will thereby be taken away, but on the contrary, in accordance with our account of truth, this thought must remain in God merely subjective, and it can possess no particular consciousness with an actual alienation from all its higher perfection, otherwise it would cease to be the thought of an object and become the thought-of object itself.

15 Let us designate the degree of reality that belongs to a limited being, *A*, and the limitation itself, or the reality that the being is deprived of, *B*. God, when He represents in His mind this limited being, will affirmatively conceive *A*, together with all its consequences, and negatively conceive *B*, along with all its consequences. [251] Thereby He has the most complete, most accurate, and truest

notion of this being. It is, however, impossible for God to produce in Himself or possess the consciousness of *A* with an actual alienation and absence of [the reality measured by] *B*, for this would be the true alienation of His divinity.

16 Yet perhaps what is happening in this dispute is what Spinoza remarks in respect of another dispute: *Pleraeque oriuntur controversiae, quia homines mentem suam non recte explicant, vel quia alterius mentem interpretantur. Nam re vera, dum sibi maxime contradicunt, vel eadem vel diversa cogitant ita, ut in aliis quos et errores absurdia putant esse, non sint.* [Many controversies arise because people do not explain correctly what is in their mind or because they misinterpret what is in another's mind. But the truth is that when people contradict one another completely, they are either both thinking the very same things, or they are thinking different things in such a way that the errors and absurdities that they discover in others are not such.] So let us examine again how far apart we and the pantheist are; perhaps we shall find in the end that we are closer to one another than we suspect. “*All is One,*” says the pantheist. We say, “God and the world,” and he says, “God is also the world.” “The infinite,” we say, “has brought into actuality all that is finite as a One made up of a plurality”; the pantheist, however, says, “the infinite includes All, is itself All, is One and at the same time All.” [252] As little as the plurality can exist without the One, just as little can the infinite One, for the pantheist, exist without the All. We, for our part, admit that the existence of the finite is not conceivable without the infinite. We further grant that it is inconceivable for the infinite understanding not to contain the clearest thoughts of everything finite. We believe, however, that it is possible and quite conceivable for the infinite to exist apart from the actual existence of any finite thing. We believe that every finite thing depends for its existence upon the infinite, but the reverse is not true. So we separate God from nature, and we ascribe an extra-mundane existence to the former and an extra-divine existence to the latter. However, the follower of the sort of pantheism we previously described, and with which we are now concerning ourselves, assumes that there is no extra-divine existence at all, but the representations in the mind of the infinite, by virtue of their necessity, attain a kind of existence in God Himself, a kind of existence that is, fundamentally, most intimately united with God's own being. [253] Let us for the moment put everything aside that we have just brought forward against this thesis, and let us now only raise this question: do all of God's thoughts possess their own self-consciousness that we perceive in ourselves and that we find impossible to deny, or do only a few of them have it to the exclusion of the rest? No one will assert the first option, for when all of God's thoughts, merely because they are His thoughts, have all that is necessary for them to come into existence, then not one of them could actually

come into existence. For we are able to assert this much at least of anything that actually exists: that the presence of one certain defining property excludes the presence of the contrary property; that the present state of a thing's changeable properties cannot be actual in the same way as the past and future states of those properties; that I who am now sitting and speaking am no longer lying in bed and sleeping. [254] Let it be forever the case that, according to Spinoza (and, fundamentally, according to the truth of the matter), the succession of different states only takes place in me as a limited being; still this is a succession of different states that exclude each other as they succeed one another, and this succession therefore presupposes that when one of God's thoughts comes into actuality, others are excluded.

17 Therefore, only some of God's thoughts, in being preferred over others, attain that which we call existence. And this is what we are now quarreling about, whether these thoughts thereby remain within His being, or whether they attain their own substantiality outside of Him. Those of God's thoughts that in being preferred have attained existence have been preferred over others not because of their truth and conceivability, for the contrary thoughts are equally conceivable and at any rate had existed or will exist. This difference of time changes nothing of the truth or the conceivability of things. The introduction of secondary causes helps us out here not in the least, since they are resolvable into an infinite series according to Spinoza, and they therefore only push the question further back in time without ever answering it. [255] All this we have sufficiently explained in the previous lectures. Those of God's thoughts that come into actuality to the exclusion of the rest will come to be preferred by virtue of their relative goodness and their fitness for the purpose they serve—in other words, being exactly how they are and not otherwise, they correspond to the idea of what is perfect and best at this time and place. This visible world actually exists, according to the pantheist, as a thought of God within His being, insofar as it is a representation within Himself of the best and most perfect totality of diverse finite beings that can be conceived in interconnection with one another. In this one immense thought there is each human being, there am I, a human being, also a thought of God, gifted with the separate and limited consciousness of myself, totally ignorant of all that lies beyond my limitedness. [256] Because of this limitedness I am also capable of happiness and misery, partly due to myself and my own actions, and partly also, without any contribution from me and without any reference to my happiness or my misery, due to other thoughts of God.

18 I, a human being, can furthermore expect that any good thing I will ever receive will come only from that substance whose thought and modification I ought to be, insofar as the substance is willing to let this partly depend upon myself and

partly on other thoughts it has. Although it is in fact not a matter of its willing; for Spinoza believes that will and understanding are the same thing. However, if I understand him correctly, and as my friend [Lessing] explains him, he distinguishes between cognition of the true and cognition of the good, and he calls the cognition of the good "will," insofar as through it one thought gains preference over another. [257] Consequently, we can always say: everything good that we receive is an effect of the divine will, and to that extent it is also an effect of His free will, to the extent that He has found it fitting to let our happiness depend upon ourselves or upon other thoughts of His. Accept all of this, and I ask: what is the difference between the system defended by my friend and our own system?

19 I, a human being, a thought of the Godhead, will never cease to remain a thought of the Godhead, and I will be in the infinite unfolding of time blissful or miserable according to the degree that I recognize Him, my Thinker, and to the degree that I love Him; yes, to the degree that I strive (and Spinoza must allow that striving also pertains to me, this thought of God's), to the degree that I strive to make myself similar to this source of my existence, and to love His other thoughts like myself. If my friend, the defender of purified Spinozism, admits all of this as he surely would have done on the basis of his fundamental principles, then morality and religion are safe, and his doctrine differs from our system only in a subtle distinction that could never make a practical difference, in a point without any consequences—namely, [258] whether God let the thought of this best configuration of interconnected, contingent things emanate out, flow out, stream out, or whatever metaphor I may choose to apply to this action (since this subtlety can only be described through metaphors), whether He let His brilliance break forth as lightning from Himself, whether He only allowed it to shine inwardly, whether He remained only as a source, or whether He as the source poured Himself out into a stream. If you wish to render in sensible form the production, creation, or actualization of the world using such metaphoric expressions, it is difficult to avoid misinterpretation or misunderstanding, as the metaphor extends beyond its boundary and leads one astray, either into religious enthusiasm or atheism, depending upon whether one's mind is prone to ecstatic raptures or to sober rumination. These alternative systems seem to be far removed from one another in their final consequences, but basically they arise from the misinterpretation of the same metaphor, which in one case pictures the world too much with the features of God, and in the other case pictures God too much with the features of the world. Sincere love of truth leads one soon back to the point from which one set out, and shows that we had gotten ourselves tangled up in mere words. Bid farewell to the words, and, as a friend of the truth, embrace your brother!¹¹ [259]

LECTURE XV

■ ■ ■

Lessing. His Service to the Religion of Reason. His Thoughts Concerning Purified Pantheism.

- ¹ Our friend D., who surprised us with his visit the last time we were together, did not finally bid me farewell until he had raised a number of objections against what I had said. “What is it,” he said, “that makes you turn our Lessing into a defender of so erroneous and ill-reputed a doctrine? Had you no other name to which you could attach this whole unsavory business?” “You know,” I replied, “that Lessing was always the first to come to mind whenever I looked about for a judge in such matters. With him I had a long philosophical association; we had for many years shared with one another our thoughts on these matters, and we had shared as well an impartial love of truth that would tolerate neither stubborn dogmatism nor fawning complaisance. [260] It is his so very familiar image, then, that will often rise up before me whenever a philosophical proposition is the subject of discussion, or when arguments and counterarguments need to be weighed against one another and their relative merits assessed.” “I would nevertheless hesitate,” he said, “to make use of his name on this occasion. There is nothing in the world that would induce me to cast even the slightest suspicion upon the religious principles of this decent man. How could it be? Is Lessing a defender of pantheism, a doctrine that is built on oversubtle sophistical premises? If this doctrine does not quite overturn all the truths of natural religion, it at least renders them highly problematical. Is there anyone for whom one could say that the truths of the religion were more inviolable than they were for him, the great ally of the Fragmentist and the author of *Nathan*?¹ Germany has never known a philosopher who has expounded the religion of reason with such sincerity, so free of any drop of error or prejudice, and who so persuasively laid it out before simple common sense as the Fragmentist. His commitment to natural religion went so far that in his zeal on its behalf he would suffer no revealed religion to stand beside it. [261] He felt obliged to extinguish all other lights so that the full illumination of the light of reason might be permitted to pour forth in one brilliant stream. And in his defense of the Fragmentist, Less-

ing seems to have invested all the force of his being. One can recognize already in his earliest writings that for him the rational truths of religion and morality were eternally sacred and inviolable. And even after his acquaintance with the Fragmentist, one notices in his writings, in all the essays that he composed for the defense of his friend or ‘guest,’ as he called him, the same quiet conviction that was so deeply ingrained in him, the same unbiased distance from all embittered skepticism, the same level course of common sense in pursuit of the truths of the religion of reason. And in his *Nathan?* What Horace says in regard to the morality of Homer,

*Qui, quid pulcrum, quid turpe, quid utile, quid non,
Plenius ac melius Chrysippo et Crantore dicit.*

[Who speaks of what is fair, of what is base, of what is useful,
and of what is not,
more fully and better than Chrysippus and Crantor.] [262]

“exactly the same thing I would venture to assert of the masterpieces of Lessing, in regard to certain of the truths of natural religion, but mainly in regard to the doctrine of providence and the governance of God. I do not know any writer who could have laid out before the reader these great truths with the same sincerity, with the same persuasive force, and with the same interest, as he so movingly did.

Cur ita crediderim, nisi quid te detinet, audi!”

[Why I would thus place my faith in you (that you will keep your promise), unless something should hinder you, listen now!]

- 2 “In all human actions that we can observe, we notice a kind of opposition between elevation and lowness, lordliness and fellowship, that convinces us of the difficulty of combining both of these moral qualities in one character. Even our language attests to this opposition if we compare the secondary moral sense of the words with their primary physical meaning and contrast elevation or loftiness with lowness. [263] If that which is physically lofty is brought down low, it ceases to be lofty; and therefore one is inclined to assume that this impossibility of conjunction also holds in the case of the moral qualities, although in fact the very opposite is the case: the highest moral loftiness consists in lowness, and lordliness without fellowship is deprived of its true worth. It is no insignificant refinement in our conceptual vocabulary to mark the distinction between the moral and physical and to not let ourselves be blinded by common prejudices. That great king who raced his children around the table on hobby horses was right to ask his minister when the arrival of a foreign ambassador was suddenly

announced: ‘Is he married?’ ‘Yes,’ he was told. ‘Does he have children?’ ‘Yes.’ ‘Well, then, he may enter,’ were the words of this good king, who could rely only upon a father’s sensibility to be proof against judging his paternal lowness as a diminishment of his lordliness. Without his own experience of the matter, a courtier seldom recognizes this truth. Lowness in his eyes is usually a sign of slightness of intellect, and the fellowship of a father with his children is seen as little more than weakness. [264]

3 “The same difficulty one has in imagining how these two qualities could be found in conjunction has for a very long time led people into two opposing but equally erroneous paths in the matter of religion. One either exaggerates the loftiness of God or His lowness, and one soon ends up either excluding God from all involvement in human affairs or so weaving Him into them that He is compelled to share also in the weaknesses of human beings. The philosophers who recognized the infinity of God thought it was unworthy of Him to trouble Himself about the fate of humans and other less than infinite creatures. So they lifted their divinity entirely beyond the sublunar world and assigned to it as its only concern the preservation of the whole, and its only objects of care the genera and species of things, with complete disregard for the destinies and histories of individual beings, whether they belong to the class of rational or irrational creatures. [265] The popular system of poets and priests was directly opposed to this one. Not only did they ascribe the large natural cataclysms, the major events and revolutions of states, wars and their devastation, to the immediate involvement of their divinities, but they made their Jupiter into a domestic guest of their Philemon and Baucis, and they let him enjoy these poor peasants’ hospitality in the very midst of their downtrodden lives. If, on the one hand, this sort of representation had the virtue of bringing the divinity in a certain way closer to humanity, of making him the witness and judge of human actions as well as the comforter of humans in the hardships of this life, on the other hand it laid the foundation for the error of degrading the divinity to the level of human frailty and of not properly recognizing the divinity’s infinite grandeur and self-sufficiency.

4 “Furthermore, this popular system allowed for the hand of the divinity to be acknowledged only in extraordinary and astonishing situations, or in miraculous deeds—that is, only in those individual events where there appeared to be some intentionality at work. [266] In these situations it seemed that one could not doubt the participation of a conscious being acting freely and according to a purpose. The common course of things, however, where everything seems to go according to fixed rules, was held to be the working of nature, and any participation of the divinity was altogether excluded. The order of nature and the will of the divinity were placed at opposite poles from one another. The more

one discovered order and regularity in the course of nature, the less room was there for the governance of God, and hence it is that the first naturalists have also been the first atheists.

- 5 “You know,” he continued, “that in the last century, the greatest men had not yet completely straightened out these concepts. The philosophical prejudice grew ever stronger that the highest cause could act only in accordance with general laws. Anything unusual could only be an object of divine governance if it were a consequence of something usual. In and of itself, something unusual could be either in conformity with the intention of the divinity or contrary to it. [267] But insofar as the general laws of nature brought it about, it had won the approval, exactly as it had happened, of the Divine Ruler, or it would have had to be nullified through His direct intervention—that is, through a miracle.
- 6 “It is the supreme triumph of human wisdom to recognize that there is the most perfect harmony between the system supporting final causes and the system supporting efficient causes, and to acknowledge, with Shaftesbury and Leibniz, that God’s final purposes, and His participation in effectuating them, extend to the smallest change and every particular event that happens to each inanimate thing no less than to each living thing; and that from the similarities among particular things, events, and their final purposes there arise general teleological laws, and, in a completely harmonious way, there also arise general laws concerning efficient causes; that between these two sets of laws there is nowhere a gap, and that every work of nature is at the same time something that conforms to God’s purpose, since it flows from His omnipotence. [268] Not to discount God’s governance and providence in the very smallest of events, not to discount them precisely because they take place in the usual course of nature; to find reason, thus, to revere God more for what occurs naturally than for feats of wonder: it seems to me that this is the highest ennoblement of human thought and the most elevated expression that we may give to our reflections about God, His governance, and His providence.”
- 7 I applauded him warmly, and cited the words of the rabbi who had earlier noticed this contrast between elevation and lowness: “Everywhere that you find God’s grandeur and elevation, there also you can find His lowness.”² Especially remarkable are the passages from Scripture, with which this teacher, as is the custom of the rabbis, supports his teaching, and the lyrical force with which the psalmist’s genius invests it:

Who is like our God, the Eternal?

Who sits enthroned so high?

Whose gaze is so deep?

*In the sky?
On earth?"*
[Psalms 113: 5–6]

D. continued: [269] “Now, it seems to me, my friend, that this very doctrine has, on the one hand, never been presented by any author with more conviction or depicted with more detailed nuance, nor, on the other hand, rendered with more fervor and pious enthusiasm than it has been by our immortal Lessing. One need only recall that remarkable scene from his didactic poem in which, combining the clarity of the philosophical educator with the energy of the dramatic playwright, he gave flesh-and-blood reality to the true doctrine of the providence and governance of God while also showing the harm of that other conception of God according to which one is always running to discover some wondrous deed displaying the finger of God. A connection that was possible only for a Lessing, though perhaps only possible for him in our mother tongue. Only our mother tongue seems to have achieved the kind of development that permits the language of reason to be given such vivid and lifelike embodiment.” [270]

8 “It seems to me,” I said, “as if Lessing had the intention to write a sort of anti-*Candide* with his *Nathan*. The French writer [Voltaire] assembled all the powers of his wit, spurred on the irrepressible humor of his parodic spirit, and, in a word, strained all the extraordinary talents that providence had given him to produce a satire on providence itself. The German writer [Lessing] went to the same lengths in order to justify providence and to display it before the eyes of mortals with its purest and more brilliant visage. I can clearly remember when my late friend, soon after the publication of *Candide*, had toyed with the idea of writing a response to it, or rather a sequel to it, in which he would show by a series of events that all the evils and calumnies that Voltaire heaped up in his indictment against providence in the end had indeed turned out for the best and could be read as conforming to the wisest of intentions. [271] It seems that the French satirist had made his task too difficult and had heaped up more fictional evil than any fiction could ever turn back into good. Lessing thus preferred to take his own path, and he created an eventful drama that can easily stand up to *Candide* in its spirit and poetic élan. Further, in the excellence of its intentions, in its wisdom, and in its beneficial power, it compares to the other work much in the way that heaven compares to hell, or the ways of God compare to the ways of the Tempter.”

9 “And how dearly did our immortal friend have to pay for even this beautiful poem in praise of providence, this holy effort at justifying the ways of God to man!” D. said, once more taking up the conversation. “Oh! how it embittered

his last days if it did not even end up shortening his precious life. With the release of the *Fragments* he prepared to see a whole swarm of writers descend upon him who, whether or not they had any professional stake in the issue, would volunteer to serve in the war against the *Fragments*. Lessing thought himself strong enough to defend his guest against all the ill-tempered attacks of such opponents. [272] However many and various were the paths his opponents could take in launching their attack against him—and the success of their venture shows that they really did launch the attack—still he believed he could parry all the thrusts of those opponents who could never be described as motivated by fairness or by love of truth. But the whole affair ultimately stayed at the level of one of those schoolyard squabbles that both sides have reason to recall as an occasionally pleasant, and occasionally unpleasant, way to spend a number of hours but that could have no lasting impact upon the happiness of life, at least as he thought about it. But how the scene changed after the appearance of *Nathan!* Now the cabal moved from the study halls and bookstores into the private homes of his friends and acquaintances; everyone whispered into his neighbor's ear: Lessing had insulted Christianity, although he had only dared to reproach certain Christians and, at the very worst, had ventured to bring forward a few charges against Christendom. Basically, his *Nathan* had promoted, if we are to speak honestly, the true glory of Christendom. [273] At what a lofty level of enlightenment and culture must a nation stand in which a man can lift himself to this height of sentiment, can develop himself to this refinement of knowledge concerning things divine and human! At least, it seems to me, this is how posterity will judge him, but Lessing's contemporaries were of a different mind. Every rebuke he made against some of his co-religionists for their conceit and one-sided thinking, or that he allowed one of his dramatic characters to make, they heard as an insult directed at themselves personally by Lessing. The friend and acquaintance who was once welcome everywhere now found faces everywhere shut against him, glances everywhere restrained and frosty, greetings cold and farewells glad, and he saw himself abandoned by his friends and acquaintances and left exposed to all the sneers of his enemies. Strange! [274] Among the superstitious French, *Candide* had brought in its wake none of these terrible consequences; that libel against providence had aroused none of the animosity against Voltaire that Lessing had incurred from the most enlightened of Germans because of his defense of providence, his *Nathan*, and how sad were the changes all this wrought upon his spirit! Lessing, who, notwithstanding all of his scholarly work, was always the most agreeable presence in society and the most cheerful companion at table, now lost his jovial mood completely and became a sleepy, unfeeling automaton.” “Stop, friend!”

I interrupted. "Spare me this melancholy memory!" "All right," he said. "It is comfortless, this melancholic memory, and it is not my intention to awaken it. I wanted only to record what Lessing had done and suffered for the truths of the religion of reason, and what a debt of gratitude is owed to him from all its friends and adherents. Such a man should be too much held in honor by us to be so ill used as to be represented as a defender of an erroneous doctrine. If you insist on making your friend into a partner in your philosophical dialogues, at least give him no worse a cast of mind than he would have recognized as his own. [275] Let him defend no heretical doctrine, from which he stood very far removed." "You may well be right about that," I said. "But do you think it is not in accord with Lessing's character to have been delighted to see himself portrayed by me as the defender of pantheism or Spinozism, regardless of whether I had given him good or bad arguments?"

10 "No, I indeed think not."

11 "But the farther removed he stood from a persecuted doctrine, the more it was in his character to take up its cause, whether he was or was not its devoted follower, and to summon all his ingenuity in order to put forward one more point in its favor. The most erroneous proposition or the most absurd opinion, only let it be attacked with some shallow argument, and you can be sure that Lessing would have taken it under his protection. The spirit of inquiry was everything with him. [276] 'A truth maintained with shallow arguments,' he would say, 'is sheer prejudice, and is no less harmful than manifest error, and sometimes even more harmful, since such prejudice is a drag on exploration and kills the spirit of inquiry.' [277] I am certain that if a reviewer of the *Fragments* had defended it with bad arguments, Lessing would have been the first to attack them.

12 "It was with deep delight," I continued, "that I heard from your own mouth such praise of our friend. Oh! it is comforting, indeed most comforting, in the midst of an indifferent and ungrateful world, to keep fresh the memory of one's noble-minded benefactors and to see it bear fruit. I also praise the zeal with which you accept the religious principles of this thinker. I acknowledge with my whole heart the sincerity and honesty of his convictions, whenever the question concerned any of the most important truths of religion, and I do not think it is necessary to ask his departed spirit for forgiveness because I have tried to call upon it in defense of pantheism. Without making himself its devoted follower, he—or, at any rate, the man I knew—could zealously take up the cause of an error if the arguments were unsatisfactory with which one had sought to attack it.

13 "I have also shown in the exposition of my last lecture that purified pantheism could very easily exist alongside the truths of religion and ethics, and that its difference [from theism] is only in an oversubtle speculative point that has

not the least bearing on human actions and happiness, and that it rather lets everything remain in place that has any practical consequence of note either for people's lives or even for their opinions.

¹⁴ “Consider now this passage from Lessing's unpublished theological writings that will convince you that Lessing had in fact held views on this point of just this sort. It is, as I recall, from a youthful essay, from which he had read to me the most essential part, sometime very close to the beginning of our acquaintance. [278] But it shows at least the turn his thought had so early taken toward this kind of speculation, and, if I am right, a little pamphlet that he published shortly before his death contains certain unmistakable traces of the very same way of thinking.

¹⁵ “This passage is from the twelfth essay of his unpublished works, which he had titled ‘The Christianity of Reason.’ I will give you the most important sentences from it, consisting as it does entirely of isolated sentences that have been found unfinished in his papers. They read as follows:

§. 1.

The single most perfect being has from eternity concerned itself with nothing but the contemplation of that which is most perfect.

§. 2.

That which is most perfect is He Himself, therefore God has from all eternity only been able to think Himself.

§. 3.

Making something present before one's mind, willing something, and creating something are all one act in God. One can therefore say that everything that God makes present before His mind, this He also creates. [279]

§. 4.

God can think in only two ways; either He thinks all of His perfections at once, and Himself as the totality of them, or He thinks His perfections as divided, each one separated from the other, and each divided from Himself in proportion to its degree of perfection.

§. 5.

God thought of eternity in all its perfection—in other words, God created Himself from eternity as One Being to which no perfection was lacking that He Himself possessed.

“In the following sentences L. attempts by a not unsubtle turn of argument to explain the mystery of the Trinity, or even, as he would often rather immodestly put it in those early years, to demonstrate it metaphysically. To this youthful presumption [to demonstrate rationally the doctrine of the Trinity], a presumption that is outdone by the strictest adherents of the Athanasian creed itself, he

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admittedly returned in his later years. [280] However, one can see in this passage the clearest traces of it, and this serves as evidence that the essay dates to a very early period in his career. Lessing continues:

§. 13.

God thought of His perfections in their division—that is, He created beings, each of which has some of His perfections—for, I repeat once more, every thought is an act of creation for God.

§. 14.

All these beings together are called the world.

§. 15.

God could be able to think of His perfections in their division in infinite ways; there could therefore be infinitely many possible worlds if God did not always think of that which is the most perfect, and therefore had not thought of the sort of world that was the most perfect among those infinite worlds, and had not in this way actually produced it.

§. 16.

The most perfect manner of thinking of His perfections in their division is if one thinks of them in their gradation from more to less, as they follow one upon the other in such a way that nowhere is there a leap or a gap between them. [281]

§. 17.

According to such gradations, therefore, must the beings in this world be arranged. They must make up a series in which each link contains everything that is contained by the lower links and then something more, which something more, however, never reaches the ultimate limit.

§. 18.

Such a series must be an infinite series, and in this sense is the infinity of the world undeniable.

§. 19.

God creates nothing but simple beings, and that which is compound is nothing but a consequence of His creation.

§. 20.

Since each of these simple beings has something that the others have, and none can have something that the others would not, [282] among these simple beings there must be a harmony, harmony from which everything is to be explained that transpires among them—that is, that transpires in the world.

§. 21.

Up to this point a fortunate Christian will one day see natural science extend its borders. But only after long centuries—when one has seen all phenomena in nature reduced to their fundamental ground so that nothing remains but to trace them back to their true source.

§. 22.

Since these simple beings are like limited gods, their perfections must be similar to the perfections of God, as parts are similar to the whole.

§. 23.

It belongs to the perfections of God that He is conscious of His perfection, and also this, that He can act according to His perfection. Both are, as it were, the seal of His perfections. [283]

§. 24.

To the various gradations of His perfections there must also be combined various gradations of the consciousness of their perfections and also the capacity of acting according to them.

§. 25.

Beings that have perfections and are conscious of their perfections, and possess the capacity to act in accordance with them, are called moral beings—that is, such beings as can follow a law.

§. 26.

This law is taken from out of their own nature and can be none other than: act in accordance with your individual perfections.

§. 27.

Since there cannot possibly be found in the series of beings a leap, such beings must exist that are not clearly conscious of their perfections. [284]

“You see,” I finally added, “that Lessing had a conception of a completely refined pantheism just as I have represented it; in the finest harmony with everything that can have an impact upon our lives and our happiness; indeed, you see that he was on his way to connecting pantheistic concepts even with those of positive religion, and this synthesis was every bit as successful as was the emanation of the ancients, which for many centuries had been incorporated into religion as the only orthodox doctrine. On the long road that one must take from these oversubtle speculations to the realm of the practical in both religion and morals there are very many convenient points of entry where one can turn away from the side road [of speculative theory] and join up again with the open highway [of practice]. Just as when one is adding up a sum a later error can correct a previous one and set the calculation right, so can one inaccuracy in abstract speculation find itself soon enough overturned by another. [285] A small detour that would have subsequently taken us very far from our goal is set right by a second and equally slight adjustment in direction, and we are back on track. The disregard for the need to adapt theory to practice [in religion and morals] has always been the mother, or at least the nursemaid, of all persecution, and of all religious hatred among human beings.” [286]

LECTURE XVI

• • •

Explanation of the Concepts of Necessity, Randomness, Independence, and Dependence. Attempt at a New Proof for the Existence of God from the Incompleteness of Self-Knowledge.

- 1 If one demonstrates that a certain thing actually exists, the possibility of its existence is forthwith established. Everything that is actual must also be able to be conceived. Now, we had to admit that a contingent, dependent being exists, for our own existence is of the highest certainty, the consciousness of our limit-edness is evident beyond all dispute. We also had to admit that something that is dependent is inconceivable in the absence of something independent, and it therefore has no possibility of existing in its absence, and thus we were forced to admit the actuality of a necessary, independent being, in whose absence we as contingent, dependent beings could not possibly exist. [287] Which one of you was it who recently demanded that we more clearly distinguish between our terms of art, “dependent” and “contingent,” and their opposites, “independent” and “necessary”? W.: “I recall that it was I who asked you about this. The word ‘dependent’ seemed to me to have too much of the metaphor about it, and the word ‘necessary’ seemed to introduce the idea of some need or compulsion. I think that in the sense we are using it, the word ‘necessary’ should be freed of these associations. So, because you seemed to me to be using the paired terms [‘contingent’ and ‘dependent,’ ‘necessary’ and ‘independent’] as if they were synonymous, I asked you to clarify for me their difference.”
- 2 Let’s see, my son! If a thing A is supposed to be actual, must not the proposition *A actually exists* be true?
- 3 “Completely!”
- 4 Must it not therefore be graspable by reason?
- 5 W.: “By reason or by the senses. Truth must be knowable by the unimpaired power of our cognitive capacity. The senses, however, are, no less than reason, capable of unimpaired exercise.” [288]

- 6 Excellent! But have we not seen that both rational and sensible cognition flow from the very same source, and that all sensible knowledge allows itself to be resolved into rational knowledge? If we know through our senses that a sentence is true, the subject [of the sentence] must be conceived together with such individual conditioning factors that from them the predicate [of existence] will inevitably flow. The senses do not unfold these conditioning factors [of the subject] and then bring them together through the concept of space or time, in relation to which the senses locate the fact [of the subject's existence], but reason must be able to unfold these individual factors, explicate them, and thereby transform a sensibly cognized proposition into a rational one. Here is a tree! We know this by means of our senses, and so it is a sensibly cognized truth: a tree actually exists here. [289] All the conditioning factors that must be added to the concept of a tree, the soil in which it is implanted, the seed from which it has grown, air, sunshine, rain and everything else that must be conjoined with these things in order for the tree to have become actual, we bring them all together through the word "here," a reference to a location in space where these conditioning factors can be found all together. Our subjective reason is indeed incapable of unfolding all of these circumstances and proximate conditioning factors, but reason, objectively viewed, very well must be able to explicate them and to transform them into clear concepts: We have today a spring morning with fair weather. The time determination "today" brings together all the individual circumstances that have gone before and have contributed to the fact that this spring morning's weather has turned out to be in fact fair. If, however, we are going to maintain that the mind's sources of knowledge are identical, then reason, objectively viewed, must be able to explicate and clearly specify which proximate conditioning factors happened to contribute to the morning's fair weather and what was the extent of the relative contribution of each. [290] To summarize, each sensibly cognized proposition must in and of itself be capable of being resolved into a rationally true proposition whose subject contains all the individual conditioning factors by virtue of whose conjunction one can ascribe to the subject the predicate of its actual existence. Is this clear? "Perfectly!"
- 7 Thus, if the proposition *A actually exists* is a sensibly cognized truth, reason must be able to discover additionally for the subject *A* those conditioning factors by virtue of whose conjunction one ascribes to *A* the attribute of its actuality and that make it comprehensible how this subject and this attribute come to be joined together. Now, this joining together can happen in two ways. Either the conditioning factors that permit one to transform the sensibly cognized proposition into a true rational one include the actuality of something different from *A* and presuppose that thing's existence, as was the case with the actuality

of the tree or of this fair day. Without presupposing all the contributing causes that brought about the tree or the fair morning, the actuality of each is in and of itself not comprehensible. [291] Things of this kind are termed “dependent,” insofar as their actuality is not rationally comprehensible without presupposing other actual things that are different from them. Their existence flows not from their conceivability, but from their linkage to the actuality of some other thing. Insofar as their actual existence is not a consequence of their conceivability, they are termed “contingent”; however, insofar as the existence of another thing is the ground of their actuality, one says that they are dependent: their existence depends on the existence of a thing that is different from them without which their existence cannot be rationally comprehended.

8 Now, we must also admit that the sum of all contingent beings, taken together to form an infinity, could not possibly make comprehensible any thing’s actual existence in a manner that would satisfy reason. The question [of how the thing became actual] is able to be postponed, but not resolved. [292] We are doomed in the end, as in the beginning, to always once more presuppose among the conditioning factors of the subject the actuality of further things that, as they are likewise dependent and contingent, do not allow reason to advance one step closer [to fully comprehending the sensibly cognized proposition]; these newly presupposed factors can be more truly said to ensnarl the proposition’s comprehensibility than to unravel it. We were therefore compelled to seek our refuge in the existence of an independent and necessary being. “Independent” means that the being’s existence is conceivable without presupposing the existence of anything different from it; “necessary” means that its conceivability is by itself sufficient to ground its actual existence—a being, in other words, that is actual because it can be conceived because it is possible. This was the second situation in which the proposition *A actually exists* can be true—namely, if the actuality of something different does not belong among the conditioning factors of the subject—that is, if its mere conceivability suffices to ground its existence.

9 The characteristics of things that are contingent, dependent, necessary, and independent are in this way, I think, clearly enough explicated. [293] Insofar as, for the existence of a being, the actuality of another being need not be presupposed, the being will be termed “independent”; insofar, however, as this same being’s existence flows out of its conceivability and insofar as the contrary possibility—namely, its nonexistence—is in and of itself not conceivable are we able to ascribe necessity to this being, and we can say: God is a necessary being—that is, the existence of God flows out of His conceivability, and the contrary or His nonexistence is in and of itself not conceivable. Is such a being possible? We are not required to ask this question after we have been led to conclude the exis-

tence of such a being by a valid chain of deductions based upon the indubitable conviction we have in our own existence. A concept must contain truth if it is one we are brought to by the undiminished power of our cognitive capacity. If something contingent exists, a necessary being must exist, and, even more than this, such a being must be conceivable. [294]

10 Let me now attempt another proof [of God's necessary being]. As far as I know, it has not yet been touched upon by any philosopher. Listen well, then, my sons, and bear in mind that whenever I allow myself to take particular pride in my own thoughts, I am prone to trip and fall.

11 Besides the immediate sensation of my own existence, which, as we have seen, is secure from every possible doubt, I must accept the unimpeachable truth of the following perception: *I am not merely that which I clearly know about myself*, which amounts to the same thing as saying: *There is more belonging to my existence than what I am aware of in my conscious mind*, and also this: *What I know about myself is in and of itself capable of a greater unfolding, a greater clarity, and a greater completeness, than I am capable of providing*. This is a point that, I think, possesses nothing less than undeniable certainty. As a perception of our inner sense, it has subjective certitude. [295] And since whenever my thoughts have myself as their object, their subject is also my own I; the attribute of being immediately known can also be predicated of myself. The feeling that I do not know everything that belongs to my existence cannot be a trick or illusion of my senses, for, in the first place, we are not ascribing the content of an inner perception to an external object; nor are we trying to join together reports from various senses to create a single object; nor are we inferring from what happens frequently that it always happens. All of these are sources of sensory illusions, as we saw in the propaedeutic lectures, and, in any case, this illusion would itself prove that we do not know ourselves with complete accuracy, and therefore there is much that is actual within us of which we are not conscious. In fact, neither our body nor our mind could be actual if they only were what we have a clear consciousness of in regard to them.¹

12 Now, I maintain that not only must everything that is possible be conceived of as possible by some thinking being, but also that everything that is actual must be conceived of as actual by some thinking being. [296] That which no thinking being represents in his mind as possible is not in fact possible, and, what is more, that which is not conceived of as actual by any thinking being cannot in fact be actual. These propositions seem to be already a part of the commonsense view of things. Each possible concept is conceived of as an alteration of a subject, and, thus conceived, it is a thought in a thinking being. So this concept must have at least an ideal existence—that is, it must be a true concept in the mind of some

thinking being—and this was the first half of our proposition: every possibility must be conceived of as a possibility.

13 But every actuality, too, if it is to be true, must be known and grasped as a truth by some being. Each thing has its corresponding concept; each object must be represented in some subject; each original must be reproduced in some mirror. A thing without a concept has no truth, and a truth in the absence of being affirmed by any being does not carry the slightest degree of certainty with itself and is therefore not a truth. [297]

14 If these propositions are admitted, then it follows with palpable obviousness that there must exist a being that represents before itself everything that belongs to my existence in the clearest, purest, and most detailed manner. Any limited cognition could not contain everything that belongs to my actual existence. The consciousness and the unclouded awareness possessed by any contingent being, or even by all contingent beings taken together, does not reach as far as [to unfold] the existence of a single dust mote in a sunbeam. In the mote's actuality there lie infinitely many facets that cannot be comprehended in perfect clarity, whether in their extent or in their intensity, by the combined cognitive power of all contingent beings. In a word, to grasp with the highest level of cognition any truth as a possible truth is beyond the power of a contingent being, just as it is also beyond its power to grasp in perfect completeness any truth as an actual truth. Therefore there must exist a thinking being, an understanding, that conceives in the most perfect manner the totality of all possibilities as possible, the totality of all actualities as actual. [298] This means that the thinking being represents all of these things before itself in their most complete unfolding possible, in accordance with their network of coordinated as well as subordinated interrelations, and in the clearest, most complete, and most detailed manner. *There is an infinite understanding, and so on.*

15 What in this chain of deductions could still be unclear is perhaps the proposition that everything actual must be conceived of as actual by a thinking being. I can very well see, some might say, that everything actual could not help but be conceivable. But how does it follow from this that it must in fact be conceived of by some specific being? Is this not to deduce actuality from possibility, coming-to-be from able-to-be? One seems, therefore, to beg or, rather, surreptitiously obtain what in the first place we set out to prove. Is it not this that makes you still have some concerns?

16 “*This very thing,*” was the unanimous answer.

17 It seems to me that the word “able” is once again causing us, by its ambiguity, to be confused in our thinking. [299] We must avoid the word if we want to avoid its snare. If we say of a thing that it has an ability; that it is able to do something

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or suffer something; that it has a capacity, ability, or facility for something, doesn't this connote a certain possibility that we ascribe to it?

18 “Nothing else! However, one does distinguish among distant, close, and immediate possibilities.”

19 Just so! But however close or immediate it may be, it still remains a mere possibility, as the logicians call it, a possibility of which nothing has yet become actual. The air that surrounds us, for example, has within itself an elasticity, or an ability to be expanded beyond its present condition. And one ascribes to me, who now am sitting here, a capacity to stand up even when I am not actually exercising this capacity. In all these cases, therefore, we assert of the subjects mere possibilities as predicates. But how can mere possibilities exist as actual predicates?

20 “It seems entirely incomprehensible.” [300]

21 Do we not contradict ourselves when we ascribe to a thing that actually exists something that does not actually exist, as a determining feature of it; if we hold a mere possibility to be a predicate of that which is actual?

22 “At any rate, it seems we contradict ourselves.”

23 And yet the totality of human knowledge is full of these seeming contradictions, these abilities, facilities, distant or near possibilities, great or small capacities, talents, and so on, by which actually existing things are characterized and distinguished from each other. How does this happen? Are we on this account to throw out the whole mass of human knowledge as self-contradictory?

24 “Surely not. It seems merely that we have been caught in the trap of a terminological difficulty, which we may not have the ability to escape from now (if I may use a similarly suspicious expression).”

25 My son, you've hit the nail on the head! [301] It is a mere terminological difficulty that we have to clear out of the way in order to dispel the appearance of self-contradiction. In principle, whatever is possible, insofar as it is only possible, is no objective predicate of things. If we assign to any object a possibility as one of its determining features, we are only saying that by virtue of its presently determined condition one can also understand how, under other circumstances, it could come to take on that feature that we now ascribe to it as possible. To ascribe ductility to gold, or elasticity to the air, or mobility to a seated person is only, in the case of gold, to declare that by virtue of its present actually determined condition one can understand how under other circumstances it could actually be beaten out; or it is to assert of the air that its presently determined condition does not contradict its coming to be expanded; and of the seated person it is to claim that the parts of his motor system now employed in sitting, when directed by different causes of movement, would make him stand up or

walk. [302] For all these and similar cases of asserting possibility, that which actually exists supplies the basis, and the possibility attributed to what exists is the thought that under other circumstances its presently determined condition could be otherwise modified. Is this now clear?²

26 “I can think of no objection to it.”

27 Mere possibilities may not be predicated of things as objectively determined features or predicates; otherwise mere possibilities would have to be at the same time actually existent, but this is obviously self-contradictory. But from the present state—in other words, from the actually determined condition of a thing—a thought can arise in a thinking subject that under other circumstances a differently determined condition would pertain to that thing, and that therefore this other condition is able to be conceived by him [in other words, it is, in his estimation, possible]. All possibilities have therefore an ideal existence in the thinking subject, and they are ascribed to the object by this subject as thinkable possibilities. An unthought possibility is a true no-thing. [303] If something thinkable is supposed to be actually thought of, but by no thinking being, as an attribute of some actual thing, or if something that is distinguishable from something else is supposed to be actually so distinguished but by no one in particular, and if something that is specifiable is supposed to be actually specified but by no thinking subject, then either that which is only possible is assumed to be at the same actually existent, or one is joining words together whose concepts contradict one another.

28 “Excellent! Now it seems that all the doubts that gave us pause in regard to your proposition have been happily dispelled.”

29 So every actual thing must not only be conceivable, but it must also be thought of by some being. For every instance of real existence there corresponds in some subject an instance of ideal existence; for every object there is a representation. In the absence of the being known of what is knowable, there is nothing knowable to be known; in the absence of the being observed of a distinguishable feature, there is no distinguishable feature to observe; in the absence of a concept, no object actually exists. Do you grant this?

30 “How can we do anything else?”

31 This match-up between object and concept admits of no exception. [304] Every distinguishable feature, every distinguishable sign of an object must be thought of by some thinking subject just in the way that one finds it in the object, conceived of in all its truth, with the highest possible clarity, completeness, and comprehensiveness. So long as one distinguishable feature remains behind and is nowhere observed, so long as one degree of unfolding remains to be unfolded,

or something to be distinguished is not distinguished—in summary, with the slightest lack of match-up between object and concept—we involve ourselves once again in the contradiction of taking something that is only possible to be an objective predicate of something actual.

32 “All this was granted.”

33 And now it is an easy matter to take this and apply it to the earlier argument against whose conclusion some doubts had been raised. I cannot deny my own existence. It is for me equally undeniable that there are distinguishable features and conditioning factors pertaining to my actual existence that I am not aware of with my conscious mind, and that in regard to even those features and factors of which I am aware, I am far from having perfectly matched my concepts of them with their reality. [305] My concepts are neither so true, so pure, so complete, detailed, and matching—in a word, between the concept and the object one does not find the most perfect match-up—if I only consider what I am aware of about myself. The necessity of this conclusion was proved earlier. I also cannot deny that a limited being—indeed, that the sum total of all limited beings, be they finite or infinite in number—is incapable of grasping how I am constituted in a manner that matches up completely with my reality.

34 Whoever recognizes in even a limited way the interconnected web of all truths and the unfathomable depth of all knowledge will admit that not one part of all this can be known in its fullest perfection or with the maximum clarity of conscious awareness unless the whole sum and substance of truth and knowledge be understood in just the same measure, with the same truth, certainty, clarity, and completeness. [306]

35 There must therefore necessarily be a thinking being, an understanding, that not only represents before itself me, together with all my features, traits, and distinctive characteristics, but the sum total of all possibilities as possible, the sum total of all actualities as actual—in a word, the sum total and the interconnected web of all truths in their greatest possible unfolding, with the clearest, most complete, and most detailed expression. There exists an infinite understanding.

36 But the fact that comprehension cannot exist without action, nor cognition without approbation or disapprobation, nor infinite understanding without the most perfect will, has already been set forth in the foregoing at sufficient length.

37 We have therefore in this way a new systematic proof of the existence of God based on the incompleteness of our self-knowledge. Examine it well, this thought of mine, dear friends! It seems to me to be as productive as it is foundational. The chain of deductions that has served to bring us here, consists in the following links:

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- 38 Everything actual is actual in all its completeness.[307]
- 39 To the completeness of the object there corresponds in some thinking being
the detailed exposition of its concept.
- 40 Complete and detailed concepts can only be found in a perfect understand-
ing, and a perfect understanding is not found without a perfect will; the greatest
comprehension is not found without the freest choice and the most efficacious
expression of its power. [308]

LECTURE XVII

■ ■ ■

A priori Grounds for Proof of the Existence of a Most Perfect, Necessary, Independent Being.

- 1 The concept of that which is necessary, as it was developed in the last lecture, could easily lead an audacious thinker such as Descartes to embark on the trail of discovering an a priori proof for the existence of such a being. If it is indeed true that the actuality of this being depends only on its possibility, and if there is a firmly established route by which to travel from the conceivability of that which is necessary to its actual existence, perhaps it is within the power of human reason to discover this route and thereby to break ground for a new path to a truth that it holds so dear. Without presupposing some actually existing thing, not even one's own existence, however little it is subject to doubt, without any empirical claims based upon external or internal sensation, a human being could, by setting forth from this explication [of the concept of that which is necessary] and by taking secure steps, finally arrive at the truth: *that there is a God!* [309]
- 2 Audacious and unprecedented would be the only way to describe this great advance. In the whole realm of human knowledge there is no example of this type of deduction. Everywhere one argues from possibility to possibility or from actuality to actuality. Real existence outside the mind has its own links by which it is joined together, and likewise ideal existence within the mind has its own links; one thing corresponds with another, just as one concept corresponds with another. Where one concept makes another necessary, so also does one thing have another as its result; in this way the necessary link between ideal entities that we discover by reason can also be applied to real entities outside of us. But nowhere is there an instance where one can deduce the object from the concept, or real, objective existence from an ideal existence, as it is supposed to happen in the case of the necessary being.
- 3 But the rarity of this happening, or better, the uniqueness of it, should cause us no second thoughts in this case. [310] Such uniqueness is here precisely the mark of truth. Since there can be no more than one substance of this nature, since apart from this single substance the actuality of no other thing can be validly

deduced from its conceivability, there can be only one case in which this kind of proof could be brought forward. In the whole realm of all human knowledge, this case must be the only one, without precedent or example, if the route [from conceivability to existence] is one that leads to the truth.

4 To find this route, Descartes attempted to effect a shift between two equally valid concepts. In place of the concept of the necessary being he put that of the infinite, perfect being. It is obvious that the necessary being does not have any changeable limitations, and therefore it must possess all perfections in the highest degree. In the idea of a necessary being, therefore, there lies the totality of all the perfect properties that can belong to any being. This being the case, Descartes further concluded, existence is obviously one of the perfect properties of things, and thus the concept of that which is necessary includes in itself the perfection of existence. [311] Therefore, that which is necessary must also actually exist. In this way we were supposed to have discovered, through a subtle shifting of the concept, the only route that joins the realm of actuality with the realm of possibility and that leads from the concept to the object.

5 “Too quickly,” cried Leibniz to his audacious predecessor, “the jump that you have accomplished for yourself by this route is indeed without any danger, but reason ought to make progress by walking and not by jumping. When we are convinced by other arguments that a necessary being exists, then the possibility of its existence is forthwith given. But if the existence of this being is to be deduced from its possibility, we have to prove this possibility beforehand. We must first prove by other arguments that the notion of a necessary, infinite, or perfect being is a true one and does not combine properties that cancel each other out.” [312]

6 Fortunately, this deficiency can be easily remedied, and the gaps in reasoning are able to be filled in. If properties are truly contradictory, one property must annul what the other posits, one deny what the other affirms, of the very same subject. Now, of the necessary being all realities are affirmed in the highest degree, and all defects and limitations are denied. All positive predicates are attributed to it, and all negative ones are removed from it. Here, then, there is nothing contradictory that might cause us to be concerned, and there is nothing that could be mutually annulling. All perfections in the highest degree are also in concord with one another in the highest degree, they harmonize in the most perfect unison, and their consonance cannot bring forth any contradiction, inconceivability, or, what is the highest form of discord, untruth. This is based on another doctrine of Leibniz, that all perfections are affirmative properties, and, vice versa, all affirmative predicates of things are perfections. [313] If, therefore, the union of all affirmative predicates or perfections cannot be something that

is inconceivable, and if existence obviously belongs together with the totality of all perfections, then we can correctly conclude that existence is inseparable from the concept of that which is infinite or most perfect. Everything finite can, as far as its concept goes, be true without having actual existence ascribed to it. However, the Infinite, that which is limitless and most perfect, would have to be also untrue as a concept if it were such a thing as could not exist. And now, standing there before us, we may hope to have found the pure, systematic argument for the existence of God. It should be now standing unshakably before us, founded upon its own self-evidence.

- 7 "Not so," say some opponents of this type of proof; "you are still building, as usual, on a foundation whose strength you have not properly investigated. In truth, you have manufactured for yourselves an abstract concept, and you have heaped upon it all the properties you can possibly think of. [314] We certainly do not intend to deny you the freedom to manufacture whatever concept you like and to give it your stamp of approval. But no sooner have you done this than you surreptitiously try to manufacture its existence, saying: to make the package complete, we must also take this other property and give the concept an actual existence. Isn't this rather an underhanded procedure?"
- 8 Nothing could be less so, as it seems to me at least. I think I can justify this procedure against all the accusations of this nature.
- 9 First of all, abstract concepts are not merely arbitrary. They must at least contain truth, and this truth does not depend on the arbitrary power of our will. As modifications of our thinking being, they must have an ideal existence; they must be logically conceivable in order to be possible objects of our thought. Now, we can go further than this: a limited being can, as a modification of myself, be an object of thought without my attributing to it an existence in actuality. [315] It may have an ideal existence even while I deny to it real existence. It may be a mere concept without an object. The necessary being, however, can either not be an object of thought or, as a modification of myself, have no truth, or I must at least think of it as having actual existence. It is either concept and object at one and the same time, or it is neither one nor the other. This being can absolutely not be a concept without an object; this being cannot be an object of thought if it is only thought of as a mere modification of our cognitive capacity. We have merely to demonstrate the conceivability of this concept and we are straight-away compelled to think of it as a being that actually exists. Apart from its ideal existence, which also pertains to a finite being insofar as truth pertains to it, the Infinite must also have real existence ascribed to it. I can discover nothing dishonest in this procedure, nothing surreptitious, such as our opponent alleges.

- 10 That the concept of the Infinite is a possible object of thought was previously set forth in detail by Leibniz. [316] I believe I can demonstrate in another, more easily grasped manner how the Infinite can be an object of thought.
- 11 All truth must be a possible object of cognition. Furthermore, the purer the truth, the greater the understanding by which it is grasped and comprehended; also, the more perfect the knowledge, the more perfect the knowing being.
- 12 The purest truth can be grasped and comprehended only by the most perfect understanding. The highest cognitive power is fittingly joined to the highest knowledge. Only an infinite power comprehends the truth in all its purity.
- 13 Now, the purest truth is unquestionably a concept that can be an object of thought, and therefore there must be an understanding that alone can grasp this truth. Further, the highest understanding, the infinite cognitive power, is a concept that is also not an impossible object of thought. If the characteristics of this concept were to annul each other, then the purest truth would be something that is self-contradictory, and this is absurd. [317]
- 14 But how could this be? Could the concept of that which is most perfect, even in the absence of the perfection of the existence, still remain a possible object of thought? Can the sum and substance of all realities be thought of without the reality of actual existence? If this is not possible, then we have secured the bedrock of our conclusion. That which is most perfect must also actually exist.
- 15 “Precisely here is where you make your surreptitious move,” our opponents shout out. “In order to call it into existence, you presume existence to be a characteristic of a thing over and above all its other possible properties. You look upon existence, in virtue of that scholastic definition of yours, as a complement to the essence (*complementum essentiae*), an addendum, as it were, to the possibility of a thing. Because in our everyday speech we talk about existence just as we do about the characteristics of things, because we say a thing is actual, just as we say a number is even or a figure is round, so therefore you presume that existence is on par in its nature with the other properties and characteristics of things, and upon this presupposition you build your argumentative edifice. [318] But this presupposition is exactly what we cannot concede to you. Existence is no mere property, no addendum, no complement; rather, it is the positing of all the properties and characteristics of a thing. In the absence of this positing, these properties remain mere abstract concepts.”¹
- 16 They go on to say that existence is what really needs to be explained; however, existence may prefer to remain unexplained. You know how averse I am to enwrap with words such an inwardly sensed apperception [as we have when we feel that something really exists]. It is enough that we all associate approximately the same representation with this word. The concept [of existence] arose within

all of us in a similar way when we looked for a characteristic common to all of our own actions and passions, and since this characteristic has such universality, it can be difficult, perhaps it is even impossible, for it to be further dissected or analyzed into constituent parts. [319] Be this as it may, our opponents are still not entirely wrong to claim that existence has its own identifying features by which it is distinguished from all the characteristics and qualities of things, and that it is not as simple as we make it out to be to grasp these features so that we can, as it were, complete the tally in our inventory of all the most perfect being's properties.

- 17 I can grant my opponents that much. Let it be forever the case that actual existence is not a property of a thing but is rather the positing of all the properties of a thing, or let it be something inexplicable that is, however, understood by all of us; it still is sufficient for my purposes that I can think of something contingent without positing its existence.² I can leave out existence from the concept of something contingent without thereby annulling the concept. It remains a concept, but without an object. But this does not hold in the case of the necessary being. I cannot split off existence from the concept of this being without annihilating the concept itself. I cannot help but think of the concept with the object, or I must just let the concept go. [320] Everything rests on this important difference, and this difference in no way rests upon an arbitrary definition; it follows from the concept itself, and it cannot be doubted by even the stubbornest opponent.
- 18 If that unexplained [concept of] existence still causes someone second thoughts, in an earlier work of mine^{*} I advised a person in such a situation to avoid the word ["existence"], and to start from non-being, which seems to have less difficulty.³ What is not, it goes without saying, must either be impossible or only possible. In the first case, its inner defining properties must contradict one another—in other words, the same predicate must at the same time be asserted and denied of the same object. In the second case, these properties will not contain a contradiction, but they will not permit us to understand why the thing [that does not exist] should not rather *exist* than *not exist*. The one [i.e., the condition of nonexistence] or the other [i.e., the condition of existence] can be conjoined with that essential part of the thing by virtue of which we speak of it as possible. [321] The existence of such a thing does not belong to its inner possibility, nor to its essence, nor to its properties, and therefore it is a mere contingency (mode), whose actuality cannot be otherwise understood than as arising from the actuality of some other thing. For any contingency is a

* On Certainty

determination that neither follows from nor is comprehensible on the basis of its mere possibility, and its actuality cannot be explicated otherwise than from another actuality. Such an existence is thus dependent, not independent. This point requires no long proof. Now, such a [contingent] existence is not fitting for the perfect being, for it would contradict its essence. Since everyone recognizes that an independent existence is a greater perfection than a dependent one, the proposition that the most perfect being is a contingent being is a manifest contradiction. [322] The most perfect being is either actual, or it contains a contradiction. The reason for this is that it cannot be merely possible, as has been proven before; therefore there remain only two options: either that it is actual or that it is impossible.

19 In sum, contingent beings, as mere thoughts, can be objects of thought without having actual existence. To predicate nonexistence of them does not generate a contradiction. The idea of such beings can be a mere thought, a concept without an object, an alteration, lacking objective existence, within a thinking being. Its essence does not conjoin only affirmative properties, and none of them is found in its highest degree. You can have this idea [of any contingent being], and the affirmative property of existence can be omitted from it. The necessary being, however, conjoins all affirmative properties and characteristics in the highest degree. Each one of them would be inconceivable without all the rest. [323] Therefore, the Infinite Being, if it lacks the affirmative predicate of existence, would be something self-contradictory. It may either not be an object of thought at all, or not otherwise an object of thought than as it is thought together with the predicate of actual existence. The representation itself, the very idea of a necessary being, is an inconsistent idea so long as we separate existence from it. We think of either concept and object at the same time, or the concept itself vanishes. We can either simply not have the necessary being as a possible object of thought, or we must ascribe to it actual existence.

20 “But doesn’t your argument, when all is said and done, start with the thoughts in your head and end with actuality?” so our opponents go on to ask. “Doesn’t it start with your own ability or inability to form concepts and end with the nature of things? The necessary being is supposed to have to actually exist, because no human being can think of it in any other way. Does this also take into account our shortsightedness? Is there anyone [with perfect vision] who can assure us that what we must think of as actually existing is something that in fact actually exists?”⁴ [324]

21 I reply: It would be quite a boon to us if we could at least get our opponents to admit that a human being, when he forms the thought of a divinity, must think of this divinity as actually existing. This admission would be a very important

step forward. The victory would be complete for our whole system of human knowledge, for our character, and for our deeds, since what more can any human being do than strive for as much certitude as our mortal powers allow and act in accordance with this certitude? But still, to satisfy my passion for speculative matters, I would take one further step and add this to what has already been admitted: not only the shortsighted man, but every thinking being, whatever may be the farthest reach and horizon of his intellectual powers, must think of the necessary being as actually existing. The contrary of this proposition is not only for us, but in and of itself, no possible object of thought. Something that is self-contradictory, that annuls and annihilates itself, cannot be an object of thought for any thinking being. [325] If the proposition *A is not actual* is unthinkable and therefore not true, the subject *A* is either not a possible object of thought or the opposite is the case: one must admit, and therefore it must be true, that *A* actually exists. Now, it has been proved that the negative statement *the necessary being is not actual* is unthinkable, for the reason that the negating predicate is diametrically in contradiction with the subject. This proposition can therefore be thought of as true neither by us, nor by any thinking being. The contrary of this proposition, or the affirmative proposition, that *the necessary being actually exists*, must be accepted by every thinking being; it is a consequence of the undiminished power of our thought and is therefore the truth. And with this admission the victory on our side would be complete. For what more could we desire than to prove that the proposition *the most perfect being actually exists* is a consequence of the undiminished power of our thought and is not merely a subjective truth but is also the objective and irrefutable truth? [326] The assurance that all thinking beings, by virtue of their power of thinking, agree upon one rational proposition offers the highest certitude of its truth. What all rational beings must think in just one way and not otherwise is in this way and no other way true. Whoever demands more than this certitude is striving for something of which he has no concept and of which he can never attain a concept, and has only himself to blame if he finds in the end that his striving was in vain.

²² Let us summarize in a few words the results of these final colloquies of ours. In order for our reason to be able to assert the actuality a thing, its truth and its superior goodness must be given. The first is what our cognitive power demands; the second is what our power of approbation demands. Its truth makes it a concept that can be an object of thought, a modification of a thinking being, and it gives to it an ideal presentness [before the mind]. Its superior goodness makes it a real object and provides it with its actual existence. [327] *Everything that is has truth and superior goodness*, and the reverse also holds: *everything that has truth and superior goodness must also be actual*.

- 23 Contingent beings meet all the demands of our cognitive power; they have truth, but they do not under all circumstances also have superior goodness. Insofar as they are merely objects of thought—that is, insofar as they are concepts and modifications of the thinking being—one can think of them without thinking of them as actually existing objects. Under a certain condition (*secundum quid*) each of them is what is the best, and its existence depends upon this condition. Once circumstances or a certain condition of time and space brings it about that a contingent thing meets the requirements of superior goodness, once it emerges that this thing is the best thing at a certain time and place, it then and there comes into actuality, and to the concept of the thing there now also corresponds an object, to the ideal existence there corresponds actuality.
- 24 The necessary being, however, is in and of itself the most perfect being. [328] It is not dependent upon circumstances and conditions, and it not only possesses all the requirements of thinkability, but it must be thought of as actual by every thinking being, and it is utterly unthinkable as a concept without an object, as a modification without its own existence, as something possible without actuality, for it is under any circumstances and conditions just as perfect as it is true, just as necessarily actual as it is necessarily possible. As an object in actuality it is no less necessary than it is as an object of thought.
- 25 And in the understanding of this supreme being, that which is contingent is necessary, though as an object of thought but not as an object in actuality; the contingent thing is independent of space and time in regard to its truth, but it is dependent upon time and space in regard to its goodness and perfection. With the arrival of the right circumstances of time and space, and with the actualization of the conditions upon which the contingent thing depends, the existence of the contingent thing connects with its truth, and it arises. It is under these conditions that the contingent thing *then* and *there* also becomes that which is the best. [329] It thereupon changes from being only an object of divine knowledge to also being an object of divine approbation. Cognition on the part of the Infinite is in the highest degree alive, and His approbation is in the highest degree efficacious. As soon as the contingent thing becomes an object of His approbation, it becomes actual. What God gives Himself to think of as that which is best, there it stands! He speaks, and it comes into being, He commands and there it stands.
- 26 It is therefore no shameless presumption on the part of a child of the earth if he dares to argue from his finitude to the existence of the Infinite, or from his limitedness to the actuality of the most perfect being. It is quite befitting the immortal spirit of man to believe himself to be so related to the Godhead that from any of his thoughts he may find his way to Him. His shortsightedness

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notwithstanding, it is still permitted to him to attain a vision of the great truth that he himself depends upon the Godhead in a twofold relationship: as an *idea* and as a *real object*. [330] As an *idea*, he has from all eternity been known by the divine intellect, and, as a *real object*, he attained actuality from that moment when the conditions of time and space made him also a worthy object of divine approbation, so that, for a certain time and at a certain place, he himself, belonging to Him Who Is Best, became what is best.

To the Friends of Lessing

A Supplement to Mr. Jacobi's
Correspondence Concerning
the Doctrine of Spinoza

1786

- 1 [iii] My late friend entrusted to me the task of bringing this work to press, just as he did with his *Morning Hours*. How can I surrender it to the world without at least saying a word about the magnitude of my loss and the pain within my heart?²¹
- 2 How great a loss Mendelssohn's death means to scholarship, philosophy, and German literature is known to everyone for whom these things are important, but it hardly compares with the irreplaceable loss sustained by his friends! [iv] What the world was able to see of this man was the least part of his worth; it is simply impossible to glean from his works the true measure of the grandeur of his spirit, however full they may be of his broad and varied learning, and however graced with charm and wit. And how much less so [can one glean from them a true measure of] his moral goodness, his zeal to be of service to others, his humility—all the great virtues of his character that inspired our love! I freely confess that no blow can fall more heavily upon the very core of my being, no accident can more deeply wound me, than the death of this noble man.
- 3 The proximate cause of this so justifiably and so widely mourned death was the very thing that gave the spur to the composition of this work. [v] If it is true that thinking is generally not conducive to the working of our body's engine, one can imagine how the profound exertions of the thinking of a Mendelssohn would necessarily be ruinous to such a weak and unfortunately constructed machine. Nevertheless, this excellent man pushed forward in his work without any marked weakening of his health as long as he was still engaged in speculative matters. Only when [Johann] Lavater made his demands upon him were matters of the heart also set into motion, and suddenly his usual manner of life now brought in its wake quite frightening consequences, and had he lacked the spiritual fortitude with which this truly practical sage was able, for an entire year, to renounce every physical and intellectual pleasure, he would already at that time have been wrenched from the world and his friends. [vi] Sensual pleasure he steadfastly refused to the end [of the year]; it was incomprehensible how the food to which he restricted himself could maintain a human body, and it was touching to see him (with a cheerful countenance) invite his friends to enjoy

dishes and drinks that he himself, despite all their tempting attraction, could not dare to taste. Only the intellectual pleasure of reading and the even more enticing pleasure of his own work could he, as someone who was so completely a being of the spirit, no longer bear to do without. Shorter essays, which in his best hours he had attempted without incurring any harm, drew him little by little back into harness, and he began to follow the trail of his previously favorite ruminations. [vii] Had it been granted to him to travel upon his wonted path, had he not ever again been wrenched away from the sphere of his peaceful speculations, he would probably have held fast to life for many years hence, despite all his many activities.

4 The effort of writing the first part of his *Morning Hours* affected him powerfully; he extended to me his heartfelt thanks for having offered to take upon myself the burden of arranging for its printing, and he was determined to devote himself for a full month only to his normal activities, until he once more felt fully up to working on the second part [of *Morning Hours*]. But unexpectedly the now famous work of Mr. Jacobi appeared in print, and it touched him a little too closely for him to leave it unread. [viii] Initially, his inclination was to disbelieve in the existence of this book, but when this fact was quickly placed beyond any doubt, he tried to persuade himself that its content was not such [as had been reported]. The fact that Mr. Jacobi had been entertaining such a distrust of him and of his untarnished honor, thinking that he [Mendelssohn] would mention their previous correspondence despite his explicit promise to the contrary,* and that he would slanderously bring him [Jacobi] under the so grievous suspicion of atheism, this fact pained him, to be sure, but he was willing to overlook it. And since his book [*Morning Hours*] so undeniably demonstrated the groundlessness of this distrust in its deep silence, maintained from beginning to end, about that correspondence, all this by itself would not have altered his determination to give himself time to rest. [ix] But the fact that *Lessing*, a man so dear to him and with so firm a place in his memory, this friend of his youth, this man to whom he owed a large part of his education and, at the beginning of that education, the entirety of his knowledge of ancient and recent literature; this man on account of whom he first became a writer, one could almost say against his will; the fact that this man not only appeared before the world as an atheist, but also as a mocking jester and a hypocrite, while he, Mendelssohn, was supposed to carry on with his life and let all this pass; that fact was for him quite unbearable. His determination to give himself time to recuperate was, in a single moment, cast aside; he overcame his aversion to quarreling; [x] he wanted straightaway

* See page 79 of this text.

to uproot the initial impression that Jacobi's work was capable of making, and so, in composing the pages that soon followed, he sacrificed the last remnant of his strength to God and friendship. The unusual animation with which he spoke to me and several others about this matter, going into such detail, talking late into the evening hours, when he usually just listened or spoke about the most neutral topics, this animation showed only too clearly how much turmoil there was in his head and in his heart. At the same time, his plan for the second part of his *Morning Hours*, into which he hoped to weave the correspondence I have spoken of, had fallen to pieces; [xi] he could no longer so restfully put the work off until later, and he exerted himself to undertake a freshly designed project as regards the arrangement of its material and the manner of its explication. Considering the ferment that this too prolonged and too engrossing activity produced in his blood, and the overall, already greatly weakened, condition of his nervous system, it needed only the slightest external accident and this excellent man would be lost.

- 5 My readers will prefer to hear the story of his final illness and death from the mouth of the doctor who assisted him in his last moments. [xii] Privy Counselor [Markus] Herz, who was not only, like the rest of us, a partner [of Mendelssohn's] in the quest for the truth and a highly cherished friend, but also someone who lost in Mendelssohn an ornament and pillar of his nation, was, because of his heartfelt sorrow, unable to finish the story he tried to convey to me in person, so he bid me farewell in order to put it into writing. It is with his full knowledge that I am now publicly sharing his account. It not only brings great honor to our departed Mendelssohn but also to him [Herz], its author, because of the overriding warmth of human feeling it displays.
- 6 “As I said, my dear Engel, our *Moses* parted from life as he had cleaved to it, gently and wisely. [xiii] He crossed over as if to some business affair that he had long been preparing himself for, completely according to his manner, as he usually in his life undertook the performance of his good deeds, without making a noise or a fuss, with that easy grace with which he would slip away from the table where he so often looked on as we genially dined, and then would move over to the sofa under the bust of *Lessing*, where he let himself listen to us as we carried on without him. I will never forget it, his enviable death in my arms. Oh, if you, Engel, and all of you, his friends, had only been present at the death of this just man!
- 7 “It was first on Monday that I happened to hear that the good man was not well and that he was confined to his room. [xiv] I rushed to him and found him standing at his bureau engaged with his business ledgers. ‘How are you, my dear *Moses*? Are you sick?’ ‘I caught a cold on Saturday,’ he answered,

‘when I brought my essay dealing with the Jacobi business to Voss; it’s nice to no longer have this bothersome affair hanging around my neck.’ These last words he uttered with what was for him an unusual reluctance and displeasure that pierced me to the core. The fact is that in his life nothing had ever quite so much, or let me rather say, nothing at all had ever caused him such real emotional distress as this affair concerning his *Lessing*. [xv] ‘You wouldn’t believe,’ he continued, ‘how weak my memory has been for some time; my cash ledger is in complete disarray; there’s an item missing here and another there, and so I have had to get up now and make an effort at getting things to tally.’ He complained in more detail about his weakness, but he made little of his ailment; his pulse was normal and his breathing was free; only he had a deep, persistent cough, against which he availed himself of some ineffectual home remedy. Every now and then he sucked on a piece of sugar. This was always his favorite kind of candy, and on more than one occasion people had advised him to give it up. ‘Sugar,’ he used to say, ‘has only one problem: you can’t have sugar with it.’ [xvi] We spoke then about the state of medicine, of which he had a very general idea, and about the intellectual skills and the breadth of related scientific knowledge that are by and large required of practicing doctors, and so I left him without prescribing anything. His body was simply incapable of tolerating any remedy a doctor could think of.

8 “Tuesday midmorning I found him wrapped in a fur, sitting on the sofa under his bust of *Lessing*, at first glance sicker and weaker. ‘I am really and truly sick today, my dear doctor,’ he said. ‘My cough will not go away; I cannot eat, I have not slept, and I have hardly any energy left.’ Still, he talked with complete clarity of mind about the intellectual abilities of his youngest son, who was there in the room with him. [xvii] His pulse was somewhat weak and noticeably fluctuating. I persuaded him that every once in a while he should take a spoonful of a very mild and cooling little infusion I prepared.

9 “In the evening by five o’clock he lay on the couch in a rather strong fever, but his breathing was freer and his spirits were brighter than in the morning. At nine o’clock the fever was almost completely gone, his breathing remained freer, and he only showed me a small area in his chest where he felt tightness, but he added at once that it felt like gaseous bloating. I agreed with Mr. D. Bloch that he should be given an enema and that warm compresses should be laid on the spot where he sensed discomfort. [xviii] In the event that the tightness would not dissipate, we agreed to open one of his veins. His mood was rather cheerful; when some of us said that there were too many people in his room, he replied with some humor: ‘According to Achard’s experiments, such air is the healthiest.’ On this note we wished him good night.

10 “Wednesday in the morning his son came by at around seven o’clock to call on me; he was upset and he asked me to come immediately to his father, who was very restless. I hurried there and found him on his sofa; no longer under *Lessing’s* bust, since this now stood on the bureau across from him. [xix] I was startled when I first saw him; his eyes no longer possessed their piercing fire, his face was haggard and pale. He received me in his friendly manner, with a handshake. ‘Do not take it amiss, my dear doctor, that I troubled you so early in the day; I have had a miserable night. The tightness disappeared once the compresses were put on, but I have had some evacuations that have completely shattered me. I feel anxious and restless, I feel pressure rising up from my abdomen, and my chest is very congested.’ His pulse was almost normal, only a little weak, without the slightest irregularity. I explained to him after several minutes of reflection that I was totally nonplussed. [xx] ‘I truly do not know, my dear Moses, what can be done for you, because you absolutely are not strong enough for any remedies. Everything causes bloating, anxiety, and the least little thing might carry you beyond the point of no return.’ ‘I want to sit up again; maybe it will be better that way,’ he said. He raised himself up with considerable force, sat down on a nearby chair, stood up again after half a minute, sat on the sofa, and said, ‘It’s now over, I think.’ But his face grew more and more twisted in discomfort, and while I was turning to go into the adjacent open room to report on his condition to his wife and his sons-in-law and to ask them to call for an assistant to help me, I heard a noise from the sofa. [xxi] I sprang toward him, and there he lay, having slipped down a little from where he had been sitting, his head tossed backward, a bit of foam at his mouth; his breathing, pulse, and life, gone. We tried different things to revive him, but in vain. He lay there without any sign of his previous wheezing breath or jerky movements, without any distortion in his face, but only with his usual kindness on his lips, as if an angel had sped him on his way from the earth with a kiss. His death was one of those that are rare in nature, a collapse from utter exhaustion. The lamp was extinguished because its oil had run out, and only a man like him, with his wisdom, self-control, moderation, and spiritual calm, could keep the flame of his physical constitution burning for 57 years. [xxii] I reached out and grasped his head in that first moment of terror, and I remained transfixed in that position, only God knows how long. To collapse beside him and together with him to depart this life, that was my most burning wish, the strongest I have ever felt or will ever feel.

11 “Farewell! May Heaven now embrace our friends for us!” [xxiii]

Engel.

IF A NATIVE OF ETHIOPIA were on a Sudden transported into Europe, and plac'd either at Paris or Venice at a time of Carnival, when the general face of mankind was disguis'd and almost every Creature wore a Mask; t'is probable he wou'l for some time be at a stand, before he discover'd the Cheat: not imagining that a whole People cou'd be so fantastical, as upon agreement, at an appointed time, to transform themselves by a Variety of Habits, and make it a Solemn Practice to impose on one another, by this universal confusion of Characters and Persons. Tho he might at first perhaps have looked on this with a serious eye, it wou'd be hardly possible for him to hold his Countenance, when he had perceiv'd what was carrying on. The Europeans, on their Side, might laugh perhaps at the Simplicity. But our Ethiopian wou'd certainly laugh with better reason. [xxiv] T'is easy to see which of the two wou'd be ridiculous, bear a double share of Ridicule. However, shou'd it so happen, that in the Transport of ridicule, our Ethiopian, having his Head still running upon Masks, and knowing nothing of the fair Complexion and Common Dress of the Europeans, shou'd upon the Sight of a natural face and Habit, laugh just as heartily as before: wou'd not he in his turn become ridiculous, by carrying the jest too far; when by a silly presumption he took Nature for mere Art, and mistook perhaps a Man of Sobriety and Sense for one of those ridiculous Mummers.

—Earl of Shaftesbury, *Essay on the Freedom of Wit and Humour*,

Part II. Sect. I.² [1]

¹ Our friend's allegiance to Spinozism, it is claimed, is no mere hypothesis, as the Patriarch in *Nathan* puts it, that one only contrives for the sake of debating the pros and contras of an argument.³ A man of established reputation in the republic of learned letters, Mr. Jacobi, steps before the public and declares it to be a veritable fact: Lessing was really and truly a Spinozist. The proofs adduced in this public heresy trial, he claims, can be found in an epistolary exchange

To the Friends of Lessing

between himself, a third party,⁴ and me, and it is further alleged that this correspondence establishes the fact [of Lessing's Spinozism] beyond the shadow of a doubt.

2 This correspondence is actually the inciting reason behind my having sped up, quite contrary to my intention, the release of my *Morning Hours; or, Lectures on the Existence of God*, a work whose plan was conceived some years before. [2] I mentioned this inciting reason in the preface to the first part of the *Morning Hours*; the correspondence itself, I hoped, would then follow in the second part. From the beginning I had intended to place this philosophical dispute [about the Spinozism of Lessing] at the front and center of the work, and I received permission from Mr. Jacobi to use his letters in whatever way I wished. But then some rather troubling concerns presented themselves. The matter seemed too delicate, and the reader too unprepared, to allow me to jump straightforwardly into the middle of such an awkward inquiry. I wanted first to bring the subject [of Spinozism] itself into clear focus and only then enter upon the question of how things stood with the various persons involved with the subject; I wanted to begin by laying out for inspection my own ideas about Spinozism, about what is harmful and what is innocuous in this system, and only then examine whether this or that person was a follower of the system, and in what sense he had taken it up. [3]

3 Was Lessing a Spinozist? Did Jacobi hear this from Lessing himself? In what circumstances and in what mood did they both find themselves when this confidentiality was shared? We [Jacobi and I] could postpone these questions until we and our readership had come to a mutual understanding about the subject before us: what Spinozism really was or was not. I therefore altered my initial intention, and I decided to refrain from making use of my correspondent's kind permission until the second part of the work. But I see that he judged it to be better to rush ahead of me. Unworried by its consequences, he throws into the public sphere an apple of discord.⁵ He accuses our friend Gotthold Ephraim Lessing—the editor of the *Fragments*, the author of *Nathan*, known to the world as the great and admired defender of theism and of the religion of reason—he accuses him of being a Spinozist, an atheist, and a blasphemer. What are we supposed to do now? [4] Do we want to undertake the defense of our friend? The harshest inquisitorial court never begrudged the accused heretic the benefit of a defense. But I would have thought we could confidently let the author of *Nathan* mount his own defense, and if I were Plato or Xenophon, I would be well advised not to write a defense speech for this Socrates. To say “Lessing” in the same breath as one says “hypocrite,” to mention the author of *Nathan* in one breath with the word “blasphemer”—whoever can do this would

be a man to attempt the impossible and might even find it an easy matter to join “Lessing” and “simpleton” together in a single thought. However, since I have already gotten entangled in this affair, and Mr. Jacobi has summoned me, first in private letters and now before all the world, to take up the case of our friend, let us jointly examine the basis of the accusation! Hiding nothing from your eyes, I shall go through the charges of the indictment; [5] I will offer additional details to fill out the presentation of the facts where my own involvement is touched upon, and I will add commentary where I find it to be necessary.

4 In his own account of the matter, Mr. Jacobi says he had heard from a friend [Elise Reimarus] that Mendelssohn had just set about writing something concerning Lessing’s character, and he inquired of her how much, or how little, Mendelssohn had known of Lessing’s religious convictions. He wrote: *Lessing had been a Spinozist.*

5 “My friend [Elise Reimarus],” he informs us, “perfectly grasped my import, and the matter seemed to her extremely important, and that very moment she wrote to Mendelssohn to reveal to him the information to which I had made her privy.”

6 He continues: “Mendelssohn was astonished, and his first impulse was to doubt the accuracy of my testimony.” [6]

7 That I was astonished is not properly a part of the simple presentation of the facts, but the narrator’s conjecture. The information to which Mr. Jacobi made our mutual friend privy, and that she in turn had revealed to me, could in point of fact never have aroused in me any such impulse as he describes. Neither Lessing’s high repute nor that of any other human being could ever dislodge me in the slightest degree from my conviction that Spinozism is false. Nor could this information have any influence upon my friendship for Lessing, nor could my view of Lessing’s genius and character suffer in the least because of it. *Lessing is a follower of Spinoza?* Oh well! What do speculative doctrines have to do with human beings? Who would not be overjoyed to count Spinoza himself as his friend, however much of a Spinozist he may have been? Who refuses to admit the truth of Spinoza’s genius and noble character? [7] As long as one had not yet accused my friend of being a secret blasphemer, and therefore also of being a hypocrite, I felt rather indifferent about the information that Lessing was a Spinozist. I knew that there was a purified Spinozism that can make common cause with all that religion and morality ask of us in a practical way, as I had amply shown in my *Morning Hours*. I knew that this purified Spinozism was able to be brought into harmony especially with Judaism, and that Spinoza, his speculative doctrine notwithstanding, would have been able to remain an orthodox Jew if he had not in some of his other writings called into question

the authentic core of Judaism—its legislation—and, as a consequence, removed himself from it. The doctrine of Spinoza is obviously much closer to Judaism than it is to the orthodox teaching of Christians, so if I could love Lessing, and be loved by him, when he was still a strict follower of Athanasius,⁶ or when I at least took him for one, why then should I not love him all the more when he came closer to Judaism and I recognized him to be a follower of the Jew *Baruch Spinoza*? [8] The appellation “Jew and Spinozist” could never be so startling to me, nor so irksome, as it perchance may be to Mr. Jacobi.

8 Finally, I had also for some time been quite aware that our friend had been inclined to pantheism in his earliest youth, and that he not only found a way to connect it to his religious system but had even attempted to demonstrate the truth of the creed of Athanasius on the basis of it. The passage from a youthful treatise that I had occasion to cite in my *Morning Hours* shows this quite clearly. I had received from him this treatise for my perusal at the very beginning of our acquaintance.

9 The information, then, that Lessing was a Spinozist could be for me neither surprising nor strange. [9] But the fact that I was made a gift of it by Mr. Jacobi was highly unpleasant, I must confess. Basically, I was previously unacquainted with Mr. Jacobi, though I was aware of his merits as a writer, but in the field of metaphysics I had never seen anything from him. Also, I did not know that he enjoyed a friendship with Lessing and had personal contact with him. So I treated his information as a mere anecdote that perhaps he had picked up from some traveler. We know this class of travelers in Germany, the ones who carry around their souvenir albums from place to place, and whenever they see or hear something about some notable figure, they hawk it about in great haste and zeal from one end of the country to the other, or even give it out to the press for publication. Such a man, I thought, had perhaps picked up a half-understood word from Lessing, or maybe Lessing had written that Greek motto of his in the traveler’s souvenir album:

One and All, [10]

10 and the anecdote monger had turned Lessing straightaway into a Spinozist. However, I quite clearly saw how one might be inclined to make this the instigating cause for a trial of Lessing. The study of natural history has gotten Germans into the habit of classifying everything. When they are not able to quite take the measure of the sentiments and writings of a man, they grasp the first available opportunity to pigeonhole him within some category and turn him into some “-ist,” as if with this one stroke they had taken care of all remaining loose ends.

I really was then on the point of writing about Lessing's character, and I sensed pretty clearly that this anecdote would lead me far astray from my goal. It would involve me in disputes and inquiries that were not in tune with my intentions. I saw that the anecdote would inveigle me into thorny subtleties and force me to renew a quarrel that should have been finished long ago. [11] It was therefore highly unwelcome to me, this pronouncement of Mr. Jacobi, and I pressed for further explanation: How and in what circumstances and with what precise terms had Lessing made known his Spinozism? I pressed these questions on Mr. Jacobi with perhaps a little too much energy, but they were appropriate given the matter at hand. I was, after all, not disposed to sparing his feelings.

11 I received in full measure the further explanation that I had asked for. A missive addressed to me by Mr. Jacobi gave me abundant evidence to conclude that I had been rather mistaken about my man, that Jacobi had penetrated more deeply into the subtleties of Spinoza's doctrine than I suspected, that he really had had personal contact with Lessing, that he had held intimate colloquies with him, and that therefore the information about Lessing's being a follower of Spinoza was no mere anecdote mongering. It had to have issued from those intimacies. [12]

12 Whoever has experienced such intimate colloquies, whoever has had the good fortune to enjoy them, will not cast doubt on the honesty and fidelity of what issues from them. In this sanctum of friendship one opens oneself not only head to head, but heart to heart, and one allows all one's secret corners and recesses to be exposed to the other's view. One friend reveals to the other all his secret doubts, weaknesses, shortcomings, and infirmities so that they can be brought beneath, and perhaps also be healed by, the touch of the friend's hand. Whoever has not tasted the pleasure of an hour of such an outpouring of the heart has never in his life felt true cheer. Oh, what pain it must have caused poor Rousseau when in the fullness of his heart he languished after such spiritual refreshment but instead encountered in the other man a mind like a rock face that drove him back with redoubled force!¹⁷ [13]

13 If the colloquy that Jacobi held with Lessing were of this kind, we of course would have nothing to bring forward to excuse our friend, and we would simply be compelled to acquiesce to the fact that Lessing was the most enigmatic character that has ever lived, a strange mixture of hypocrisy and resoluteness of spirit, a man in one respect closed in upon himself to the point of total obstinacy and in another respect open to the point of puerile frivolity. But I would be deeply grieved for my own sake, for the sake of my friend Lessing, and for the sake of Mr. Jacobi himself if this were so.

14 *For my own sake*, since I confess that it would greatly depress me if our friend Lessing, with whom I lived in intimate friendship for over thirty years, with whom I carried on an unceasing quest for the truth, and with whom I held constant commerce, in both speech and writing, about these very matters of the most vital import; [14] that I, who so loved him and who was loved by him, that I should not have been judged worthy of the same confidence that another man, a mere mortal like me, had learned how to receive after only a few days of friendly social contact. I confess my weakness. I know of no earthly creature whom I would not envy for being so preferred.

15 *For the sake of our friend Lessing*, for how far must he have fallen in the last days of his life if he had said all those things that he is supposed to have said in this colloquy in complete and sincere confidence. In this colloquy he appears not to be the bold and decisive thinker who follows his reason and lets it guide him whenever he strays into error. He appears to be a stale atheist, not from the school of [Thomas] Hobbes or [Baruch] Spinoza, but one of those childish wags who makes a sport of kicking at whatever happens to be important and dear to his neighbor. [15]

16 Mr. Jacobi, however, admits to having condensed and compressed his report of the conversations. But, in line with his well-known sense of honesty, we can certainly assume that the principal point of the whole affair did not suffer from this treatment, and that what he attributed to each person was actually what was said. Still, one discovers not one sound thought in anything that Lessing brings forward. All the rational arguments are scored to Mr. Jacobi's advantage. He defends Spinozism with all the ingenuity that can possibly be made to serve this system. Lessing does not make the slightest objection worthy of any interest; he permits the sort of arguments to stand as correct and valid that he and I in earlier conversations had so many times before tested for soundness and upon whose real worth we had passed judgment, and when his friend here and there lets him get a word in, it is only a strained effort at brilliance that ends up for the most part being just some blasphemous wisecrack. [16] Could Lessing have so completely forgotten himself in the midst of this sincere outpouring of his heart? And what about that whole matter of his judgment regarding the poem "Prometheus" that Jacobi put into his hands and that Lessing was so taken with?⁸ He certainly could not have put it into his hands because of its literary merits, but only because of its daring content. The poor art critic! How far you must have sunk to have been in earnest when you judged this paltry production to be of some merit! In better days I saw him on a number of occasions return into the hands of some poet far more tolerable verses with the words, "Pretty good, my friend, pretty good! But what was the point of writing verse? You should first make sure that

your thoughts would meet with your approval if they were framed in prose!" Mr. Jacobi apparently suffered from qualms of conscience about printing these verses without providing a prophylaxis against them, so he therefore inserted in his book an inoffensive page that the reader of tender conscience could use as a replacement for the bedeviling verses.⁹ [17] My sense is that Lessing would have definitely found the prophylaxis to be more noxious than the poison itself. Anyone who could lose his faith because of such poor verses must surely have had little to lose. In a word, in all of Lessing's contribution to this colloquy, I cannot recognize the least trace of his character, and where there ought to be an earnest but friendly confidentiality, I find nothing of his penetrating mind and inventiveness, nothing of his philosophy and his critical acumen.

¹⁷ But for Mr. Jacobi's sake, I would also be deeply grieved if he himself had taken this colloquy as an expression of a confidential trust that our friend had reposed in him. All the friends and acquaintances of Mr. Jacobi praise his integrity and admire his heart even more than his intellectual gifts. But how can his conduct in regard to Lessing be reconciled with this vaunted integrity? His friend places in his lap a confession, and then he reveals it to the public; [18] his friend makes him privy in the last days of his life to his weakness, and he then seeks to use it to vilify his memory in coming ages. He raises accusations at great length against one whom he calls his friend, without being able to bring forward any other witness to the crime except for one person: himself. One person only as witness, himself, for by his own admission he was an accomplice; indeed he played the major part in this affair and had rather entrapped his friend than discovered him already on the path of crime. He is in the end careful enough to keep open for himself a back door through which to make his retreat and escape from the grasp of atheism, returning to the safety of the banner of faith. But why does he slam the door shut behind himself and not let his poor accomplice also slip through? Why must this poor fellow stand there unarmed, defenseless, and utterly abandoned? [19] I repeat again: if Jacobi himself had really believed that Lessing had entrusted him with a secret that he wanted to keep concealed, one would find it difficult to account for his behavior.

¹⁸ But even more incomprehensible, I think, would be his conduct in regard to me. In the opening pages of his book he explains that Lessing let him know that he treasured me most highly among his friends; then, in one of his philosophical conversations with Lessing, he, Jacobi, expressed his astonishment that a man like me could have been able to so zealously embrace the proof for the existence of God based on the idea [of God],¹⁰ as I do in my treatise on certainty;¹¹ and "Lessing's apologies," Jacobi goes on to say, "immediately led me to the question whether he had ever put forward his own doctrine as a challenge to Mendels-

sohn. “Never,” Lessing answered. [20] “Once I mentioned to him more or less what you can find in my *Education of the Human Race* (§ 73). Our discussion never reached a final conclusion, and I let the matter rest there.”¹²

19 Lessing showed forbearance toward my weakness, apologized for my zeal for metaphysical a priori reasoning, and kept his true system hidden from me, his so highly treasured friend, apparently so as not to rob me of a conviction with which he saw me living so peacefully and happily. Mr. Jacobi heard this from his own lips, at the very time when he made him into a confidant of his great secret, and yet I am the first person whom Mr. Jacobi seeks out in order to force upon me this dangerous secret, from whose knowledge my friend, through the course of so many years, had wanted to spare me. If things stand exactly as they look on the surface, I must ask: which person here manifests a more *serviceable* religion, a more authentic piety: [21] the atheist, who does not want to deprive his beloved friend of his conviction in natural religion, with which he observes him to be happily contented, or the orthodox Christian, who, as it were, unpitifully knocks from out of the lame man’s hands the very crutch on which he was managing so well to drag himself forward?

20 In order to settle all of these difficulties and apparent contradictions, I am able to see only one way to pursue the matter, and though it requires that I rely upon a hypothetical reconstruction in certain parts, it seems to me, when I consider what Mr. Jacobi declares to be his intention, that this reconstruction is quite natural and, given the character of the parties involved, not unreasonable.

21 “The intention of this work,” Mr. Jacobi declares in his preliminary remarks, “I have briefly stated directly following my last letter, and, I think, I have made it patently obvious in everything thereafter up to the end of the work.”¹³ Nothing can in truth be more obvious; [22] it is an intention that is undissembled and well-meaning. Mr. Jacobi openly seeks to lead those of his fellowmen who have lost themselves in the wilderness of speculation back to the level and secure path of *faith*. It is to this end that all of his conversations with Lessing are directed; it is to this end that his correspondence with Hemsterhuis, with our mutual friend [Elise], and with me is directed.

22 What is first of all important to note in regard to Lessing is that perhaps Jacobi himself never really believed that this man had confided in him a special secret, but he much more likely thought that Lessing was a man of unsettled principles who had the gift of expressing with equal cleverness now this and now that side of an issue, that today he could be the voice of theism and tomorrow of atheism, and that maybe the day after he would even defend superstition. Jacobi probably thought that here was a man who did not try to hide his opinions, and

that whenever whimsy, or the spirit of contrariness, suggested an idea to him, he would not hesitate to inform all the world about it. [23] Jacobi looked upon Lessing as a misguided sophist lost in his own chicaneries, as someone, in other words, who viewed truth and falsehood in the same light, or darkness, and for whom, in the end, a joke could count for philosophy, and blasphemy, when the mood struck him, could be passed off as forcefulness of intellect.

23 Jacobi, who believed he had found our friend in a sad state of mental confusion, formed the magnanimous resolution to heal him of his illness. And just like a skilled doctor, Jacobi ventured at first to worsen the evil so that he might afterward be able all the more reliably to cure it. He led Lessing ever deeper into the labyrinthine twistings of Spinozism, drew him into the thorny hedges of pantheism, so that the one method of escape left to him would be all the more welcome when he finally revealed it to him. This method of escape, as we today are able to see rather clearly, was to retreat under the banner of faith. [24] He wanted to convince Lessing that there are certain things, as he puts it (p. 77), to which one simply cannot close one's eyes, and since these things cannot be proved rationally, they must be accepted just as one finds them, and this means that one must turn one's back on philosophy, because philosophy can only result in all-consuming skepticism.¹⁴ And in response to Lessing's curious question, "So what then does one turn *toward*?" the answer is given: *toward the light*, about which Spinoza says that it *illuminates itself and the darkness alike*, and therefore it looks as though Spinoza, the very person who had led Lessing so far astray, is the one to bring him back on the path toward the truth.

24 Our friend, who had almost certainly sensed Mr. Jacobi's barely disguised intention right from the start, had enough sporting spirit to encourage the view of him to which the other held fast. And part of the story may be that he simply appreciated the cleverness by which Jacobi knew how to muster his arguments in defense of the teaching of Spinoza. [25] You who know our friend are aware that he took greater pleasure listening to an absurd thesis cleverly advanced than the truth poorly defended. So he played the role of the rapt student to the hilt, never uttered one word of disagreement, but always nodded his assent to everything, and did his best to steer the discussion back on track with some little witticism whenever it threatened to take a different direction. It is for this reason that I could not have known about this great secret of his, though I was his constant and most intimate friend, nor can one credit Gleim as being in on this metaphysical comedy.¹⁵ This open and jovial host, who knew quite well both the philosophy and the whimsy of his guest, would have been unable to carry on the joke for very long. Here we have the explanation for the sudden

inspirations and the dull platitudes, the swooning over bad verses, all of which is so unnatural for one such as Lessing. [26]

25 Let everyone think as he will! I will continue holding to my hypothesis, since it seems to me to be more natural. So Mr. Jacobi, when he noticed that his attempt to win over Lessing had failed, believed it was incumbent upon him to persevere in his pious intention of turning the example of Lessing into an edifying warning to all other swaggering speculators, a lifeline thrown out to them in good time, but their last hope of rescue if they refuse to clutch it. Do they want to join the Lessings and Leibnizes and Wolffs and all the others who march under the banner of metaphysics and become determinists, and consequently, if we believe Jacobi (p. 172), also fatalists and Spinozists, and therefore *atheists*, or would they prefer to surrender themselves to the extremes of skepticism? No, let them rather, before it is too late, follow the light that illuminates the darkness too! [27] *Every proof presupposes something already proven, either itself something requiring proof, or something whose starting point is revelation*, and furthermore: *The foundation of all human knowledge and action is faith.**

26 Since Mr. Jacobi does not know me, I, too, may be described by him as a hireling of reason, as someone who grants too many concessions to reason and none at all to faith, who operates with the delusion that with the help of metaphysical demonstrations he could put everything right, that with his quiddities he could exorcise the spirits or go to work against some magic-wielding cabal. Hence the earnest effort to cure me, too, by whatever means, of this disease. [28] And hence the license to divulge to me the secret that our friend is said to have taken such pains to keep hidden from me. The good and frank intention of bringing me into the fold of faith, while it cannot justify everything, at least excuses many things.

27 From the very first I suspected that something was afoot not unlike what I had very often experienced before with such well-meaning attempts on the part of my contemporaries. I therefore let Mr. Jacobi understand in my response to him that the cure in my case would be attempted in vain, and that in regard to eternal truths and tenets I admit to no other form of conviction than that which derives from rational argumentation. Judaism commands faith in historical truths, in *facts* upon which the authority of our positive ritual law is based. [29] The existence and the authority of the supreme lawgiver, however, needs

* This thesis is supported by a passage from Lavater in which it is supposed to be shown that the perception of truth (intuitive knowledge) is the foundation and starting point of faith. If this is really faith and revelation, then our quarrel is over: Aristotle is full of revelations, and Spinoza is a knight of faith.

to be recognized through reason, and in this matter, according to the principles of Judaism and according to my own principles, neither revelation nor faith has any role to play. Furthermore, since Judaism is not a *revealed religion*, but is rather a *revealed law*, I said that as a Jew I had one more reason to search for conviction through rational argumentation.

- 28 Let me be permitted to explain in a bit more detail what I mean when I say these things [about reason and revelation], since they are so easily able to be misconstrued. What I assert of Judaism, that it requires absolutely no faith in statements of eternal truths, but only in statements of historical truths, I have clearly shown in a more fitting context, to which I must refer the reader.* The Hebrew language has in fact no proper word for what we call *religion*. [30] Further, Judaism is not a revelation of doctrinal propositions and eternal truths that we are commanded to believe. It consists solely and entirely in revealed laws for the serving of God, and it presupposes that, on the basis of natural and reasonable evidence, one comes to be convinced of those tenets of religion without whose truth no divine lawgiving could have taken place. When I speak of conviction based on reasonable evidence, and when I assert that in Judaism such conviction is undoubtedly presupposed, I am not talking about the metaphysical arguments we are accustomed to carry on in books, nor about scholastic demonstrations that have stood the test of the most subtle refinements of critical probing, but about the dicta and the judgments of a simple common sense that looks things straight in the eye and calmly takes their measure. [31] To be sure, I am a great admirer of demonstrations in metaphysics, and I am fully persuaded that the principal truths of natural religion are as capable of apodictic proof as any proposition in solid geometry. But nevertheless my conviction in the truth of the tenets of [natural] religion is not so entirely dependent upon metaphysical arguments that it is compelled to stand or fall with them. One can cause me to have doubts about my arguments, one can show me that in places my reasoning is in error, but yet my conviction remains unshaken. *Petrus Ramus*, a man who knew how to raise a host of doubts about the primary and derivative postulates of Euclid, remained nonetheless fully convinced of the truth of Euclid's Elements. Many a mathematician can cast doubt upon the certainty of the Euclidean postulate about parallel lines, but yet they are also able to stake their happiness and their lives on the truth and the incontrovertibility of the postulates that are derived from it. [32] Now, it seems to me that the certainty of natural religion is just as brilliantly resplendent, just as incontestably sure, to the unspoiled and undeluded common sense of all humans, as any proposition of geometry. In

* *Jerusalem; or, On Religious Power and Judaism.*

every walk of life in which a human being may find himself, at whatever rung of enlightenment on which he may stand, he has the resources and means, the opportunity and sufficient strength, to persuade himself of the truths of the religion of reason. The reasoning of that Greenland Eskimo who, as he walked about with a missionary one beautiful morning on an ice floe, saw the dawn blaze forth between the frozen peaks and declared to his companion, “*Look, brother, at the young day! How beautiful must he be who has made this!*”—this reasoning, which was so convincing for the Greenlander before the pious preacher had led his understanding astray, is also convincing for me, and has for me the very same force as the simple and artless reasoning of the Psalmist:

He who has planted the ear,
surely He must hear; [33]
He who has formed the eye,
surely He must see?
He who imparts knowledge to the son of man,
the Eternal One, also knows the thoughts of men.
[Psalms 94:9–11]¹⁶

29 This natural conclusion, easy enough for even a child to draw, has for me all the certainty of a geometric axiom or postulate and the overwhelming force of an irrefutable demonstration. I assign to my philosophical speculation the task of correcting the claims of common sense and, as much as possible, turning them into rational knowledge. As long as both of them, speculation and common sense, remain on good terms, I gladly follow them wherever they lead me. But as soon as they have a falling out, I seek to orient myself and lead them both, if possible, to the point from which we started.¹⁷ [34] When superstition, priestcraft, the spirit of contradiction, and sophistry disorient us with their various dizzying subtleties and sleights of hand, when they have brought our common sense into confusion, we must of course have recourse to the tools of our art in order to come to its aid. The metaphysical subtleties that are used to mislead us must be held up to and compared with the truth, examined and tested against it, and if they do not pass muster, the attempt must be made to replace them with a more precise set of concepts. When it comes to a real and authentic conviction in natural religion, a conviction that stands some chance of having an influence upon a human being’s happiness, these fancy methods are neither useful nor necessary. The human being whose reason is not yet spoiled by sophistry need only follow the direct lead of his own mind, and his happiness stands secure. [35] I will treat this at greater length in the continuation of my *Morning Hours*, and here I rest content with merely quoting the words of a certain sage who has

encompassed in two very readable little tracts much useful philosophy, though he is quite displeased with the subject of philosophy.*¹⁸

30 “Natural religion is both the simplest and the most comprehensible religion: it is so easy, so suited to everyone’s capacities, that one cannot but be amazed when one hears philosophers seriously claim that it is not for the common man. Using a number of different approaches, I have essayed to present to our country laborer ideas concerning the supreme being in accord with natural religion, and each time the man was quick to comprehend, firm in his grasp, and straight in his judgment; he felt the power of the ideas, which awakened his mind, brought it peace, and gave it new strength. [36] These ideas are of one stock with everything that is beautiful, good, and perfect among men; they lend such things an illuminating brilliance, and they also are illumined by them; each allows the other to stand out in sharper relief, each reinforces the other.

31 “I maintain that the easiness of the concepts of natural religion and the difficulty of those of revealed religion prove the falsehood of the philosophers’ claim; the common man cannot comprehend the latter concepts, but can comprehend the former; thus does my understanding reach a secure resting ground, etc.”

32 To return now from this digression to my reply to Mr. Jacobi’s charges, I present here my Demurrs concerning his conversations with Lessing, which I took the opportunity of sending to him and in response to which his subsequent letters were composed.

Demurrs against Mr. Jacobi.¹⁹

33 [37] You say: “Every coming-into-being [of something finite] in the Infinite, in whatever metaphoric terms you choose to describe it, by whatever change in that Infinite it happens, requires that something arises out of nothing.” You believe “Spinoza had therefore banished the possibility of any transition from the Infinite to the finite, completely rejecting all *causas transitorias, secundarias* or *remotas* (transitional causes, secondary causes, or remote causes), and he replaced an emanationist with an immanentist concept of the Ensoph [Infinite], posited as an indwelling, eternally self-identical, and unchanging cause of the world, which, when taken together with all its consequences, would be one and the same as all of them.”²⁰ Here I run into difficulties that I for my part am unable to resolve: (1.) If a series without beginning did not seem to Spinoza to be an impossibility, then an emanationist coming-into-being of [finite] things would not necessarily lead to positing a becoming out of nothing. (2.) If the visible things around us are for Spinoza something finite: their indwelling within

**The Village Preacher* and *The Village School*.

the Infinite, it seems to me, is as little comprehensible, indeed it is even less comprehensible, as their flowing out from the Infinite. [38] If the Infinite cannot cause anything finite, it also cannot think of anything finite.

34 In general, the system of Spinoza seems not to be crafted so as to resolve such difficulties. These difficulties can be raised in regard to the thoughts [of the Infinite] no less than in regard to their actual objects. What cannot come to be objectively actual cannot be subjectively an object of thought. The same difficulty that Spinoza encounters in allowing there to be something finite outside of God, the same difficulty, I assert, he must encounter again if he makes it reside within the divine being and treats it as an idea of the Godhead.

35 In what follows you explain a passage in Spinoza, which Lessing mentioned as among the darkest of all, and which Leibniz^{*} likewise found to be obscure and did not fully understand—namely, [39] that the Infinite Cause, as you put it, *explicite* has neither understanding nor will, because it, on account of its transcendental unity and uninterrupted absolute infinity, can have neither any object for its thought nor any object for its will. You further explain that your own opinion would only extend as far as to deny to the First Cause, which is of an infinite nature, merely individual thoughts and individual determinations of the will, and you adduce as the reason for this denial that every individual idea originates from a different individual idea and must be directly related to an actually existing object. Therefore you only want to grant to the First Cause the inward, primary, general, elemental stuff of the mind and the will. I must confess that I understand this explanation just as little as I do the words of Spinoza himself. [40] The First Cause has thoughts but no understanding. It has thoughts, for thoughts are, according to Spinoza, a chief property of the one true substance. However, it has no individual thoughts; rather, it has only the general elemental stuff [*Urstoff*] of such thoughts. But what generality can be grasped apart from all specificity? Is not this elemental stuff without determinate shape even more incomprehensible than a formless matter, a being without a formed shape, a being that has general, but no particular, features? You say the absolutely Infinite has no object of thought. But is it not itself an object of thought, are not its own properties and modifications an object of its thought? And if the Infinite has no object of thought and no understanding, how is it that thinking is nonetheless its attribute, how is it that it is nonetheless the one and only thinking substance? Furthermore, the modifications of the Infinite, or in other words contingent things, really do have individual determinations of the will, but the Infinite itself would have only the general elemental stuff of these determinations? [41] I understand maybe a half

* Theod. § 173.

of this in Spinoza. He defines free will merely as an undetermined, purposeless choice arising from a completely neutral and undecided being. This seemed to Spinoza to be able to pertain to the modification of the Godhead insofar as the modification represents a finite being, but he rightly denied that such an arbitrary caprice pertained to the Godhead itself, however, inasmuch as it is an infinite being. In Spinoza's opinion, the knowledge of the good, by which a free choice is effected, belongs among the properties of the understanding and as such is of the most thoroughgoing necessity. All the consequences of this choice, whether they flow from the knowledge of the true and false or from the knowledge of good and evil, must be, in accordance with his theory, of the same degree of necessity. [42] However, since you, dear sir, accept the system of determinists, and since you also allow to the human being for his part no other kind of choice but that which arises as the last practical step in the weighing up of all his motivations and impulses, I see no reason why you do not allow to the Infinite Cause such an eternally predetermined choice. Of course, it is probably because you do not allow that the Infinite has true individuality that neither will nor freedom can pertain to it, since these things presuppose some real and particular substantiality. But this is not the reason that you adduce, and what you do bring forward seems to me to be directly opposed to the system of Spinoza, as I will have the opportunity of explaining in detail in what follows below.

36 As Spinoza would have it, everything that transpires in the visible world does so in accordance with the strictest necessity, because it is only in this manner that things have their ground in the divine nature and in the possible modifications of the properties of that nature. Whatever does not actually transpire is for him not even something that is possible or conceivable. [43] If, therefore, Spinoza had admitted, as Bayle, Leibniz, and others hold, that the law of contradiction defines the boundary limit separating the possible from the impossible, he would have on that account had to conclude, as Leibniz properly reminds us in the passage cited, that all the novels of Scudery and all the poems of Ariosto describe actual occurrences.²¹ But Spinoza also held the position that the impossible is that which is not grounded in the divine modifications considered as the necessary cause of all things, even if it contained no contradiction. You see here the way in which Spinoza would have reached the [doctrine of the] *perfectissimum* [that which is most perfect] if he had been able to make peace with the determinists about their concept of freedom.²² Only in accordance with the system of the *perfectissimi* can one understand why this and no other sequence of determinations actually transpired within the Divine Being, or, to express the same point using Spinoza's way of putting things, why no other sequence had been possible. [44]

- 37 What you have to say about consequences and duration has my entire approval, but I would not say that they are *mere illusion*. They are necessary determinations of all limited thinking, and therefore they are *appearances*, which one must distinguish from mere delusion.²³
- 38 Your *salto mortale* [death-defying leap] is one of nature's ways of saving its creatures.²⁴ After I have been cutting a trail of speculation for some time through thorns and bushes, I seek to orient myself with *bon sens* [common sense] and I look for the path that will allow me to reunite with it. Since I cannot deny that there are intentions, to have intentions is therefore a possible attribute of the mind, and insofar as it is not a mere defect of the mind, to have intentions must also pertain to any mind whatever, even a mind supremely above ours. And so, in addition to thinking, it is also possible for willing and acting to be attributes of the Infinite, and therefore they must be [attributes of the Infinite]. [45]
- 39 The clever retort that Lessing countered with at this point is entirely in keeping with his spirit; it is one of those soaring jumps of his, with which he set about a sort of leap out of and over himself, and for that reason he did not seem to have moved from his spot at all. To worry whether there exists something that not only exceeds all our concepts but completely lies outside any possible concept, this I call an out-of-and-over-oneself jump. My credo is: whatever my mind cannot grasp as true does not cause me to lose my peace of mind because it might be true. A question that I do not understand, I cannot answer; for me it is as good as no question at all. It has never occurred to me to want to climb up on my own shoulders in order to get a less constricted line of sight.²⁵
- 40 In one of his comedies, Lessing has one of his characters say, believing he has seen into the workings of a magic trick involving a burning light: “*This flame is really burning, [but perhaps] it is only shining without burning; [46] [perhaps] the flame is not really shining, [but] it only seems to shine.*” The first doubt [that the flame is not burning but is only shining] is reasonable; the second doubt [that the flame is not really shining but only appears to shine], however, contradicts itself. What seems [to shine], must really shine. Every appearance possesses the highest degree of certitude as an appearance. All thoughts, viewed subjectively, are perfectly turned-out productions. Therefore the power of thinking is also a truly primary power that cannot be grounded in some higher originary power. Even you seem to have ascribed no special significance to this remarkable retort of our Lessing.
- 41 But when you say (p. 13) the infinite single substance of Spinoza has, taken only by itself and apart from individual things, no determinate, fully fledged existence, you jettison me all at once right out of the entire conception that I have constructed for myself of what Spinozism is. Is it, then, that according to this

system [of Spinozism] individual things have their own actual and determinate existence, and in being gathered together they are also a bare unity without any determinate and fully fledged existence? [47] How should I interpret this or reconcile it with your other pronouncements?

42 If Spinoza, as you subsequently point out, had conceived of freedom in the manner of Leibniz, he would have also had to admit that, insofar as it concerns the Most Perfect Cause, the knowledge of good and evil could just as little as the knowledge of truth and falsehood be entirely absent of any issue or consequence. He would have to admit, in other words, that the Most Perfect Cause must favor that which is good and must look with disfavor upon that which is bad—that is, it must have intentions, and if effects issue from it, they must issue according to those intentions.

43 Here we are once again at the place where the [Leibnizian-Wolffian] school philosopher meets the Spinozist, and where they embrace each other as brothers.

44 On p. 26 I encounter a passage that is for me simply unintelligible. [48] *Thinking, you say, is not the source of substance, but rather substance is the source of thinking. Therefore, prior to thinking there must be something non-thinking that is taken as that which is primary, something that one must conceive of as that which is primordial, although not perhaps in possibility but rather in conceivability according to its essence and inner nature.*²⁶ You seem to me here to desire to think of something, and also have our friend think of something, that is not a thought; this is to take a leap into the void where reason cannot follow. You want to think of something that precedes all thinking, and it is therefore unthinkable for the most perfect understanding itself.²⁷

45 It seems to me that the source of all these pseudo-concepts of yours is found in the fact that you consider extension and movement to constitute the sole matter and objects of thought, and also that you consider these to be objects of thought insofar as they actually exist.²⁸ I do not know with what reason you presuppose this as if it were agreed upon by everyone. [49] Can the thinking being itself not serve as the stuff and object of its own thinking? We know what it is we feel when we suffer pain, hunger, thirst, cold, or heat, and if we fear, hope, love, hate, and so on. Call what you know thoughts, concepts, or feelings and affections of the mind; it is clear enough that the mind in the case of all the affections has neither extension nor movement as its object. Indeed, even in the case of the sensations themselves, what does sound, smell, or color have in common with extension and movement, or indeed what does the body's flavor have in common with them? I am well aware that since [John] Locke it is customary among philosophers to consider extension, impenetrability, and movement to be *qualitates primitivas* and to hold that the other sensory phenomena, as *qualitates secundarias*, are

reducible to them. But what reason does a Spinozist have to grant the validity of this position? [50] And as a final point, can there not also be a mind that thinks extension and motion are merely possible even when they are not really present? In regard to Spinoza, who holds that extension is a property of the single, infinite substance, this point must have all the more pertinence.²⁹

46 I pass over the whole lot of comic inventions with which our L*** [Lessing] entertained you subsequently, all of which it is difficult to say whether they are meant as joking banter or philosophy. Whenever the fancy struck, he used to mate ideas of the most alien sorts, just to see what they would generate in the way of offspring. Through this unplanned, random interbreeding of ideas there occasionally arose some quite strange musings, which he knew how to put to good use at a later date. Most of the ideas, however, quickly revealed themselves to be merely *strange vagaries* that are best suited to serve as diverting entertainments to accompany a cup of coffee. This is the sort of thing you report him saying on p. 33. [51] Such are his notions of the economy of the world soul, of the entelechies of Leibniz that are supposed to be mere effects of the body, his meteorological machinations, his *endless boredom*, and other such bursts of thought that flare up in an instant, crackle, and then disappear. I therefore grant to him that honorable retreat under the banner of faith that you invoke as a recommendation for your side, as also a standing option on his side. He is completely within the spirit of your religion that lays upon you the duty of trampling out all doubt through faith. The Christian philosopher is able to make a pastime out of teasing the natural philosopher, proposing to him a snarled tangle of arguments on behalf of skepticism, all designed to beguile him like will-o'-the-wisps, drawing him out of his corner and luring him into the open, in the end only to slip away from his firmest grasp. [52] My religion recognizes no obligation to dissolve such skeptical arguments other than by rational arguments; it commands no belief in eternal truths. I therefore have one further reason for seeking *conviction based on demonstration*.

47 I come to the passage, p. 41, where you can try again to make Spinoza's principle of actuality clear. "The God of Spinoza," you say, "is the pure principle of actuality in every real thing, of being in every particular being, entirely without individuality and absolutely *infinite*. The unity of this God is based on the identity of indiscernibles, and it therefore does not exclude a type of plurality."³⁰ Insofar as He is considered only from the vantage point of this transcendental unity, the Godhead must be absolutely devoid of actuality, since that can be found expressed only in particular individuals."³¹ If I understand this correctly, only particular individual beings are actually existing things; [53] the Infinite, however, or the principle of actuality, resides only in the *togetherness*,

or in the *totality*, of all these individuals. It is therefore a mere *collectivum quid* [something collective] that has no other substantiality than the substantiality of the elements of which it consists. Now, every collective depends upon the thought that encompasses the manifold, because apart from thought, or, in other words, considered objectively, each individual is isolated, a *thing* in its own right; only its relationship makes it a part of the whole, an element of the *togetherness*. Relating, however, is an operation of thinking. Now, please help me out of the confusion in which I find myself in regard to Spinozism. I ask in the first place: where does this thought subsist that relates each individual to the whole of this collective? Not in the particular thing, for each thing sustains this whole only as far as its own part.³² If we were unwilling to grant this point, we would have not only a *type* of plurality in the Godhead but also a true, innumerable multiplicity.³³ [54] And this multiplicity would not be gathered up again into a collectivity, for this leads to obvious absurdities. So if this *pan* [all], this togetherness, is to have a purchase on the truth, it must subsist in a real transcendental unity that excludes every plurality, and with this we would be right back where we least expected to end up—namely, in the usual rut of the school philosophy.³⁴

48 Furthermore, up until now I have always thought that according to Spinoza only the uniformly single Infinite possessed a true substantiality, whereas the multiformly distinct finite was merely a modification or thought of the Infinite. You seem to reverse this. You give true substantiality to the individual, and as a necessary consequence of this, the encompassing whole is merely an idea of the individual. So you drive me around in a circle, from which I can find no exit. [55] For on other occasions you seem to be in agreement with me that according to Spinoza only a transcendental infinite substance is possible, whose properties are infinite extension and infinite thoughts.³⁵

49 The greatest difficulty, however, that I find in the system of Spinoza is that he wants to generate the Unlimited by the gathering together of that which is limited.

50 How can a grade [of a quality] be strengthened by the process of addition?³⁶ How can the augmentation of an extensive property produce a strengthening of an intensive property? If in all existing philosophical systems it is difficult to understand the transition from infinity to finitude, it seems that for this system the reverse transition from finitude to an intensive infinity is absolutely impossible. By mere process of [quantitative] augmentation we will never achieve [qualitative] intensification, even should we continue the process to infinity. [56] Even if we are able to assign to the grade [of a quality] a quantitative measurement, still it remains an intensive quantity and it cannot be increased by adding to it things of the same grade. Isn't the Spinozist plainly forced to switch around

these concepts and let an [extensive] multiplicity take on the function of a single [intensive] magnitude?³⁷

51 This objection was already touched upon by Wolff (in the second part of his *Natural Theology*), but to my knowledge no defender of Spinoza has yet responded to it.

■ ■ ■

52 At this point I received an answer from Mr. Jacobi dated 5 Sept. 1784 containing a copy of his “*Lettre à Monsieur Hemsterhuis*,” and then, finally, I received a letter written in German addressed directly to me dated 21 April 1785. This letter dealt with my Demurrs. In both these letters, Lessing is no longer at issue. [57] Mr. Jacobi, now coming out into the open, attempts to persuade Mr. Hemsterhuis and me that speculative reason, if it is self-consistent, inevitably leads to Spinozism, and that there is no other path of rescue from the steep heights of metaphysics than to turn one’s back on every form of philosophy and throw oneself headlong into the depths of faith.

53 In my *Morning Hours* I have already given an account of Spinozism and how someone might be drawn to it. I will postpone for another time my specific comments concerning the manner in which Mr. Jacobi chooses to set forth his defense of the doctrine of Spinozism [as the only self-consistent speculative philosophy]. At this point in time the public only has the task of deciding between Jacobi and Lessing, and to a lesser extent between Jacobi and me. Because a judge must have access to everything that relates to the dispute before him, it is appropriate to enter into evidence the introductory section of the letter from April 1785 that Jacobi, as he says (page 117), omitted [from his presentation of our correspondence] because it merely contains the reasons “why I found it best to oppose Mendelssohn’s Demurrs by *merely providing a new presentation of Spinoza*, [58] thereby making the justification of my conception of this system the main focus [of my response].”³⁸ [58]

To Mr. Moses Mendelssohn, concerning the Demurrs he sent to me:

Before one can attempt to score a hit against one’s enemy, one must know where his saber is and where he is holding it. You looked for mine by swinging your arm around in a circle, but you couldn’t find me since I wasn’t there. I shall stand before you in my fixed and undisturbed defensive position and try for a direct hit with but a single mortal blow. If you parry my blow from within your circle, then at least we can begin the combat in earnest.

Enough of allegories. Your position rests from beginning to end upon a fundamental error that you have left unexamined. [59] Since your idea of Spinozism

has no overlap with mine, one of us must be wrong. Since it is not worth the trouble now of figuring out which of us is wrong—indeed, since the question cannot even be posed at this point which of us is wrong—the question simply has to be put off with a promissory note until I have the honor of your actually entering into an investigation of the evidence with me. The promissory note would be cheaper and less onerous to cash if you would remind yourself as you read my essay how much has slipped your memory about the writings of Spinoza, although you must have once had some familiarity with them. [60] Enough of that. Since you never managed to place your conception of Spinozism in the balance against mine in relation to the actual sources, you simply bypassed the issue itself in dispute. Everything then had to float in vagueness; on no page could you have grasped my meaning, let alone make an assertion against it. You didn't feel as if there was any substance to my arguments, because you hadn't correctly known where the resistance was; they just seemed to yield at the slightest pressure. And what *didn't* you mix into the batch of stuff you came at me with? There was the inner falsehood of your concepts and the falsehood of the thing itself, at least as you imagined it to yourself. There was the failure to truly grasp the inner meaning of my position and its outward expression as one would normally understand it, or to deal with the communication that took place between Lessing and me, or what it might be taken to mean. So mixed up and disparate were things in your counter arguments that they couldn't help but be a mess . . . That's why the longer . . . [Jacobi's *Spinoza-Letters* omits all this from its reprint of the letter and continues on page 117 with the sentence beginning "That's why the longer . . ."]

And so you go on from page 117 until 166 in your report. [61]

54 Abraham von Moivre is said to have once requested from Newton a proof for a mathematical theorem that he himself was unable to find.³⁹ Newton was willing to provide it, but the premises of the proof were even more difficult than the theorem itself, and the more intently that Newton sought to elucidate the proof, the less was von Moivre able to follow him. This was very nearly the same thing that happened to me with Mr. Jacobi. The more he devoted himself to giving me an account of the honest truth about Spinozism, the less did I understand either him or his Spinoza. Taking his words in their most precise sense, I could not understand them. One can accuse me of being thick-skulled or shallow-brained, but I simply do not understand his language. At one time it becomes excessively transcendental, and at another, excessively figural. But I always lack a clear grasp of what the words mean, or how the concepts are precisely defined; everything flutters before my eyes as if with shimmering outlines in a twilight haze. [62] Many sentences whose words I imagined I understood seemed to be clearly

intended neither for the pro nor the contra side of the argument, but rather both options seemed able to be asserted with equal reason, and in so many other cases the assertion seemed to me to be so obviously one that no one could seriously entertain that I could not make myself believe that I had properly grasped its correct sense. So I had to remain in total doubt as to whether I had found the weapons of my enemy, as Mr. Jacobi puts it, and also whether I was capable of grasping them securely. To cite just a few examples: In his letter to Hemsterhuis, Mr. J. allows his Spinoza to offer proof that the will cannot bring about any change in nature, and he puts the following words in his mouth: “*La pensée considérée dans son essence n'est que le sentiment en l'Etre.* [63] *L'idée et le sentiment de l'Etre, en tant est déterminé qu'il est déterminé, individuel et en relation avec d'autres individus. La volonté n'est que le sentiment de l'Etre déterminé agissant comme individu*” (page 72). [Thought, when it is considered in its essence, is nothing other than the feeling of being. The idea and the feeling of being, insofar as it is determined, is individual and is in a relation with other individuals. The will is nothing but the feeling of the determined being acting as an individual.] Now, since the French word *etre* has many meanings, let us stay with the translation that Mr. Jacobi himself has added: “Thinking, considered in its essence, is nothing else than Being that feels itself.”⁴⁰ I must confess that I simply do not understand these words. Far more comprehensible to me is the word “thinking” than the words “Being that feels itself.” Is this sentence supposed to mean: “Thinking, considered in its essence, is nothing else than the self-consciousness that one exists”? It seems so to me, if I compare it to p. 140, where Mr. Jacobi, in the German letter he sent to me, argues for the same proposition: [64] “Absolute thinking,” it is stated there, “is the pure direct absolute consciousness in general Being, in Being par excellence, or substance.” I perhaps only understand half the idea here, because I do not at all understand what “general Being,” “Being par excellence, or substance” means. In the footnote [to this passage] Mr. Jacobi says: “the expression ‘*le sentiment de l'Etre*’ that is able to be formed in French and that I used in my letter to Hemsterhuis, was purer and better, for the word ‘consciousness’ seems to involve in some measure imagination and reflection that here are not found at all,” and then Jacobi adduces in explanation of this conception of his a passage from the *Critique of Pure Reason*. But according to Kant, consciousness merely supports all our concepts as their ground, but for Jacobi thinking is supposed to be nothing other than this, and these are two very different claims. Moreover, Spinoza must, I think, admit that there are representations without consciousness if he wants to be consistent. [65] For since according to his doctrine all that happens in the body in the manner of movement finds a harmonized expression in the mind in the manner of a representation,

and since furthermore it cannot be denied that there are movements in the body that we are not conscious of, it follows that there must necessarily be dark and sleeping representations lacking all consciousness, and, therefore, according to Spinoza, ideas without consciousness, or a *thinking without Being that feels itself*, must be considered a real possibility. What is said [by Jacobi] about the will is completely incomprehensible to me. “The will is nothing but Being that feels itself, insofar as it is determinate and acts as a single entity.” I understand here the literal meaning of the words as little as I do in the reiteration of the explanation of what thinking is that is found on page 98. “Thinking,” it is stated there, “is Being that feels itself; therefore everything that occurs in extended space must likewise occur in thinking; [66] and each *actual* individual is ensouled to the extent commensurate with its *manifoldness and unity*, or with the degree of the power by which it is what it is.” What is *the essence of the human being himself, or the ground of his actual capacity* [to do what human beings do], or *the power with which he is what he is?* I never would have thought I could find the *freedom of the will* behind these transcendental words, but that is how Spinoza is supposed to explain them (page 96), in order to refute them in his specific manner. I was entirely incapable of getting any purchase on these arguments, because I did not understand the meaning of the words.⁴¹

55 Concerning the system of final causes, Mr. Jacobi says (page 60) that Spinoza reckoned this to be “the greatest derangement of the human understanding,” and (page 124) he makes Spinoza say: “the doctrine of final causes is sheer madness.” [67] If this is said in all earnestness, it seems to me the most audacious assertion that ever came out of the mouth of mortal man. No one whose first progenitor was made from the dust of the earth should permit himself the liberty of such an opinion, at least if he is as little nourished by the nectar of immortality as the rest of us mortals who must eat bread, sleep, and eventually die. When a philosopher finds himself confronted in his speculation with such a monstrous assertion, I think it is high time for him to take his bearings and scan his surroundings for simple common sense, from which he has strayed too far.

56 Indeed, Spinoza, according to Mr. Jacobi, wants to deny that any experience could refute him. “We also see,” he says (p. 79), “that the sun spins around the Earth. Let us dismiss appearances and strive to see things as they are.” But appearances are not in such cases so easily dismissed. [68] Their testimony is, on the contrary, of the highest standing, for considered as appearances they speak the unvarnished truth. To say that the sun moves round the earth is true, if we consider things only from the viewpoint of the inhabitants of the earth and do not draw the conclusion that it must also appear that way to the inhabitants of other cosmic bodies. Are there purposes and final causes in nature? If such purposes

and causes are found in a human being, if a human being has them and carries them out in action, if they are made real through all his exertions and through his every organ and limb, then it cannot be denied that there are final causes in nature. Mr. Jacobi seeks to thrust out (page 104) final causes from the universe by the following reasoning: "Let a person contemplate," he announces, "the vastly complicated organization of the body politic and let him search out what makes it into a single whole; [69] as he penetrates deeper and deeper into its makeup, he perceives more clearly only blind drives and the immense activity of a machine; but of course, it is a machine similar to those produced by a first-class craftsman, where the forces mutually align themselves each in accordance with what it is required to do and its level of energy; where all the springs are sensitively attuned to their effects, a sensitivity they communicate to one another through their mutual straining against one another: one necessary, infinite, construction of interlocking levels. The same thing can be said of languages, each of which seems in the perfection of its structure to be a miracle, though not one of them came into being with the aid of a grammar textbook." So this is the high wisdom that Spinoza opposes to the common and simple system of final causes; these are the convincing arguments with which he presumes to extract all of us from our madness and derangement. Human beings, who have a common need, can form without any prior arrangement a rational body politic; [70] human beings, wishing to make themselves understood by others, can, without any knowledge of grammar, produce a comprehensible and, what is more, quite well-ordered language. They can also knock things together without any technical know-how or design, and they can manufacture the miracle of this great globe with the same playful offhandedness by which La Mettrie's painter managed to achieve the effect of foam on a warhorse's mouth [when in frustration he simply spattered paint at the canvas]. And whoever does not see the truth of this is out of his mind, and the entire human race is out of its mind if it does not grasp such simple reasoning. Can any man ever have made such claims in earnest?

57

Nothing, I think, can be more beyond question than that in the visible world that surrounds us, as well as [the invisible world] within ourselves, final causes are realized and purposes are carried out. I cannot possibly believe that any philosopher has ever seriously doubted this. [71] One need only open one's eyes and give heed, with even the slightest modicum of attentiveness, to any one of nature's works, and one will be completely persuaded of this truth. The question that arises in metaphysics and that is deserving of close study is:

Is the system of final causes able to be proved apodictically or not? That is, is a single fact sufficient to lead us in the manner of a deductive demonstration to

know that a final cause lies at the basis of something, or must one rather amass a multitude of individual cases until a near-certain inference can assure us of [the existence of final causes]?

Neither in religion nor in our moral doctrine is the resolution of this problem of any special consequence. In regard to its practical effects little hangs on how we decide the question of whether our conviction rests upon an *apodictically demonstrated* truth or upon a *near-certain inference*. [72] But for a head that is inclined to speculation, the investigation has both a useful and pleasant aspect, and it deserves to be engaged in with all the acuity and accuracy one can bring to it. But that a man like Spinoza would simply explain away the system of final causes as a form of mental derangement and madness, and therefore consign the rest of us who are so adamantly attached to this system to the category of the ignoramus, that is laying down a rather slanderous challenge for which the defender, in accordance with the chivalric code and custom of philosophical dueling, may seek an apology.

58 The letter to Mr. Hemsterhuis that Mr. Jacobi shared with me remained for a time without a reply from me. Basically, I had nothing yet to say in response. The letter was not really directed to me; I did not understand it, placed the blame for this in part on my limited knowledge of the French language, and wanted to wait for the German answer to my Demurrers that Mr. Jacobi promised to send me. [73] When I could no longer wait for this answer to arrive, I decided to publish my *Morning Hours*, which I had in the meantime completed and put into its final shape. I arranged for Mr. Jacobi to be requested to delay his own counter-demurrers until he held the first part [of *Morning Hours*] in his hands.⁴² I explicitly wanted Jacobi to be told that in this first part of my work there was not one mention of our correspondence. It was my intention in this part only to lay out clearly my thoughts concerning the *first principles* of knowledge, concerning *truth, illusion, and error*, and to attempt to make use of these ideas in dealing with the topic of pantheism. It was here, I thought, that Mr. Jacobi would find a common point where we might meet and find a starting point for the race we hoped to conclude. My side in this race would have been presented in the second part [of *Morning Hours*]. [74]

59 But when directly after this I received Mr. Jacobi's letter and his German *Presentation of Spinoza*, I had to give up all hope of ever finding a common point where this philosopher and I could meet. If his French Spinoza was beyond my grasp, the German one was as if completely enwrapped in fog and clouds. I could not hold on to a single idea; barely had I managed to risk an attempt at trapping an idea in my grasp when in the very next phase of the argument

I was compelled to let it fly away again. At one moment it seemed to me as if the Spinoza of Mr. Jacobi claimed that all mutable things were mere thoughts and ideas of the immutable, but at another moment he seemed also to ascribe objective existence to that which is mutable. At one and the same time it was vehemently asserted that the Infinite is not an aggregation of the finite, and that by no means could the addition of things at a lower degree achieve the level of a higher degree, and therefore an endless *many* could never constitute one Infinity. And without prejudice to any of these assertions, that which is mutable was supposed to be one and the same substance as the immutable.⁴³ [75] Then I understood from his words in another place that his infinite is a mere abstract *quid* [what], a general concept, whose only reason for being considered eternal, infinite, and unchanging is that it is encountered in every finite and mutable thing and that it must lie at the basis of each thing. Looked at this way, only the finite entity would have a concrete existence, but the Infinite would be a concept that can be separated from the finite. The absolute unity itself, which he [Spinoza] ascribes to his only possible substance, seemed in many places to be a mere unity of an abstraction, somewhat the way animality in all animals or humanity in all humans is, insofar as it is an abstract concept, one thing, but insofar as it is found in objects it is manifested in each singular entity in a specific manner. [76] The force of a body's weight is the same when it is found in far-off heavenly bodies and here in the pendulum inside a clock. In regard to the concept, it is one and the very same force, but in regard to the objects, this force must be instantiated in each particular individual in multifold ways if indeed it is going to produce so many and varied effects. Thus it seemed to me that Spinoza's unity had to be construed as a unity merely in regard to the concept, because that by virtue of which the many mutable things find themselves in accord is one and ever the same thing in regard to the concept, whether or not it remains the same when it is instantiated in each particular object. But I could not reconcile this way of conceiving of unity with other passages [in Jacobi's *Presentation of Spinoza*]. In a word, it was as if I was driven about in a circle and could never get a firm footing anywhere. I therefore saw the need to have more contenders and more impartial judges participating in our combat, and so I wrote on 24 May 1785 to our common friend [Elise Reimarus] the following letter. [77]

■ ■ ■

- 60 You are now receiving . . . the first part of a manuscript that I have decided to release to the publisher. Please extend your friendship on my behalf and deliver it to * * [her brother J. A. H. Reimarus] for criticism. I have no philosophical friend in whose frankness, honesty, and discernment I repose more trust, or who

is more well-disposed or well-qualified, to tell me the truth about this work of mine. Ask him, dearest friend!, to give me some of his leisure hours and send me back my manuscript marked up by his amending pen once he is finished. The second part should follow shortly. I cannot let Mr. Jacobi see the manuscript; he will have to wait to hold the whole thing in front of him until it's printed, for a reason that you will immediately hear about. [78]

61 My dealings with Mr. Jacobi follow a quite peculiar course. The more he adds to the explanation he desires to give me, the less I understand him. In regard to his letter to H[emsterhuis], I simply do not understand its literal meaning, and a few days ago I received an extensive essay by him that was supposed to explain the letter [to Hemsterhuis] and at the same time answer my Demurrs against his system, and—I am not ashamed to admit it—I understood this essay even less. Now what is to be done? If we speak in different idioms and we are not mutually intelligible, for all eternity we will never get free of one another. And, on top of this, H.J. [Herr Jacobi] seems sometimes to get worked up and possessed by a sort of passionate ardor, although he could also be putting this on only to make the argument more lively. The truth may be that his heart still remains free of self-absorption and self-righteousness. [79]

62 Be that as it may, I must, to avoid confusion, first state my principles before I engage with H.J. So I am releasing the first part of my *Morning Hours* without saying anything in it yet about all our correspondence, but notwithstanding this I do touch upon Spinozism and make an effort at refuting it. I am saving our correspondence for the second part, which may appear a year afterward. In the meantime I will perhaps learn how to understand Mr. J. better, or, should I be so fortunate, even to ally myself with him on some points. Before we run our race, we must first meet at one definite place.

■ ■ ■

63 Impartial readers may judge whether H.J., after everything that had passed between us, was justified in the concern that he expresses on page 176 and whether he had any sort of right in hastening to avail himself of a private correspondence without first consulting with all the parties involved.⁴⁴ [80] “I could,” he says, “hardly allow him [Mendelssohn] by himself and quite one-sidedly to define what would be the proper terms of the controversy and to publicly announce that, in the point under dispute, much (in my essays) was absolutely incomprehensible to him, and that he paid less and less notice to every new effort I made at giving him an explanation of what I meant. Still less,” he continues, “could I yield to him on having the *status controversiae* [terms of the dispute] defined in such a way that it would fall to me to become in a certain sense the devil’s

advocate if at the same time the provoking cause of the controversy we were supposed to be waging was not to be made known. It was very important to me that people should understand exactly in what sense I had taken up the cause of Spinoza, and that it was solely and exclusively a matter of setting speculative philosophy against speculative philosophy, or rather, pure metaphysics against pure metaphysics.” [81] That in the first part of my work our exchange of letters was not yet even mentioned, and that still less therefore would there be any talk of H. J.’s essays and their comprehensibility or incomprehensibility, of this fact H. J., as he himself testifies on page 167, already had my assurance in his hands on 26 May; and if our mutual friend, as I suspect, had also shared with him a copy of my letter of 24 May, he therefore had my repeated promise that our dispute would only be broached in the second part [of *Morning Hours*], and I could not, without becoming a patent liar, act contrary to my promises. My *Morning Hours* are now out, and one can see that nothing of what H. J. feared has come to pass. When did I say that I wanted to show *the public* that, in the point under debate, much in his writings was absolutely incomprehensible, etc.? [82] As H. J. himself on page 175 testifies in quoting my own words, I only said: “*at least it would become clear* what the point under debate was, etc.”—that is to say, if I would have managed to set forth in my own fashion the *statum controversiae* as regards pantheism in general in the first part of my work, then it would soon become clear what the point under dispute between us was. How correctly or incorrectly I had set forth this *statum controversiae* was something that H. J. could, without at all compromising his own position, wait and see. The issue still only concerned pantheism in general, not Mr. J. in particular, who had plenty of time in which to educate me and the public with his better lesson, if he should have caught me straying from the correct path, without having to be in such a hurry to publish our correspondence. And H. J. had even less cause to worry that I would set him up as a supporter of atheism. [83] Even had I not promised to make no mention, for the time being, of our dispute, I had certainly given him no grounds for such a foul suspicion. What could move me, before the world and for all posterity, to defame the character of a man who had never wronged me? On the path upon which I try to travel through the world, and whose end I have now almost reached, H. J. will certainly never block my passage, and if he didn’t put it past me to gloat so much over another’s pain that I would trip an innocent person in order to amuse myself over his fall, he ought never to have sought to approach me and enter into correspondence with me.

64 Looked at from another angle, one may wonder why—if it is of such importance whether and in what complexion one takes up the cause of Spinoza and

seeks to defend his teachings, as H. J. maintains it is—why he allows himself in that case to set up our friend Lessing as so unabashedly a devil's advocate, as he calls it. [84] Why does he allow himself to libel a dead man who can no longer defend himself, and against whom he is incapable of bringing forward any other evidence besides an oral conversation and no other witnesses than his own person?

65 In a word, I can as little discover for myself Mr. J.'s practical principles as I can his theoretical ones. I believe that in circumstances so ill-suited to be set to rights through a disputation, it is well that we go our separate ways. Let him turn back to the faith of his fathers, bring a muzzled reason into obedience through the conquering might of faith, beat back any upwelling doubt, as happens in the postscript of his work when, invoking authorities and their dictates, he *blesses* his childlike return *and seals* (page 213) it with words from the *pious, angel-pure mouth* of Lavater. [85]

66 I for my part remain with my Jewish infidelity. I place my trust in no mortal's "angel-pure mouth," nor would I rely upon the authority even of an *archangel* when it came to eternal truths upon which human happiness rests, since in this matter I either stand or fall upon my own two feet. And what is more, since all of us, as Mr. J. says, are "born in belief," I therefore return to the faith of my fathers, which in accordance with the original meaning of the word, is not a faith in a teaching or an opinion, but is a trust and confidence in God's attributes. I assert with full and unqualified confidence in the omnipotence of God that He has the power to bestow upon humans the ability to recognize the truths upon which happiness is based. [86] I cherish a childlike confidence in God's mercifulness, that it is His will to bestow this ability upon me. Strengthened by this unwavering faith, I seek to learn and be persuaded of as much as I can from wherever I can. And praise to the benevolence of my Creator! I *believe* that I have discovered much, and everyone can find just as much if he seeks with open eyes and does not want to interpose himself before the light. So much for what concerns me.

67 As to what concerns our friend Lessing, his fate in the end is also not as hard as it initially might have been suspected. H. J. has placed him in company with people whom he may not find so unpleasant. According to a text he found among his papers, which he shares with us, on p. 170 he [Jacobi] explains that although Spinozism is atheism, the philosophy of a Leibniz or a Wolff is no less fatalistic than that of Spinoza, and he says that they lead anyone who perseveres in his study of them back to the principles of Spinoza. [87] In the end, he adds, *every path in pursuit of demonstrative truth leads to fatalism*. Scarcely could the spirit

To the Friends of Lessing

of Lessing, who once so much enjoyed the company of those outcasts, harbor any fear of being bored by their society now. Therefore let Lessing put all fear to rest and return to the quiet abode of peace and to the embrace of men who, like him, were journeyers on the path toward demonstrative truth, and, like him, trusted a little bit in reason.

Notes

INTRODUCTION TO THE TRANSLATION

1. Moses Mendelssohn was born on September 6, 1729, in the Dessau ghetto. One year after reaching the age of majority according to Jewish law, Mendelssohn followed his former rabbinical tutor in Dessau, Rabbi David Fränkel, to Berlin. Rabbi Fränkel had left Dessau for Berlin in 1743 when he was appointed to serve as the Berlin Jewish community's chief rabbi. Mendelssohn spent the rest of his life in Berlin, serving first as tutor to the children of a wealthy Jewish silk merchant and ultimately becoming a partner in the firm and taking over the business at his partner's death. Mendelssohn married Fromet Guggenheim (1737–1812) in 1762 and had eight children with her, six of whom survived to adulthood. Mendelssohn taught their son Joseph (1770–1848) rational theology in the morning hours (from 5:00 to 9:00) sometime around 1783 or 1784, and these conversations form the basis of the “lectures” in *Morning Hours*. Although Mendelssohn was quite successful in business, he had gone to Berlin not in order to improve his financial circumstances but, as he once explained, “to learn.” In the decade preceding his meeting with Gottfried Ephraim Lessing in 1754, Mendelssohn, under the tutelage of Abraham Kisch and Aaron Solomon Gumperz, had managed to acquire a knowledge of mathematics, Latin, French, and English. In Dessau, Rabbi Fränkel had introduced Mendelssohn to the philosophy of Moses Maimonides; after arriving in Berlin, Mendelssohn continued his studies with the Maimonides scholar Israel Samoscz. With his prodigious intellectual gifts, his language skills, and his extensive knowledge of Maimonides, Mendelssohn found that he could quickly grasp the complexities of the philosophies of René Descartes, Baruch Spinoza, G. W. Leibniz, and Christian Wolff, then the leading thinker in Germany. In 1755 Lessing published Mendelssohn's first venture into philosophy, his *Philosophische Gespräche* (*Philosophical Conversations*). In 1763 Mendelssohn won the Berlin Academy prize for best essay in philosophy, *Abhandlung über die Eridenz in metaphysischen Wissenschaften* (*On Certainty in the Metaphysical Sciences*; Immanuel Kant's essay came in second). Mendelssohn became a prominent figure in the Berlin Enlightenment circle of scholars and Prussian state officials under the patronage of Frederick the Great, ultimately joining the elite and secret Wednesday Society, dedicated to furthering the king's progressive goals. Mendelssohn died on January 4, 1786. His doctor and friend, Markus Herz, describes his death in the preface to *TFL*.

2. Moses Mendelssohn, *JubA*, 13, Brief 534. Readers who are interested in a more detailed and intimate account of Mendelssohn's life may wish to consult the narrative

written by his great-grandson, Sebastian Hensel, in the first volume of his two-volume history of his family (Hensel 1882), freely available through Google Books. A lively fictionalization of the life of Jews in Mendelssohn's Germany is provided in Berthold Auerbach's novel of 1839, *Dichter und Kaufman* (*Poet and Merchant*), whose English translation (Auerbach 1877) is also freely available through Google Books. Translations from Mendelssohn's correspondence are mine throughout.

3. Mendelssohn, *JubA*, 13, Brief 539 (May 18, 1781).
4. "Es ist . . . als wäre es unter einem Unstern geboren." (The statement is found on p. vi of Alexander Altmann's "Einleitung" to Mendelssohn 1979.)
5. Moses Mendelssohn, "Ueber die Frage: was heißt aufklären?" originally published in *Berlinische Monatschrift* (1784), 183–200; available online at *ZA-Digital*. It is translated in Mendelssohn 1997, 311–17.
6. Mendelssohn, *JubA*, 1: 1–40.
7. Mendelssohn, *JubA*, 8: 88–204; English translation in Mendelssohn 1983.
8. Perhaps the Jewish context of *MH* was what Johann Wolfgang von Goethe sensed when he wrote to Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi, soon after the publication of the book: "What do you have to say about *Morning Hours*, and about the Jewish tricks which the new Socrates has now worked up?" In response, Jacobi refers to *MH* as *Rabbinische Vorlesungen* (rabbinic lectures). (See texts 277 and 278 in Mendelssohn, *JubA*, 22, *Dokumente I*.)
9. Mendelssohn, *JubA*, 13, Brief 532.
10. Kierkegaard 2009, 66. In his *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* (1846), Kierkegaard devotes an entire section to a discussion of Lessing. Kierkegaard recognized Mendelssohn's dispute with Jacobi over the alleged atheism of Lessing, a dispute I will describe in some detail below, as a critical turning point in the entire history of Christianity. For more on Kierkegaard's understanding of the dispute, see *TFL*, par. 39 and commentary.
11. The review is reprinted in Mendelssohn, *JubA*, 22, *Dokumente I*, text 287, p. 294.
12. The standard view is defended by Leo Strauss in his "Einleitung zu *Morgenstunden* und *An die Freunde Lessings*" in Mendelssohn, *JubA*, 3,2: xi–cx. Strauss asserts that *MH* had either already begun to be written in fulfillment of Mendelssohn's long-standing goal of writing a defense of natural theology and was then put to use as a defense of Lessing's pantheistic Spinozism against Jacobi's accusation, or "more likely" was only first begun as a response to Jacobi's provocative letter (see esp. p. xv). Elise Reimarus was the daughter of a close friend of Lessing's, Hermann Samuel Reimarus (1694–1768). (For a biography of Elise Reimarus, see Spalding 2005.) Hermann Samuel Reimarus is today best known as the author of several essays on the historical Jesus and the history of Christian dogma that Lessing published (from 1774 to 1778) after Reimarus's death under the title *Fragmente eines ungenannten* (*Fragments by an Anonymous Writer*) in a periodical he issued during his service as the librarian at the Herzog-August-Bibliothek in Wolfenbüttel (hence they became known as *Wolfenbütteler Fragmente*). Mendelssohn refers to the *Fragments* several times in *MH* and *TFL* as evidence of Lessing's open-

mindedness as well as his continuing commitment to Christianity, which seems to be the position of Lessing in his appended commentary to the *Fragments*. For an English translation of Lessing’s commentary, see Lessing 2005, 61–82.

13. In German, *ein entscheidener Spinozist*; Mendelssohn, *JubA*, 13, Brief 607.
14. F. H. Jacobi, *Über die Lehre des Spinoza in Briefen an den Herrn Moses Mendelssohn (Concerning the Doctrine of Spinoza in Letters to Herr Moses Mendelssohn)*. The English translation is found in Jacobi 1994, 173–251. The German text of all editions published in Jacobi’s lifetime is found in Jacobi 2000.
15. See Mendelssohn, *JubA*, 13, Brief 596.
16. See Mendelssohn, *JubA*, 13, Brief 597 to Karl Gotthelf Lessing. For an excellent translation and discussion of these theological manuscripts, see Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, *Philosophical and Theological Writings*, ed. H. B. Nisbett (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).
17. Mendelssohn, *JubA*, 13, Brief 597. As Leo Strauss points out (in his notes to *MH*, *JubA*, 3.2, p. 278), the noun *Morgenstunden* in the letter should not be taken as the title of a book, but as a literal reference to the morning hours. Strauss quotes other expressions in Mendelssohn’s letters where he says he “dedicate[s his] morning hours” to this or that person. But if these morning hours, at first dedicated to his Lessing book, merged into the morning hours dedicated to the theological lectures held with his son and his two friends, then it is perhaps not completely wrong to see Karl Lessing’s reference to the work of Mendelssohn’s “morning hours” in 1783 as the first testimony we have to what is found in *MH*.
18. Mendelssohn, *JubA*, 13, Brief 619.
19. The German text I use in this book is the dual-edition of both the 1781 (A) and 1787 (B) versions in Kant 1998a. References to the *Critique* will be to the pagination of the 1781 (A) edition.
20. This early critique is found in his *Philosophische Gespräche* (1755), republished in Mendelssohn, *JubA*, 1: 1–39. The English translation is in Mendelssohn 1997, 96–129.
21. See Immanuel Kant, “Was heißtt: sich im Denken orientieren” in *AA VIII*: 33–147. Kant directly contests Mendelssohn’s apparent reduction of reason’s inherent antinomies to the misuse of language in an essay also published soon after *MH*, “Einige Bemerkungen zu Ludwig Heinrich Jacobi’s Prifung der Mendelssohn’schen Morgenstunden,” *AA VIII*: 149–55.
22. I make this argument in my book *Philosophy and the Jewish Question: Mendelssohn, Rosenzweig, and Beyond* (Rosenstock 2010).
23. For a complete description of the composition history of Jacobi’s *Spinoza-Letters*, see “Anhang 2. Entstehungsgeschichte” in Jacobi 2000, 330–38.
24. Mendelssohn, *JubA*, 13, Brief 692 (to Elise Reimarus, April 29, 1785, immediately before the publication of *MH*).
25. Jacobi, *Spinoza-Letters*, 166–67.
26. Ibid., 198.

27. Sutcliffe 2004, 179.
28. On the Wednesday Society and Zöllner's role in the question that arose out of central concerns of the Wednesday Society, see Schmidt 1989.
29. Zöllner 1786.
30. *TFL* (par. 46.)
31. For a fuller discussion of Jacobi's later writings and their critique of nihilism, see Rosenstock 2010, 83–106.
32. See his account of having read Mendelssohn's critique of the essay in Jacobi 1994, 284–85.
33. For a discussion of Kant's abandonment of his precritical ontological proof, see Logan 2007.
34. George di Giovanni's “Introduction: The Unfinished Philosophy of Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi” in Jacobi 1994 is the best place to begin to gain an understanding of Jacobi's authorship as a whole. A briefer account can be found in Milbank 1999. For Jacobi and his place in the English Romantic tradition, the classic work is McFarland 1969. For Jacobi's place in the development of German idealism, see Frank 2004 and Franks 2005.
35. The exception, of course, is Alexander Altmann, whose *Moses Mendelssohn: A Biographical Study* contains a full account of the course of the argumentative structure in *MH*. Gideon Freudenthal has published an important new work dealing with Mendelssohn's philosophy, drawing not only from *MH* but also from his Hebrew writings and especially those portions of his commentary on the Pentateuch (the *Biur*) that he was responsible for (Freudenthal 2011).

NOTES ON THE TRANSLATION

1. Mendelssohn, *JubA*, 3,2. Leo Strauss was the editor of this volume of the *Jubiläumsausgabe*, published in 1974. I discuss his introduction and commentary in the next section, “For Further Reading.”
2. The author of these notes and supplements is, as Mendelssohn informs us in *MH*, “one of the most deep-thinking researchers of our time.” Mendelssohn does not name him, but from his own later testimony we know that it is Johann Albert Heinrich Reimarus (1729–1814), Elise Reimarus's older brother. This brief section offers interesting material, especially concerning Mendelssohn's implicit criticism of Kant's notion of the thing-in-itself in Lecture VII.
3. *The Case for God* was first published in Mendelssohn 1843a, vol. 2: 411–51, and then republished after *An die Freunde Lessings* in *JubA* 3,2: 219–60. *Sache Gottes* (*The Case for God*) is Mendelssohn's German rendering of Leibniz's Latin appendix to his *Théodicée* (1710; reprinted in Leibniz 1846, 31–55) titled *Causa Dei* (the French translation, *La Cause de Dieu*, is found in Leibniz 1846, 432–60). Mendelssohn's text closely corresponds to Leibniz's *Causa Dei*, but it parts company with him on the question of the justice of eternal punishment, a doctrine Mendelssohn rejects.

MORNING HOURS; OR, LECTURES ON THE EXISTENCE OF GOD

Preliminary Remarks

1. J. H. Lambert (1728–1777) was a mathematician and natural scientist whose most important philosophical work was *Neues Organon: Oder Gedanken über die Erforschung und Beziehung des Wahren und dessen Unterscheidung vom Irrtum und Schein* (1764). J. N. Tetens (1736–1807) was the author of *Philosophische Versuche über die Menschlische Natur und ihre Entwicklung* (1777). Tetens comes closest to Mendelssohn in his effort to rehabilitate common sense. Ernst Plattner (1744–1818) was the author of *Philosophische Aphorismen, nebst einigen Anleitungen zur philosophischen Geschichte* (vol. 1. [1776]; vol. 2 [1784]).

2. Joseph, born August 8, 1770.

3. “S.” refers to Simon Veit (Witzenhausen), born May 25, 1754. He was the first husband of Mendelssohn’s daughter Brendel, later Dorothea Schlegel. “W.” refers to Bernhard Wessely, born September 1, 1768, the son of Aron Wessely.

4. In describing the tendency to trust only the direct evidence of the senses as the source of not only materialism but also religious fanaticism (*Schwärmerei*) when a direct experience of the divine is sought, Mendelssohn perhaps has in mind the last letter he received from F. H. Jacobi (April 21, 1785). In that letter, Jacobi argues that human beings have an immediate and direct certainty concerning the existence of their bodies, and that this same certainty is a “revelation of nature that not only commands, but impels, each and everyman *to believe*, and to accept eternal truths through faith” (*Spinoza-Letters* 163).

5. Mendelssohn is referring to the letters he received from Jacobi over the previous two years in which he was challenged to defend his friend Gotthold Ephraim Lessing from the charge of being a Spinozist (i.e., atheist and fatalist) and of having abandoned even the last vestiges of theism that had linked the Enlightenment’s religion of reason to Christianity. For more detail, see the discussion of Jacobi in my “Introduction to the Translation.” Mendelssohn says that he plans to devote what he here calls a “subsequent installment” (*folgende Theil*) of *MH* to Jacobi’s challenge. Mendelssohn hoped to be given time to recover his strength after completing *MH* before working on the second installment, but Jacobi’s publication of the *Spinoza-Letters* forced him to respond more quickly. The work translated here as *To the Friends of Lessing* is therefore the form that the second installment of *MH* was forced to take. It is probably both briefer and more polemic than the second installment would have been had Mendelssohn been given the time to write it as he planned.

LECTURE I

1. Mendelssohn claims in *Jerusalem; or, On Religious Power and Judaism* that we cannot agree on the meaning of the words we use by reference to an internal sensation. We can only explain ourselves by using other words: “My neighbor and I cannot possibly connect the very same words with the very same internal sensations, for we cannot

compare them, liken them to one another and correct them without again resorting to words” (1983, 66). Here in Lecture I of *MH* Mendelssohn extends the point. He claims that even an external object cannot secure the meaning of a word, since when two people see an object, they may agree to call it by the same name, but it is not clear that they have the same internal representation of the object. In fact, as Mendelssohn later explains, no two perceptions of an object are identical. Therefore, the effort to find a criterion of truth based on an independently existing “original” object to which ideas and words correspond is futile, since, as he avers, we are always only dealing with copies and have no access to a perspective-free perception of an “original” object. For a lengthier treatment of Mendelssohn’s discussion of words and their meaning in *Jerusalem*, see Rosenstock 2010, 61–63.

2. Mendelssohn uses the word *denkbar*, literally “thinkable.” But when Mendelssohn says something is *nicht denkbar* (literally, “not thinkable”), he does not use the word as we in English do when we say that something is “not thinkable” or “unthinkable.” We might say, for example, that for America to launch a nuclear war is “unthinkable,” but it is certainly not a logical impossibility. Mendelssohn limits “not thinkable” to whatever is logically inconceivable. I therefore prefer to translate *nicht denkbar* as “inconceivable” or “logically inconceivable” and *denkbar* as “conceivable” or “logically conceivable” in order to capture the sense of logical possibility and impossibility in Mendelssohn’s use of the term *denkbar*.

3. The concept of the “greatest possible distance” combines the idea of a distance than which none is greater (i.e., an infinite distance) and a finite measurement that would be the greatest possible measurement of any distance. One idea contradicts the other, and therefore the concept is not logically conceivable.

4. Moral judgments (of something’s goodness, beauty, justice, and so on), Mendelssohn will argue later (see Lecture VIII, par. 22; Lecture IX, par. 9; Lecture XII, *passim*; Lecture XVII, par. 21ff.), are always comparative judgments: to say something is good is to say that it is better than other possible objects or acts, so therefore to say that something is *not* good or *not* just is to be logically committed to asserting that it is *not as good* or *as just* as something else. To be wholly evil (without any goodness) or wholly unjust (without any justice) would place something outside of this comparative series of good or just things, and thus it is a contradiction of the very idea of goodness or justice to say that something is *absolutely not good* or *absolutely not just*.

5. In this paragraph Mendelssohn asserts that one can call a concept true if the properties that make it up are logically compatible, and one can call a proposition true if it asserts of its subject a property pertaining to the concept under which the subject falls. In the latter case, the proposition is true because one is really predicated the property of the concept. Thus, an example of a true concept can be found by putting together the properties of “polished,” “thin,” “flat,” and “silver.” These are the properties of the true (logically possible) concept of the mirror. Mendelssohn still needs to explain the kind of truth that is exemplified in a proposition like “There exists an object that is a

mirror." For Mendelssohn's most extended discussion of the meaning of "existence" as a predicate, see Lecture XVII and the accompanying commentary.

LECTURE II

1. Mendelssohn rejects the claim advanced by David Hume in his *Philosophical Essays Concerning Human Understanding* (1748) that we associate an effect with a certain cause only on the basis of repeated experience of the one as following upon the other (see esp. Essay VII, Part II). This repeated experience may be what persuades us that one experience will follow upon another, but Mendelssohn argues that when we believe that a certain cause produces a certain effect, we are justified in our belief only if there is a *ground* in the concept of the cause that is logically connected to the concept of the effect. Thus, if I frequently notice that when a billiard ball strikes another ball the second ball moves, I come to expect such movement to always follow upon the striking of one ball by another. But if I wish to assert that the first ball *caused* the motion of the second, I must show that the concept of a physical body (the concept I apply to the billiard ball) includes a property (the ground) that can explain how and why one body can impart motion to another. Hume would reply that the belief in the existence of this ground goes beyond any evidence provided by experience. Kant argues in the *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781) that the assertion that one object is the cause of another does not require experiential evidence, since the condition of any possible experience of an object includes the category of cause—that is, it includes the possibility of the object acting as a cause. Kant's position is still vulnerable to the question of whether in any particular case an object is understood to be acting as a cause due to the application of the a priori category of cause or due to a psychological habit of associating that object with a certain effect. Aristotle, for example, thought that certain insects arose spontaneously from putrefying vegetal matter, because he had observed that these insects appeared regularly wherever vegetal matter had been allowed to rot. Why isn't Hume right about how Aristotle (and many others) came to believe that a causal relationship obtained between rotting vegetal matter and insects? If the belief that rotting vegetal matter gives rise to insects is due only to the fact that the two things have been frequently noted together, perhaps Kant is wrong to say that the a priori category of cause is being applied in this instance. Mendelssohn had read Kant's *Critique*, and he shows us in this passage that he does not agree with either Hume or Kant. He argues that we begin by associating two appearances (rotting vegetal matter and insects) as Hume says, but he goes on to argue that we are not warranted in believing that one causes the other until we find a property in the concept of the first that explains the effect. Aristotle, unlike his less scientifically minded contemporaries, did at least search for such a property (he thought it was the vital heat in the vegetal matter). Only when the property can be formulated within the framework of natural laws is it justified to say that a causal relationship has been established. The attribution of a causal relationship between two phenomena is for Mendelssohn neither

a result of their mere association (Hume), nor is it due to the shaping of experience by the categories of the understanding, one of which is the category of cause (Kant). While this passage clearly criticizes Hume’s notion of causation, Mendelssohn’s critique of Kant is not so explicit. The implicit critique of Kant, however, is explicitly advanced by Salomon Maimon in his *Versuch über die Tranzendentalphiosophie* (*Essay on Transcendental Philosophy*, 1790), published four years after *MH*. Maimon had studied *MH* very carefully and translated it into Hebrew before he wrote his *Essay* (see Maimon [1790] 2004, xiii). For Maimon’s treatment of cause and ground, see Maimon 2010, 61–62. For his critique of Kant’s notion of the a priori nature of cause in relation to experience in general, see Maimon 2010, 29–30, 190–92.

2. A wedge is formed by joining two inclined planes, and a screw is simply a spiraling inclined plane. The wedge (an axe, for example) or a screw allows for a more efficient application of force to a given object, just as an inclined plane allows for a more efficient application of force in lifting an object to a desired height (by extending the distance from starting level to the desired height). The same laws of mechanics apply in all three cases.

3. For the story, see Arrian, *Anabasis of Alexander and Indica*, Book II, chapter 4.8–11 (1893, 76). Alexander was informed by a letter that his doctor had been bribed to poison him, but despite the information, he trustingly drank a potion prepared by his doctor even as he held the letter in his hand.

4. An English translation of Mendelssohn’s 1761 treatise “Ueber die Wahrscheinlichkeit” (“On Probability”) can be found in Mendelssohn 1997, 233–50. In this treatise Mendelssohn explicitly sets about countering Hume’s argument that only the habitual association of two phenomenon grounds our judgments, that one is the cause of the other.

5. Mendelssohn means that his opponent, if he predicts that all four tosses will turn up tails, has exactly one chance in four of winning, but that he, Mendelssohn, would have three chances in four of winning.

6. In 100 tosses, there are 100 ways for Mendelssohn to win and only one way for him to lose, thus 101 possible outcomes. He has, therefore, 100 out of 101 ways to win; his opponent has one way to win out of the same 101 possible outcomes.

7. The ratio has become infinitely small and is therefore not greater than 0 by any finite magnitude. The ratio, then, is able to be represented as 0:1—that is, 0 chances of my opponent winning in any single toss. To be absolutely certain, in other words, that my opponent did not play fairly and that it was not by chance alone that all tosses came up tails, I would have to know that *no matter how many tosses we bet on, heads can never come up*. But I can only know that after an infinite number of tosses, which is tantamount to saying that *I can never be certain my opponent is cheating when he constantly wins the toss no matter how many times I toss the coin*. Of course, I could be certain that my opponent is cheating if I examine the coin and find that it has tails on both faces. But apart from this or some similar discovery, however many tosses turn up tails I still cannot be absolutely certain that my opponent has not been extraordinarily lucky.

8. Mendelssohn's “modern sophist,” who calls into question the use of the principle of the most economical hypothesis in the proof of God's existence, is perhaps David Hume. In his *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion* (1779), Hume has Philo say that “to multiply causes, without necessity, is indeed contrary to true philosophy: but this principle applies not to the present case”—that is, in the case where no one has ever observed the single postulated cause, God. Hume (Philo) compares the case to seeing one side of a scale with a weight lifted up by an unseen and obviously greater weight on the other side of the scale: “it is still allowed to doubt, whether that weight be an aggregate of several distinct bodies, or one united mass” (109). “By what phenomena in nature can one decide the controversy?” Philo asks. Mendelssohn replies here that it is an inherent tendency of the human mind to judge in favor of the simpler explanation according to which the cause is single rather than multiple. This tendency is not a hypothesis, nor does it stand or fall upon the existence of a single intelligent designer of the universe. The tendency is an *a priori* principle that is the condition of possibility of distinguishing lawful order from chance.

LECTURE III

1. The phrase I am translating as “our mind's unimpaired powers” is *unserer positiven Seelenkräfte*. I have chosen to render the adjective *positiven* as “unimpaired” because, first, to translate the phrase as “our mind's positive powers” smacks too much of “the power of positive thinking,” which has nothing to do with Mendelssohn's notion of “positive mental power,” and, second, because Mendelssohn contrasts *unserer positiven Seelenkräfte* with *Unvermögen der obern Seelenkräfte*, which is best translated as “impairments of those powers of our mind.” The *positive* power, therefore, is the *unimpaired* power.

LECTURE IV

1. Mendelssohn is quoting Alexander Pope, *An Essay on Man*, Epistle 1, lines 1 and 2 (in *The Works of Alexander Pope* [1734] 1808: II, 43). With a couple of slight changes, he is relying upon the translation into German made in 1776 by Johann Georg Schlosser, *Anti-Pope, oder ein Versuch über den natürlichen Menschen, nebst einer neuen prosaischen Uebersetzung von Pope's Versuch über den Menschen* (Leipzig: Weigandschen Buchhandlung, 1776), 157: “Erwache Bolingbroke, überlass dem niedern Ehrgeiz, und dem Stolz der Könige ihre Kleinigkeiten.” Mendelssohn has “dem Ehrgeize und dem Stolze der Fürsten ihre Kleinigkeiten lassen.”

2. Eris is the Greek goddess of strife; Bellona (spelled “Belona” here) is a Roman goddess of war. Hesiod said that there was a good Eris, who encouraged productive competition among individuals, and a bad Eris, who stirred up envious rivalry. In the allegory that Mendelssohn develops around Eris in the passage that follows, he identifies these two forms of Eris with a single Eris who has been under the sway of either Amor or Ambition.

3. In Judges 14 Samson tells a riddle to the men of Timnah: “Out of the eater came something to eat, out of the strong came something sweet.” They solve the riddle by getting Samson’s wife to reveal to them the answer: “the eater” and “the strong” both refer to a lion in whose carcass bees have made a hive. Samson says that the men of Timnah had “plowed with my heifer.”

4. A presentation lends us to believe that the object it presents appears before us, as when an actor portrays a character on stage. A representation offers a likeness of an object, as when a painting represents a landscape. The presentation, Mendelssohn says, may involve us in an error insofar as we forget that we are seeing only an imitation; the representation does not usually lead to this error. In the next lecture, Lecture V, Mendelssohn uses “presentation” to refer to a sensation accompanied by a sense that an external object is present as its cause (see par. 7). The skeptical position that he attempts to refute argues that all presentations are merely representations (likenesses) without any corresponding external object. In the following lectures, I have consistently translated *Darstellung* as “presentation” and the verb *darstellen* as “to present.”

5. Mendelssohn seems to be thinking of how one solves an equation. If one follows the solution procedure, one can *prove* that the final result is true by inserting the solution back into the equation. On the other hand, one can *check* the accuracy of one’s calculations by going through them once more. The proof generates near certitude about the correctness of the result, whereas the check cannot guarantee the correctness of the result, since one can make the same mistake twice without noticing it. Thus, for example, in the quadratic equation $x^2 + 3x + 2 = 0$, one can solve for x by using the quadratic formula. One thus discovers that there are two solutions (-2 and -1). One can check the truth of these solutions by going over the steps followed in working through the quadratic formula. Of course, one can simply repeat a calculation error over and over again with each check. Thus, checking the solution is not very reliable. However, if one replaces the two solutions for x in the original equation and the equation then equals 0, one has a much greater degree of confidence that the solution is correct.

6. According to Leo Strauss’s note on this passage in the *Jubiläumsausgabe* edition of *MH* (*JubA*, 3,2), Mendelssohn has in mind M. Helvétius’s treatise *De L’Homme* (1774), section 2, especially chapter 5. Helvétius there argues that “every idea and every judgment may be reduced to a sensation” (Helvétius 1777, vol. 1: 115).

7. What Helvétius has in mind is perhaps most easily understood if we imagine that we are given two equations and asked to find the unique values of the two variables, a and b , that would make both equations true: $a + b = 10$ and $a + 3b = 14$. Once we find the unique values of the variables a and b that make both equations true, we can then work with both equations using the values or using the variables. If, for example, we want to add both equations together, the result, $2a + 4b = 24$, is no less true than if we had first substituted the values of a and b and then added up the equations. In other words, the variables a and b can perfectly substitute for the values when we work with the equations. Helvétius is proposing that words in natural language could work the way that variables do in the example equations—that is, they have a unique value (a certain

sensation), and, knowing that value, one could combine sentences with these words in perfect confidence that the resultant sentences are no less true than if one were combining the sensations themselves into larger wholes. Mendelssohn insists in response to this proposal that words have a penumbra of emotional and cognitive associations that cannot be reduced to a single perception. The use of words in poetry, he argues, is not a misuse of the words, but is rather a natural consequence of the connotative richness of words. For more on Mendelssohn’s critique of the intellectualist model of language that Helvétius is advancing, see Rosenstock 2010, 49–63. I argue that Mendelssohn’s anti-intellectualist theory of language supports his critique of oath-taking as a test of religious conformity in *Jerusalem* and that it is a precursor to Wittgenstein’s critique of private language.

LECTURE V

1. The quotation is from the opening of Canto III of *Der Messias* (1773) by Friedrich Gottlieb Klopstock (1724–1803). (The first three cantos were published anonymously in 1748, and republished in 1751 under Klopstock’s name. For bibliographic details, see Klopstock 1751.) For an English translation, see Klopstock 1806.

2. The feeling that an object that is outside me is the source of my perception—as when I see a table and believe it is there before me—is, for Mendelssohn, not conclusive proof that the object in fact exists. Jacobi had argued in his letters to Mendelssohn that the existence of the external object is immediately felt and not inferred. (See *MH*, Lecture XII, par. 6 and commentary, and *TFL*, par. 45 and commentary.) Jacobi claimed that if existence were not *revealed* in the perception of the object, all that would be left of the object would be a mental representation, an abstraction with no connection to the dynamic force of existence within the object. Once the felt reality of existence was denied, rationalism would be able to reconstruct only a purely abstract and lifeless world, and its God would be equally lifeless and abstract. Thus, in order to retain a living God, according to Jacobi, one must retain faith in the immediate revelation of the existence of the object. Jacobi’s argument that existence is not a concept whose application to objects depends upon inferential proof but is rather an immediately felt dynamic *revelation* of the object would have important consequences for later philosophy, perhaps most importantly for F. W. J. Schelling and Søren Kierkegaard. Mendelssohn, as I will explain in greater detail in my commentary on *TFL*, cannot accept that existence is a dynamic force within an object, because he holds that existence is the result of God’s judgment that it is best for a possible object to be actualized at a certain place and time. Mendelssohn inherits the Leibnizian-Wolffian premise that possibility or “conceivability” logically precedes actual existence.

3. The root meaning of *zücken* is to pull something quickly and powerfully out of its normal resting position, as when one pulls a sword from its scabbard. Thus, the mind is pulled or *rapt* away from its normal condition. Mendelssohn goes on to say that rapture seems to be a natural propensity of the mind, since it is given over easily to subjective

associations of ideas. As in Mendelssohn's assertion at the end of the previous lecture that words have emotional connotations that cannot be eliminated, so here we see him asserting the natural force of the poetic imagination over the mind.

4. The reference to a “supersensory object” suggests that Mendelssohn is talking about metaphysical speculation about God, the soul, immortality, and other such topics of “rational cognition.” The fact that this sort of concentrated focusing on a chain of reason is described as “mentally tiring” perhaps reflects Mendelssohn’s own “nervous weakness” that he speaks of in his “Preliminary Remarks” to *MH*. Mendelssohn reveals his humor in the next paragraph (par. 12), where he both displays and apologizes for his own propensity to digressive and poetic lines of thinking.

5. Nicolas Malebranche (1638–1715) was a French philosopher best known for his “occasionalism,” according to which God is the direct cause of every event. Leonhard Euler (1707–1783) was a Swiss mathematician, perhaps the most accomplished in his generation.

LECTURE VI

1. See Fontenelle 1750, *Sixième Soir*, p. 75: “*les vrais Philosophes sont comme les éléphants qui en marchant ne posent jamais le second pied à terre que le premier n'y soit bien affermi.*”

2. It is Heraclitus and not Democritus who speaks about the common world of waking and the private one of dreaming (see fragment 89 in the standard Diels and Kranz collection, *Die Fragmente der Vorsokratiker* [1954]).

3. The last two paragraphs of this lecture depend significantly on the distinction between *presentation* and *representation* first introduced in Lecture V, par. 10. Certain sensations, especially those whose order seems to follow an objective rather than a subjective sequence, carry with them the impression of arising from objects outside ourselves. Mendelssohn says that these sensations seem to *present* an object. In these last two paragraphs, he goes further and says that the objects *present themselves to us* through these sensations, or at least that we have good reason to consider this to be a strong likelihood given the way that other percipient beings agree with us about the objects in the world we seem to share. Mendelssohn also seems to be making a point against Kant. Mendelssohn admits that what objects are apart from the way they present themselves to us is unknowable, but he denies that this implies that the objects do not present themselves to us at all. Objects present themselves to us as extended, mobile, and impenetrable. Kant denies this and argues that the understanding alone is responsible for applying the concepts of extension, mobility, and impenetrability to the objects given in experience. (See Kant 1998a, A359f.)

LECTURE VII

1. It would seem that here Mendelssohn is directly confronting one of the central claims of Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*. Kant made the *Ding an sich*, the “thing-

in-itself,” the limit beyond which the understanding (*Verstand*) could not legitimately venture in its use of such categories as cause, substance, accident, and so on (see *Kritik*, A236ff.). Thus far, it would seem that Mendelssohn in this paragraph agrees with Kant. But Kant allowed that reason (*Vernunft*) did have a capacity to form concepts of pure reason (“transcendental ideas”) of the thinking subject in itself, the world in itself, and God in himself, the objects of a *psychologia rationalis*, *cosmologia rationalis*, and *Theologia transcendentalis* respectively (*Kritik*, A334–35). Mendelssohn explicitly rules out such a transcendental use of reason. Kant responds to Mendelssohn’s implicit critique of his claims on behalf of the transcendental use of reason in his 1786 essay “Einige Bemerkungen zu Ludwig Heinrich Jacobi’s *Prüfung der Mendelssohn’schen Morgentunden*” (AA VIII, 149–56). Kant argues that Mendelssohn reduces objects to things with merely external relations (*äußerer Verhältnissen*) to other things, thereby overlooking the underlying subject in which those relations would inhere and have their unifying ground. Kant says that the soul and God are certainly more than such external relations, but that there is an underlying subject in each case. Mendelssohn would certainly agree that there are inherent powers of the soul and powers within God, but these powers express themselves in relation to other objects. The soul, as the previous lecture argued, has an “unimpaired power” to apprehend objects in the outside world; we will learn that it also has the power to give its approbation to objects whose reality it seeks to bring about. God has both of these powers in their perfect, entirely unimpaired version: the object of God’s approbation is necessarily brought into being. But these powers, in their human and divine forms, do not inhere in some underlying subject that has a reality “in itself.” Kant’s view is closer to that of F. H. Jacobi in *Spinoza-Letters* that every object has a dynamic, unifying power that subtends all of its other merely “external” relations. Jacobi, as I explain below (see, for example, *TFL*, par. 44, commentary), relied upon an earlier work of Kant, *One Possible Basis* (1979), with its notion of a dynamic positive power of existence maintaining the unity of the object. In his reply to Mendelssohn, Kant returns to this notion when he says that there is “a sheer, authentic reality, something that is not merely posited as corresponding to the negations (as is commonly thought), but that also and in the first place corresponds to the realities in the appearances (*realitas Phaenomenon*), the sort of reality that all things must have that are given to us through the senses and that must be named *realitas apprens* (to use a not very pretty expression)” (“Einige Bemerkungen,” 154). What *realitas apprens* literally means is “reality that comes into appearance.” Kant is referring here to a dynamic force accounting for an object’s *being real*, a force that makes itself apparent or is expressed in the sensible phenomenon. Kant seems to think that this “reality that comes into appearance” is distinct from any set of properties that we attribute to the object. Mendelssohn, as we have seen (see Lecture VI, par. 9 and 10 and commentary), argues that objects that we take to be real *present themselves* to us through such attributes as extension, mobility, and impenetrability. Kant distinguishes the “reality effect” from everything else we perceive in the object and every concept we attribute to it. Kant’s “*realitas apprens*” is a dynamic power grounded in the thing-in-itself. Jacobi took this notion and made it the basis of

his claim that God’s dynamic power to bring the world into being is *revealed*—that is, immediately given in the direct sensation of an object’s sheer reality. Jacobi claims that although “we only sense our body as constituted in this way or that”—that is, although we know the world through sense impressions or representations of the objects within the world, a point that Mendelssohn would agree with, there is also “something else as well, totally different from it [our body], which is neither mere sensation nor thought; we become aware of *other actual things*, and, of that with the very same certainty with which we become of ourselves” (Jacobi, *Spinoza-Letters* 231). The immediate awareness of the actual reality of the object is, according to Jacobi, “a revelation of nature that not only commands, but impels, each and every man *to believe*, and to accept eternal truths through faith” (*Spinoza-Letters* 231). Jacobi moves from the possibility of a “revelation of nature” (that is, of God’s creative power in the actual force of reality in the object) to the revelation of Christ (that is, God’s power to lift human life above nature through the power of the human will directed to a “higher life”). Mendelssohn does not accept that an object’s sheer reality is a “revelation.” If an object’s sheer reality is what links it to God, then *that* it is more important than *what* it is. For Mendelssohn, such a view contradicts the idea of God’s providential will through which objects come into being precisely because of what they are—that is, how their attributes contribute to the good of the universe as a whole. For Mendelssohn, the reality of an object depends, first, upon its conceptual possibility, and second, upon God’s choice of that possibility as the best thing possible at that specific time and place. Mendelssohn develops this view in the remainder of the lecture.

2. In Kant’s essay “Einige Bemerkungen” (see note 1 above), Mendelssohn’s reduction of many philosophical problems to verbal disputes comes under attack (see esp. *AA* VIII, 152–53). Kant claims that underlying such verbal disputes there is always a formal problem in which reason is trapped because it attempts to extend the categories of the understanding to objects that lie beyond any possible experience.

3. Mendelssohn is paraphrasing the words of Othello in *Othello* III.3, ll. 383–412.

LECTURE VIII

1. The Areopagus was the highest court in ancient Athens, judging appeals in civil and criminal cases. It was named for the “Rock of Ares” on the northwest side of the Acropolis, where the court met in open air when murder cases were adjudicated (see Aristotle, *On the Constitution of Athens* 57.4).

2. Johann Bernhard Basedow (1723–1790) first developed his defense of the “duty of belief” in the truths of natural religion in Basedow 1765. A later and more accessible exposition of the duty to believe is found in Basedow 1770, Zweites Stüick: 256ff. See Basedow 1880, 146ff.

3. Mendelssohn seems to be endorsing a Leibnizian view that all things that happen are the best things that could have happened. We must be careful to distinguish this view

from the view that everything that happens is simply good. The best is always found in a continuum of possibilities, from worse to better, and the best is always only comparatively best. The best that is actualized at any particular time and place should, therefore, really be called the “better.” This comparative view is linked to Mendelssohn’s discussion earlier in *MH* of the difference between the impaired and unimpaired (“positive”) exercise of the faculty of approbation. From Mendelssohn’s earlier discussion of our impaired and unimpaired use of this faculty, it seems that he assumes that humans are so constituted that we (like all other created beings) naturally strive to act with full and unimpaired powers. If we allow ignorance or prejudice to impair the power of our judgment, we are not doing what is best. It is God’s intention for the whole of which we are a part that it should become as perfect as is possible through the full and unimpaired activity of all the powers of the created beings within the world. However, at no moment in time is the world perfect, although God’s intention to perfect the world is what is directing it as a whole. What is best, in other words, is what moves the world toward perfection (the full and unimpaired activity of all the powers found in the world), but this is a goal that can never be achieved until the end of time. Mendelssohn not only understands that the world is not perfect (although what happens is the best that can happen at that time and place), but he also argues that, at least as far as human history is concerned, the direction of change is not a simple straight line of progress (see Mendelssohn 1983, 96). For a discussion of Mendelssohn’s disagreement with the Leibnizian “theodicy” according to which some rational beings are incapable of perfecting themselves and therefore are justly condemned to eternal punishment, see Gottlieb 2011, 20ff.

LECTURE IX

1. In his review essay from 1764 concerning Kant’s *One Possible Basis*, Mendelssohn discusses the problems associated with moving from the concept of God to the existence of God that Kant raises. These are the problems that Mendelssohn is alluding to here. He reports that Kant argues in his essay that existence is not a predicate like other predicates; to say that unicorns are horned is to state one of the predicates of any object that instantiates the concept “unicorn,” but it is not to say that unicorns exist. I can list all the predicates of a concept, but none of the predicates will be *existence*, not even if the concept is that of a being whose existence is necessary. It is possible to have a concept of such a being but for such a being not to actually exist. One could say that God’s necessary existence is conditional: *if God exists, He exists necessarily*. Once we admit that existence is not a predicate, it becomes impossible to move from any concept, even that of God, to existence. Since Jacobi will make use of Kant’s essay and its understanding of existence as “absolute positing” in his attack on Mendelssohn’s arguments for the existence of God, Mendelssohn is compelled to offer a much fuller discussion of these points in *TFL* (par. 47 and commentary).

LECTURE X

1. Kant composed an essay devoted to Mendelssohn's rule titled “Was heißt: sich im Denken orientieren?” (“What does it mean to orient oneself in thinking?” in *AA VIII*, 131–47.) Kant was seeking in the essay to offer a resolution to the dispute that erupted after Jacobi published his *Spinoza-Letters*. He takes Mendelssohn's side against Jacobi's rejection of what Kant calls “rational belief” (*Vernunftglaube*)—that is, the rationally clarified belief in a providential God. In the essay Kant claims that reason has a felt need [*Bediürfnis*] to form a concept of a first cause of the world's chain of events and also to posit that the first cause initiated this chain for a benevolent purpose. Kant says that Mendelssohn incorrectly identified this need of reason as common sense. He defends reason against what he sees to be Mendelssohn's undervaluation of its powers (see also Lecture VII, par. 4 and commentary). Mendelssohn would counter that he is, unlike Kant, committed to the singleness of common sense and reason. Kant places common sense on the side of phenomena and reason on the side of noumena. Mendelssohn, as we have seen in Lecture VII, denies that it is possible to use reason in respect of things in themselves. For Mendelssohn, as opposed to Kant, the question “What is the reality behind the phenomena?” is a meaningless question, because there is no possible way to answer it. For an English translation of the Kant essay, see Kant 1998b, 7–18.

For a critical discussion of Mendelssohn's dream, see Beiser 1993, 98–102. Beiser argues that the dream is a veiled attack on Jacobi's appeal to faith (*Glaube*) against reason (*Vernunft*) in his correspondence with Mendelssohn. Mendelssohn, Beiser claims, wants reason to follow common sense, but he has admitted that at times Lady Speculation has right on her side. Mendelssohn cannot offer any explanation for reason's following common sense in this case other than “our overwhelming presumption” (par. 3) in favor of common sense. But is this not an admission that reason must in the end rest upon *faith*, as Jacobi has argued? Beiser believes that Mendelssohn “subconsciously concedes a lot to Jacobi” (100). But Mendelssohn, unlike Jacobi, is quite willing to accept the tentative nature of reason's following after common sense. Jacobi demands a final renunciation of reason in favor of faith; Mendelssohn rejects any final resolution of the conflict between common sense and Lady Speculation. Beiser takes this to be a sign of Mendelssohn's failure to defend the “sovereignty of reason” against Jacobi, a task that, according to Beiser, Kant more successfully fulfills. But this criticism assumes that Mendelssohn's aim was to establish the sovereignty of reason. In fact, Mendelssohn wanted to establish the sovereignty of open-ended rational *doubt*, as is clear in Lecture III's discussion of Basedow.

LECTURE XI

1. The passage is found in La Mettrie 1751 in the section titled “Système d'Epicure”: “*N'y a-t-il pas eu un Peintre qui ne pouvant représenter à son gré un Cheval écumant réussit admirablement fit la plus belle écume en jettant de dépit son Pinceau sur la toile. Le bazar va souvent plus loin que la Prudence*” (§ XIX, 337).

2. The line of time into the future, they admit, goes on forever. Now, looking back toward the beginning of this line, they then imagine that if it has a starting point, an eternal being would have to experience time as an endless duration of boredom. If God starts time in one instant, then He must, it seems to the philosophers that Mendelssohn is here discussing, continue to experience time in all of its instants successively. The idea that such endlessness would be experienced by God as “unending boredom” is something that Jacobi, in a letter to Mendelssohn, reports that Lessing had said to him when they were discussing Spinoza. Mendelssohn refers to this phrase as proving that Lessing was joking when he represented himself as a Spinozist. See *Spinoza-Letters* 35–37: “Lessing could not tolerate the idea of a personal and absolutely endless being, with an unchanging enjoyment of its highest perfection. He attached to this such a picture of unending boredom that it made him frightened and even caused him pain.”

3. The point seems to be that if time were beginningless, there would be no actualized or completed past, just as the endlessness of future time means there is no actualized or completed future. Since there is a completed past, however, it must have a beginning. But Mendelssohn says that some philosophers, going beyond the frivolous point about God’s boredom, object that the argument for a beginning of time based on the completedness of the past begs the question. It assumes that the past is a completed actuality. What might the alternative be? Mendelssohn does not say, but from the opening paragraphs of the next lecture (Lecture XII) we can reconstruct the following as the alternative way to reconcile creation with the beginninglessness of the world: Perhaps the past is no more a completed actuality than is the future. Perhaps only one moment is ever actual—namely, the present—and an infinite number of these moments *have been* actual just as an infinite number of them *will be* actual. If this is the alternative that is in the back of his mind, then Mendelssohn is gesturing toward a doctrine that is known as continuous creation, according to which it is asserted that the world is created by God and that the world has always existed. It is possible that Thomas Aquinas argued for this position in his treatise *De aeternitate mundi*. See Wippel 1981 for a clear exposition of the issues involved in reconciling creation of the world with the beginninglessness of the world. The issues would have been quite familiar to Mendelssohn, since they were among the most important topics addressed in Maimonides’s *Guide to the Perplexed* (see esp. 2.13). On Maimonides’s discussion of the eternity of the world, see Rudavsky 2010, 71–74. In the following paragraph, Mendelssohn seems to be describing the viewpoint of someone committed to continuous creation, and he concludes by saying that because of the many problems associated with asserting that the world has a beginning, it is best not to build a proof of God’s existence on this basis.

In Lecture XIII, par. 3, Mendelssohn asserts that he and the Spinozist agree that time has neither a beginning nor an end. The Spinozist, however, denies that the world of time has been created by God—that is, that it has been endowed with its own substantial actuality. Mendelssohn, therefore, seems committed to a doctrine of continuous creation. Ironically, Jacobi seems also committed to this doctrine, although he attacks Mendelssohn’s position. Jacobi, for example, declares in *Spinoza-Letters*, “I believe in

an intelligent personal cause of the world” (17), and he also defends the possibility of *creatio ex nihilo*. Jacobi’s God does not, however, create the world out of nothing and then leave it to go on existing without Him. According to Jacobi, God is ever present as a felt power sustaining each thing in existence. This is the doctrine of continuous creation, and Mendelssohn is no less committed to it than is Jacobi. What, then, divides Jacobi and Mendelssohn? Mendelssohn, in Lecture XII, pars. 9 and 10, argues that God is Creator and Sustainer of the whole realm of changeable things taken as the best single possible configuration of things. Jacobi, however, seems to believe that God is the immediate and direct cause of every individual being. This alone allows Jacobi to assert that God is a person with a direct relation to each human being. Mendelssohn’s Judaism did not call upon him to believe in a God with whom he, as an individual, had a personal relationship. Clearly, this is not the same religiosity as that which Martin Buber expounds as expressing an “I-Thou” relationship with God (Buber 1923). Buber goes back to Jacobi, the first to use the phrase “I-Thou,” in order to claim a personal and experiential dimension at the heart of Judaism. For Buber’s discussion of Jacobi, see his essay “The History of the Dialogical Principle” in Buber 2002, 250–52.

LECTURE XII

1. See Lecture XVII, par. 21. Mendelssohn, as we have seen, is quite aware of the Kantian arguments advanced in Kant’s 1756 essay *One Possible Basis* (1979) and also in the *Critique of Pure Reason* (1998a). When he later returns to the argument for God’s existence from the concept of a necessary being, Mendelssohn is content to show that the argument, although it is not in itself a demonstration of God’s existence, is at least so psychologically compelling that, for the purposes of proving that human reason cannot help but believe in God, it is sufficient. This is the very point that Kant himself makes in his essay “Was heißt: sich im Denken orientieren?” (“What does it mean to orient oneself in thinking?”) (see Lecture X, par. 2 and commentary).

2. Mendelssohn’s point is that the set of predicates that hold true of a person and are all together linked to the predicate of existence cannot be altered in any particular without the nonexistence of the person. The person, therefore, can never change and, since the person is always a possibly existing being, will in fact always exist unchangeably, since his possible predicates are, in the case Mendelssohn is here hypothesizing, linked to the predicate of existence.

3. Mendelssohn seems to be saying that my self-consciousness, which assures me of my existence, can be associated with a certain set of predicates or their contraries, and the ground of my existence cannot lie in one set or the other, because if it did, I could only exist with that particular set of predicates, and therefore I would be unchangeably the same with respect to those predicates throughout time.

4. Mendelssohn here is treading close to but turning away from a direction that post-Kantian thought would pursue and that Jacobi is also pressing him toward. Mendelssohn starts with the undeniable existence of the self-conscious subject, and he admits that

what this subject knows about itself could not be known if the subject did not exist. Now, one might conclude from this that self-consciousness is somehow privileged in relation to the ground of the existence of the subject over all other properties, that the subject through its self-consciousness posits itself as an existing being and exists because of this self-positing act. Jacobi would make this very point, arguing that the human being believes himself to exist when he is conscious of himself in relation to the external world, and that this feeling is the expression of his power of existing, of his will to unify the manifold of his properties into a unity, so that he creates himself as a living, organized being in this way, and his existence is his existence as this persistent wholeness and unity, whose parts change over time. (Jacobi developed this argument in a work written not long after *Spinoza-Letters* called *David Hume über den Glauben [David Hume on Faith]*, 1787; English translation available in Jacobi 1994, 253–378). In *David Hume on Faith*, Jacobi writes that “the perception of the actual and the feeling of truth, consciousness and life, are one and the same thing.” Mendelssohn argues here that a self-conscious being’s existence, like that of any actual being, is grounded in God’s choice for this being to exist as that which is the best at that time and place. The individual can know himself and make himself the object of approbation, but in doing so he is only affirming what God has already chosen. For Jacobi, this denies freedom and leads to fatalism, and Mendelssohn, as we have seen, is willing to countenance the accusation, actually leveled against him by Jacobi, that he is a fatalist. Mendelssohn calls himself a “moral determinist” because he believes that the choice of the good is not completely undetermined, nor is it determined by prior physical causes, but rather it is determined by one’s judgment of what is most in harmony with one’s essential nature as a rational human being.

5. This, for Mendelssohn, is the meaning of the necessity of God’s existence—not that He is morally necessary as an object of approbation, but that it is necessary that there exist a first cause of all contingent beings’ existence. This is not precisely the ontological argument according to which it is asserted that if we can conceive a perfect being, then that being must necessarily exist since otherwise it would lack the property of existence and therefore would not be perfect. What Mendelssohn is saying is that the perfect being exists if the world, or even if only I, exist. Mendelssohn may think he is reversing Spinoza’s procedure, which is to begin with a definition of the only possible subject of a true and certain proposition—namely, the one being that is the ground of its own existence—and then showing that this being must also be the ground of the existence of all contingent beings. For Mendelssohn, the subject of the only proposition we can know immediately to be true and certain is myself. But despite the difference between their methods, Mendelssohn agrees with Spinoza that the necessary being that is the ground of its own existence is also the ground of every contingent being’s existence. But he disagrees with Spinoza because he asserts that each contingent being exists only by virtue of becoming the object of the necessary being’s approbation. Spinoza argues that the necessary being contains the possibility within its understanding of every conceivable being. According to Mendelssohn, Spinoza offers no reason for any of these possibili-

ties to ever come into existence. Or, to put it more simply, for Spinoza, the ground of the necessary being's existence is, by virtue of this very ground, also the ground of the existence of every contingent being. But Mendelssohn separates out the two types of ground: the necessary being is the ground of its own existence by virtue of its perfect understanding of its own logical conceivability, or the material aspect of its own concept, as Mendelssohn puts it; but this being is the ground of all contingent beings by virtue of its will and its power of approbation, or the formal aspect of its cognitive power. Spinoza denies that there is a difference between God's understanding (the material aspect of God's cognitive power) and God's will (the formal aspect of God's cognitive power). According to Mendelssohn, this means that Spinoza cannot offer a sufficient reason for anything to come into existence at all (no reason to choose one possibility as better than another). Spinoza, Mendelssohn will explain in *TFL*, is not an atheist, but an acosmist, a denier of the actuality of the universe.

LECTURE XIII

1. Johann Georg Wachter published *Der Spinozismus in Jüdenthumb* in 1699. It argued that Spinozism was a development of the Kabbalah and that both were pantheistical, denying the existence of the transcendent God of revelation. Wachter later recanted his argument in *Elucidarius Cabalisticus* (1706), and he argued that the Kabbalah in fact contained a mystical doctrine of emanation, not a pantheistic equation of God and nature. For both texts, see Wachter 1994 and Wachter 1995. For a discussion of how Jacobi draws from both of Wachter's texts in his attack on Spinozism and, by association, Mendelssohn, see Rosenstock 2010, 94–96. Micah Gottlieb (2011, 94) offers some interesting evidence concerning Mendelssohn's views about the Kabbalah as a corruption of the natural religion of reason through an idolatrous fixation on the metaphors used to describe how the Godhead creates the world. Mendelssohn makes the same point about the error of literalizing such metaphors in Lecture XIV, par. 17.

2. Mendelssohn explains the connection between form and movement in what follows. He means that bodies are not merely made of impenetrable matter, but also that they move in regular and predictable ways. The planets, for example, move around the sun. By virtue of the impenetrability of its matter, one planet does not differ from another, so the nature of its movement must lie in the actual form of the matter—that is, the size of the planet. In considering more organized bodies, like those of living beings, movement is more complicated, but it is still related to the form of the living being (which species of plant or animal it is).

3. Spinoza must, in other words, accept the determinists' definition of freedom as the will's perfect equipoise or preferencelessness before two options so that its choice would be entirely without prior determination of any kind. Since neither he nor the determinists believe that this perfect equipoise and undetermined choice is possible, he therefore must deny freedom of the will, or he must claim to have a different definition of freedom. Since, as a determinist himself, he does not want to quarrel about the meaning of freedom

with the determinists, he simply accepts their definition. However, in accordance with the logic of Spinoza's system as Mendelssohn understands it, he could have adopted a definition of freedom that said that it was the will's power to act in conformity with what is best. According to Mendelssohn, this definition is also compatible with determinism, understood as *moral* determinism rather than *physical* determinism.

4. Mendelssohn is speaking of any class of objects that is unified by virtue of some shared feature: the class of dogs, or green things, or parcels of water. In any instance of the class, the feature is not one and the same as it is in another instance, but it is rather at least spatially divided from that other instance's feature (dogness here is different from dogness over there; the green here is not the same as the green over there, and so on). Mendelssohn is setting up his argument that things, in themselves, do not have the power to unify themselves into a class or totality with a common feature. The class is unified by the abstract property or feature whose unity, Mendelssohn claims, is only possible insofar as the abstract property is the object of a unifying mental grasp.

5. See Moses Mendelssohn, *Phädon oder über die Unsterblichkeit der Seele* (Berlin: Friedrich Nicolai, 1767), reprinted in *JubA*, 3,1. The proof for the immortality of the soul that Mendelssohn is referring to is found in the second conversation of the work's three conversations. Mendelssohn's argument in this paragraph brings into sharp relief his difference from Jacobi. Mendelssohn is arguing for the preeminence of the *concept* over the *existent being*. Without a covering concept like “herd” or “dune,” all there would be in the world would be unrelated, discrete individuals. Even at the level of the individual, without the concept “sheep,” all there would be before us as we look at a particular sheep would be an aggregation of body parts with no unifying organization. Applying this doctrine to the case of the individual human, Jacobi finds that Mendelssohn has reduced human *existence* to the *concept* of “human being.” The life, it seems, has been drained out of the human being. Mendelssohn would reply that the immortal human soul is the true life of the individual, but Jacobi could still counter that the soul, on Mendelssohn's account, is just another name for concept-cognizing reason. It is perhaps true that Mendelssohn's ontology made it difficult for him to assign value to the unique particularity of human existence, but his friendship with Lessing and his love for his wife and children made it clear that his practice did not conform to his theory. Had Jacobi not turned his criticism into personal attack, there might have been a better outcome to their quarrel. In tension with Mendelssohn's apparent devaluation of the particularity of the human individual is his doctrine of the ultimate happiness of each individual as the goal of God's creation. This doctrine is alluded to in Lecture XV where Mendelssohn speaks of the inner connection between God's grandeur and God's lowliness. God's grandeur is expressed in His sovereign rule over creation as a whole. His lowliness is expressed in His concern for the ultimate happiness of the individual (see pars. 7–9 and commentary). The doctrine that each individual human immortal soul will progress in the infinitude of time toward happiness is explicitly argued for in a posthumously published essay, composed in 1784, titled *Sache Gottes, oder die gerettete Vorsehung* (*The Case for God; or, Providence Justified*) (Mendelssohn 1843b),

§ 82. (I provide a freely available translation of this text through the University of Illinois Library's scholarly digital repository with the permanent unique identifier <http://hdl.handle.net/2142/27714>.) It is possible that Mendelssohn felt challenged by Jacobi to demonstrate that his religion of reason did not create an unbridgeable gulf between God and the particular human being.

6. Mendelssohn means that the question of whether or not the world has a beginning defines a crossroads at which he can choose to go further on the fork taken by Spinoza, who pursues the path of a beginningless universe, only if it is understood that in going along with Spinoza he does not intend to deny that God has an independent being apart from the world. Spinoza does not, according to Mendelssohn, actually take the same fork in the crossroads as does Mendelssohn, but rather identifies God with the infinite nexus of causes and effects that constitute the universe. Mendelssohn is willing to accept the beginninglessness of the world if it is joined to a notion of a transcendent God who is eternally creating the world (continuous creation). Mendelssohn will defend the view that continuous creation is properly understood to be the act of a transcendent God in the next lecture.

LECTURE XIV

1. This lecture is one of the most important in *MH*. First of all, it offers a powerful argument against pantheism based on the incompatibility of the subjective experience of a finite, self-conscious being with the infinite cognition of God. God may have every finite, self-conscious being as the *object* of His cognition, but He cannot also be the *subject* of limited self-consciousness. Each limited, finite self-consciousness is, in relation to God's cognition, a defective or imperfect consciousness. God would need to "alienate" Himself from His perfection in order to be the subject possessing such a limited consciousness. Mendelssohn's argument is precisely repeated by William James in *A Pluralistic Universe*: "If the absolute makes us by knowing us, how can we exist otherwise than as it knows us? But it knows each of us indivisibly from everything else. Yet if to exist means nothing but to be experienced, as idealism affirms, we surely exist otherwise, for we experience *ourselves* ignorantly and in division" (1909, 192–93). And, second, it is important to note that Mendelssohn's argument against pantheism (what James calls idealism) creates a gulf between divine perfection and human finitude that apparently cannot be crossed. God cannot alienate Himself and enter into the world of finitude, nor can the human being communicate her experience meaningfully to God. Mendelssohn seems quite willing to see the task of the finite human being to consist in freeing herself from her subjective limitation as far as possible and recognizing her place in the indivisible wholeness of God's condition of all finite beings as a single totality. But Jacobi thought God revealed Himself to each human as an individual and could be a "Thou" to the finite "I" (For more on this, see commentary on Lecture XI, par. 9.) It is perhaps in order to mitigate the apparent gulf between God and human that Mendelssohn devotes a major section of the following lecture to an impressive and moving

discussion of the conjunction of lordliness and humility in God. (See especially par. 7 where Mendelssohn draws from his rabbinic learning.)

LECTURE XV

1. The Fragmentist is Hermann Samuel Reimarus (1694–1768), the defender of natural religion. Lessing published several manuscripts of Reimarus from 1774 to 1778 under the title *Fragmente eines ungennanten (Fragments by an Anonymous Writer)* (Reimarus 1774) that stirred controversy by treating Jesus as a purely historical personality. For more on Lessing’s publication of Reimarus and his “Fragments,” see the introduction, note 12.

2. In a posthumously published manuscript of Mendelssohn dated to 1784, the same time when *MH* was being composed, we are given a more detailed account of this rabbinic passage. In § 2 of *Sache Gottes oder die gerettete Vorsehung (The Case for God; or, Providence Justified)* (Mendelssohn 1843b), we read, “The true religion of reason considers both [God’s grandeur and His goodness] together: His grandeur, as the Kabbalists declare, is mixed with His goodness. *Din m’muzag b’rachamim*. [Given in Hebrew script in the manuscript: “Judgment is mixed with mercy.”] Rabbi Jochanan’s saying is very wise: ‘Everywhere you find the grandeur of God, you will also encounter his self-lowering [*herablassende*] goodness.’” The saying of Rabbi Jochanan is found in Tractate Megillah (31a) of the Babylonian Talmud (Epstein 1984). (I provide a freely available translation of *Sache Gottes* through the University of Illinois Library’s scholarly digital repository, with the permanent unique identifier of <http://hdl.handle.net/2142/27714>.)

LECTURE XVI

1. Mendelssohn is arguing here that if all the conditioning factors that brought our minds and bodies into being had to be able to be grasped clearly in our consciousness, we would not in fact exist, since we have no clear consciousness of anything prior to our existence, and obviously we are not self-producing creatures; our parents are obviously among the conditioning factors of our existence, but we have no consciousness of them prior to our existence.

2. It is important to understand that Mendelssohn is not asserting that, in the case of the gold, the infinite number of possible shapes into which it can be stretched and beaten into are each an object of a thought in some thinking subject’s mind. Rather, he is claiming that the gold’s possibility of being beaten into such shapes is the object of such a thought. Aristotle would call this possibility a *potentiality* (*dynamis*) of the gold. For Aristotle, every potentiality is either a form (the potential of an acorn to become an oak tree is on account of the form of the oak tree present in the acorn) or a material in which certain qualities inhere that can be replaced by other qualities within the same genus (as when a leaf changes color from green to brown). In both cases, potentiality is understood to be a possible object of a certain sort of cognition: botany studies the

form of the oak tree, and a color is a perceptible universal (greenness or brownness, for example). The Aristotelian principle that every actualizable potentiality (acorn to oak tree, green leaf to brown leaf) is a cognizable potentiality is retained in both medieval Scholasticism and the Leibnizian-Wolffian metaphysics with which Mendelssohn is working here. Mendelssohn is arguing that the individual human being cannot cognize all of her potentialities, and therefore a being must exist who does cognize all her potentialities, together with the potentialities of all finite beings. The argument rests on the assumption that potentialities do not exist in the object, but this assumption is flawed. Mendelssohn asserts that “mere possibilities may not be predicated of things as objectively determined features” (par. 27), but a potentiality like gold’s ductility (or the acorn’s potentiality to become an oak tree) is not a “mere possibility.” Aristotle has no problem with the notion that a *dynamis* or potentiality can exist in a material body, but his notion of matter underwent a radical change in the seventeenth century when its only two properties were thought to be extension in space and impenetrability. Aristotle’s forms and universals fled from this merely extended matter into the mind of the cognizing subject in the metaphysics of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century thinkers like Descartes, Leibniz, Wolff, and Mendelssohn. Jacobi sought to defend a dynamic conception of the material world in order to counter what he saw as the lifelessness of the idealism of this post-Cartesian metaphysics. Jacobi found evidence of this dynamic view of matter in Leibniz’s concept of the monad as a locus of both force and consciousness. (For more on Jacobi’s appropriation of Leibniz, see Di Giovanni 1994, 95–97.) Of course, Jacobi’s interpretation of Leibniz runs counter to that held by Wolff and Mendelssohn.

In the next lecture, Mendelssohn asks whether the cognizing mind that has all potentialities as the object of its thought actually exists. For a cognizing mind that has all potentialities within itself may never actually bring anything into reality and may itself remain in a condition of pure potentiality. To show that an infinite cognizing being is both necessary and actual is the challenge to which Mendelssohn next turns.

LECTURE XVII

1. Mendelssohn is here restating the argument of Kant’s essay *One Possible Basis* (1979). See also *TFL*, pars. 44, 47, 48, 54, 59 and the commentary.
2. Mendelssohn is here testing his proof by using a concept of existence with which he is not entirely in agreement—namely, that it is the *absolute positing* of an object without reference to any concept (“there is something existing over there that can be spoken of”), distinguished from the *relative positing* involved in relating a predicate to a subject (“that something over there is a dog”). This distinction is maintained by Kant in his essay *One Possible Basis* (1979).
3. Mendelssohn is referring to his 1763 prize-winning essay “On Certainty in the Metaphysical Sciences” (translated in Mendelssohn 1997, 251–306).
4. Mendelssohn’s point here seems to be similar to Kant’s point about the human incapacity to see past the perspectival refraction of our senses to the actual thing in itself,

so that we could know if our concepts fit not only the objects of the phenomenal world but also those of the noumenal realm.

TO THE FRIENDS OF LESSING

1. The opening description of Mendelssohn's final days was written by the playwright and philosopher Johann Jacob Engel (1741–1802).

2. Earl of Shaftesbury, *Sensus Communis: An Essay on the Freedom of Wit and Humour in a Letter to a Friend* (London, 1709). The point of this epigraph seems to be that Jacobi is like the Ethiopian. Jacobi takes Lessing's mask—his Spinozism—to be the truth, and he takes Mendelssohn's truth—his faith in God—to be a mask (for his atheism).

3. Mendelssohn is referring to the character of the Patriarch in Lessing's *Nathan the Wise*. In act 4, scene 2, the Patriarch says: *Doch zu allererst / Erkläre sich der Herr, ob so ein Fall / Ein Faktum oder eine Hypothese? / Das ist zu sagen: ob der Herr sich das / Nur bloß so dichtet, oder obs geschehn, / Und fortfährt zu geschehn.* (But first explain yourself, sir, whether this case is a fact or a hypothesis. That is to say, whether my lord merely is only thus creating a fiction, or whether it really has happened, and continues into the present.) The Christian Patriarch in the play is a rather despicable figure, conniving against both Nathan and Saladin, the Ottoman sultan controlling Jerusalem, where the play is set.

4. The “third party” he refers to was Elise Reimarus. For a full biography of Elise Reimarus, see Spalding 2005.

5. Zankapfel refers to the apple inscribed “to the most beautiful one” that was tossed by Juno into the midst of goddesses at the wedding of Peleus and Thetis, leading to the Judgment of Paris and the Trojan War.

6. Athanasius, Bishop of Alexandria, fourth century c.e. defender of orthodox Christianity against the Arians, came to be associated with the major creedal articulation of Trinitarian orthodoxy, the so-called Athanasian Creed.

7. Mendelssohn refers to Jean-Jacques Rousseau's account of his effort to befriend Diderot, told in books 6 and 7 of his *Confessions*.

8. Goethe's “Prometheus” poem was first published in Jacobi's *Spinoza-Letters*, but it was composed at least a decade earlier. In the poem, Goethe has Prometheus rail against the tyranny of Zeus and claim his right to self-determination in the face of his oppressive power. It is clearly meant as an allegory of the rebellion of self-affirming humanity against a God who seeks obedience above all else. Prometheus thus replaces Jesus as the one who loves humanity, but, unlike Jesus, his love is expressed by setting humanity free to live without its childish dependence upon God.

9. Jacobi printed the poem on unpaginated pages between pages 48 and 49 of *Spinoza-Letters*, and he offered the owner of the book another poem of Goethe with which to replace “Prometheus.” For some reason, however, this special arrangement was not found in all copies of the book. Jacobi wanted not only to offer readers an inoffensive substitute for “Prometheus” but also a way of evading censorship wherever it may be

more strictly enforced. The note in the *JubA* edition of *An die Freunde Lessings* contains Jacobi's explanation of how to remove the offending pages (p. 322); the edition of *Spinoza-Letters* in Jacobi 2000 does not contain this text, but it does refer to the special arrangement in a note to the inoffensive Goethe poem (p. 5).

10. The proof Mendelssohn refers to goes like this: the idea of God is the idea of perfect being; a perfect being is lacking in nothing that would make its being incomplete; lacking existence would make a perfect being incomplete; therefore the perfect being does not lack existence. Mendelssohn offers a thorough analysis of the flaws in this very argument in Lecture XVII of *MH*, where he shows himself to be completely familiar with Jacobi's objections to the proof, which are really Kant's in the essay *One Possible Basis* (Kant 1979), objections that are restated in the *Critique of Pure Reason* (Kant 1998, 668ff.; *AA*, A592/B620 ff.), in a section ("On the Impossibility of an Ontological Proof of the Existence of God") that ends humorously with the quip that "a man could as little become richer in his stock of insights by adding to it mere ideas than could a merchant who, in an effort to improve his situation, adds rows of zeros to his financial ledger's cash-on-hand column" (Kant 1998, 676; *AA*, A601/B629).

11. "On Certainty in the Metaphysical Sciences"; English translation in Mendelssohn 1997, 251–306.

12. This quotation is from Jacobi's *Spinoza-Letters* (3–4), slightly altered by Mendelssohn. Entry § 73 of the *Education of the Human Race* deals with Lessing's reinterpretation of the Son within the Trinity as the Father's duplication of himself in his vision of himself as including all possibilities, so that the unity of Father and Son is understood to be the "transcendental unity" of an infinite vision (said to be like looking at one's mirror image, only with the image a full duplicate of oneself) holding all possible finite beings within itself. See Lessing 2005, 234–35.

13. Jacobi, *Spinoza-Letters* vii–viii.

14. Mendelssohn's references to the page numbers in *Spinoza-Letters* match the square bracket page number references in the Di Giovanni translation.

15. Friedrich Wilhelm Gleim (1718–1803) was a well-regarded poet and a mutual friend of Jacobi and Lessing. For a brief discussion of his poetry, see Baur 1805, 183–90.

16. I am translating Mendelssohn's German rendering.

17. Mendelssohn makes the same point in *MH*, Lecture X, pars. 1–3 (see also commentary), and it is a point that Kant takes up in his discussion of Mendelssohn's quarrel with Jacobi in his essay "What Does it Mean to Orient Oneself in Thinking?" first published in *Berlinische Monatschrift* in 1786 soon after the quarrel broke out (but after Mendelssohn's death) and reprinted in *AA* VII, 131–47 (English translation in Kant 1998b, 3–14). While he was somewhat critical of Mendelssohn's continuing adherence to a Wolffian metaphysics, Kant basically sided with him against Jacobi's critique of any attempt to ground faith on reason. Kant believed that without a rational idea of God, it would be impossible to test the alleged immediate experience or revelation of God as truly from God. How would one know how to apply the concept of divinity to any experience without a rational grasp of the concept beforehand?

18. *Der Dorfpfarrer* (*The Village Preacher*, 1785) and *Die Dorfschule* (*The Village School*, 1786) were written by Christoph Heinrich Müller, best known for his collections of medieval German poetry, including the *Niebelungenlied*.

19. These “Demurrers” were sent to Jacobi in a letter dated August 1, 1784. In that letter, Mendelssohn alludes to the Shaftesbury passage about the Ethiopian that he chose as the epigraph to *TFL*. I am translating *Erinnerungen* as “Demurrers” because *Erinnerungen* in this context is used in a legal sense, thus fitting in with the tenor of the whole of *TFL*, which is structured as a legal brief in defense of Lessing. *Erinnerung* in its legal sense is found together with words like *Antrag* (“motion”) and *Einwendung* (“objection”). The legal term in English, “demurrer,” is an argument placed before the court that challenges evidence on the basis that the evidence does not support the allegation, regardless of its truth or falsity. The *Oxford English Dictionary* also notes an extended use beyond the law in which the meaning is more generally “an objection or point raised against anything.”

20. The quotation is found on page 14 of the *Spinoza-Letters*.

21. Since these fictional events are clearly not impossible or inconceivable because they posit self-contradictory states of affairs, they must be possible. Spinoza, holding that everything possible is also actual, would then be forced to conclude that these fictional events actually happened. Pierre Bayle (1647–1706) was an influential writer whose works pointed out conflicts between orthodox Christian faith and reason and also contradictions among various attempts to reconcile faith and reason. His best-known work is *Dictionnaire historique et critique* (1697, 2nd ed., 1702). Madeleine de Scudéry (1607–1701) was a prolific novelist, and Ludovico Ariosto (1474–1533) was the author of the epic romance *Orlando Furioso*.

22. The deterministic concept of freedom that Mendelssohn refers to is one that he himself shares—namely, that freedom is acting without external constraints rather than acting without any predetermining cause whatsoever, which was Spinoza’s position. If Spinoza had allowed that a person was free if his choices were his own, he would have seen that to make choices that are one’s own is to make choices with a view to what his reason recognizes is the best among a number of possibilities, the so-called *perfectissimum*, or “best possible thing.” But because Spinoza thought that freedom meant acting from a condition of perfect equipoise and without any determining cause other than one’s own self-determining will, a finite being would need to be able to break away from the chain of causes preceding its decision in order to be free, and this, Spinoza thought, would be tantamount to starting an entirely new chain of effects—in other words, creating something out of nothing. Mendelssohn, on the contrary, believes that human freedom consists in determining one’s actions in accordance with one’s judgment about what is best, and this does not require breaking with the chain of causation, only directing it toward what is most in harmony with one’s nature as a rational being. For a brief but excellent discussion of Mendelssohn’s conception of *perfectissimum* freedom of choice, see Gottlieb 2011, 67–69, 96–97.

23. Mendelssohn believes that in the divine mind there is no real before and after, or temporal duration, and since all thoughts of individual, limited, thinking beings are part

of the divine mind, the before and after of thoughts is a feature of limited minds only, but the sequentiality of thoughts and the experience of temporal duration is not an illusion or dream that has no connection to an objective sequence of events. Mendelssohn argues that the subjective sequence of thoughts and the objective sequence of events that are the objects of those thoughts are able to be related to one another because events are the realized thoughts of God, chosen by God because they meet the criterion of being the best for that time and place. An individual's thought can have a real event, and a real thing, as its object by attuning itself to the objective order in God's mind through a process of sifting out the contribution of subjective factors to the thought and seeking to understand, in however a limited way, why the thing is the best at that time and place. His arguments for this position are found in Lectures VI and XVII of *MH*.

24. See *Spinoza-Letters* 17–18 and 32–33. See note 25 below for a further discussion of the *salto mortale*.

25. Jacobi tried to get Lessing to make a *salto mortale* out of fatalistic Spinozism into an entirely new way of looking at himself and the world. He wanted Lessing to see the world as containing the possibility of a human ability to start an action without prior temporal determinations. This ability would mean that a human being could leap out of time into a relation with the eternal and thereby exercise a power of self-determination, the power of the self-determining God dwelling within each individual human being. Jacobi in effect wants the defining attribute of Spinoza's God—being a cause of itself, *causa sui*—to be the primary attribute of his *personal* God, an attribute that is shared with the individual human who, as a self-determining person, rises above the causal nexus of nature. To see oneself as capable of freedom is to make a leap to a new way of seeing oneself, and in changing one's self-conception from someone who is determined by prior causes to someone who is free is to enact one's freedom. Lessing thus says that to make the leap to another way of seeing the world requires the very thing that one is leaping over to—that is, one must be free before one can see oneself as being free. Or, put differently, the leap *into* faith presupposes that one already has faith. Lessing says that perhaps Jacobi can hold on to him as he, Jacobi, makes the leap. Jacobi says that Lessing need only to step over and “stand on the spring,” and the spring will do the rest (*Spinoza-Letters* 32–33). Lessing then replies, “That also requires a leap, which my old legs and heavy head can no longer manage.” Clearly, Lessing understood what Jacobi was asking—namely, to *will himself out of fatalism and thus prove fatalism wrong*. Did Lessing think this leap was impossible? As one can see from the comments he makes about the *salto mortale*, Mendelssohn certainly thought the leap was impossible, but what Lessing thought is another matter. There is a fascinating and quite illuminating discussion of Lessing and the leap in Kierkegaard 2009, 81–90. Kierkegaard agrees with Mendelssohn that Lessing is playing a game with Jacobi. But Kierkegaard's concept of the “existing subjective thinker” owes as much to Jacobi as it does to Lessing. Jacobi taught Kierkegaard that the subjective existence of the human individual is not determined by prior temporal causes, but by a leap into a relationship with God. Kierkegaard is right, however, in criticizing Jacobi for wanting “to make the leap into something objective and

the leaping itself into something analogous to, for example, finding the Archimedean point” (87). For Kierkegaard, the leap into a relationship with God is not able to be made from a secure footing given either by a rational proof that God exists or by some dogmatic belief in God’s existence. The “subjective truth” that the leap is possible is realized only with the leap itself. William James makes the same point: “Suppose, for instance, that you are climbing a mountain and have worked yourself into a position from which the only escape is by a terrible leap. Have faith that you *can* successfully make it, and your feet are moved to its accomplishment. But mistrust yourself, . . . and you will hesitate so long that, at last, all unstrung and trembling, and launching yourself in a moment of despair, you roll in the abyss . . . You *make* one or the other of the two possible universes true by your trust or mistrust” (James 1904, 26). Kierkegaard faults Jacobi for thinking that the leap’s success depended upon the *place* from which the leap was to be made. Lessing, according to Kierkegaard, had a better grasp than Jacobi of the paradoxical nature of the leap. In fact, Lessing’s Parable of the Three Rings, which I discussed in the introduction, makes it clear that religious truth is not objectively ascertainable but is the goal of action aimed at bringing it into being. Religious truth is, therefore, never true once and for all. Mendelssohn correctly understood that Lessing was not an adherent of any “ism.” Mendelssohn characterizes both his and Lessing’s deepest commitment as being to open-ended inquiry, and he sensed that Jacobi was opposed to this.

26. Jacobi, following a precritical essay of Kant titled *The One Possible Basis for a Demonstration of the Existence of God* (1979), claimed that before anything can be thought of as possible, something actual must already exist. (See my “Introduction to the Translation” for a fuller account of Kant’s argument in this treatise.) Kant shows this by investigating how we use the word “exist”: it is used to posit that a possible thing is actual, but it does not add anything to the thought or the concept of the possible thing. But if nothing actually existed and everything were only possible, the act of positing existence could not take place, since who or what would do the positing? There must therefore be a self-positing existing thing, something whose very nature is to posit itself into existence. In relation to the proof that God exists, this argument allows one to start with a self-positing being and then attempt to prove that this being is God—that is, the being that also posits the existence of things beside itself. The primordiality of the self-positing being is, according to Jacobi, also the teaching of Spinoza: God is, first and foremost, the self-positing being, the being that is the cause of its own necessary existence. Spinoza, Jacobi thought, was more consistent than Kant, because he saw that on the basis of this argument no being could ever exist independently of God. Nothing can have an independent existence, in other words, that does not posit its own existence. Kant, in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, freed himself from the pantheistic consequences of his Spinozistic conception of God as the primordial self-positing existent being by making existence only a predicate of finite, determined beings within space and time, never of a self-positing being. He therefore pulls back from his precritical proof for the existence of God on the basis of a primordially self-positing existent being (see Logan 2007). Jacobi, however, continues to maintain self-positing existence as the primary

attribute of God, and, unlike Kant, he escapes from the pantheist consequences of this conception by claiming that finite beings possess limited versions of this power and that these limited embodiments of God's power were created freely by God ex nihilo, out of nothing. For if God can posit his own existence, why can he not posit the existence of finite beings outside himself? Spinoza thought this was logically impossible, since he defined existence as self-positing (self-causation) and therefore could not allow that anything but one, independent substance can exist; to be created is to be caused by something other than oneself, and therefore nothing created can exist (or, in other words, *nothing is created from nothing*, Jacobi's catchphrase for Spinozism as evidenced in the very opening of *Spinoza-Letters*, on page 14). Jacobi accepts Spinoza's and Kant's precritical definition of existence but argues that finite beings were created by God with independent existence to be *relatively* self-positing—that is, their “self” is relational (see especially his *David Hume on Faith* in Jacobi 1994, 253–378, esp. 293ff.). Jacobi describes his position as a variant of Leibniz's monadology in *David Hume on Faith*. According to Jacobi, a finite being posits itself over against another finite being. Each finite thing thus carves out its place in nature by positing its existence in a certain manner in relation to its surroundings. Thus, for Jacobi, every finite thing is, to a certain degree, both *conscious* (because it posits itself and positing requires judgment) and *alive* (because it posits itself by organizing its internal multiplicity into a unity and thus exists as an *organic whole*). “Life and consciousness are one,” Jacobi writes in *David Hume on Faith*. “A higher degree of consciousness depends upon the greater number of perceptions united in consciousness. . . . A rational being is therefore distinguished from an irrational one by a higher degree of consciousness, and hence of life. And this degree will increase in an understanding in proportion as the power to distinguish oneself from other things (intensively and extensively) increases” (Jacobi 1994, 318–19). But humans posit themselves against *all* finite beings; they do not have a fixed place in nature. Rather, they posit their existence as a relation to what is not finite, to the Infinite, and they thereby break free of the fixed nexus of causes in space and time that determine all other finite beings. Kant, who also wanted to grant human beings the capacity to break free of the causal nexus of nature, denied that human beings *qua* free were either created or finite. They were, he said, *noumenal* beings of whom it was not proper to even say that they *exist*. Jacobi, we could say, claimed that humans *were created to be free*. In his own way, Mendelssohn agreed with this fundamental point. See the following notes for a further discussion of the way that Jacobi and Mendelssohn, each critical of Spinoza for different reasons, end up with similar positions.

27. If the absolutely or purely self-positing existent being precedes anything that is a possible existent, and any possible thing is something whose properties do not include existence, then the absolutely self-positing existent thing is not a possible thing with a set of conceivable properties but is only self-positing. This self-positing being is not an instance of any concept, and is therefore, according to Mendelssohn, simply inconceivable. It is, as it were, raw existence prior to any essence or concept. This, for Mendelssohn, is simply incoherent as a thought. Every thought must have a think-

able—that is, conceivable—object, and Jacobi wants to think of something that is raw existence before any concept.

28. Mendelssohn in *MH* had argued that one could say something existed if one could locate it in space and time, hence showing that it has extension and movement. But one could not say what something was unless one had a concept of it, and one could not say that this concept had anything actually existing corresponding to it unless one supposed that the actual existence of that thing was for the best at that time and place. Mendelssohn is saying that Jacobi seems to believe that thinking does not have concepts as its objects, but only actually existing things. This would be to reduce thinking to raw sensation of an object outside oneself, and this is in fact what Jacobi argues is the primordial basis of all thought. Jacobi calls himself a realist who takes all thinking to be a secondary elaboration of the feeling of existence of an object outside oneself. Again, Mendelssohn simply finds this to be incoherent, for how could one progress from a sensation of raw existence to anything conceptual? Kant thought that sensation was possible only within the pre-given “intuitions” of space and time and at the same time the understanding identified this spatiotemporal object as an instance of a certain concept. Thus, Kant accounted for why we perceive an object as both existing and falling under a certain concept. Mendelssohn thought that the actual existence of the object was, at best, a nearly certain *inference* from a number of concurring factors, including the agreement on the part of other people that the object is actually existing. Both Mendelssohn and Kant disagreed with Jacobi that existence was directly sensed, even before the object was located in space and time and placed under a defining concept. Jacobi called the raw perception of the sheer existence of an object a “revelation” (*Offenbarung*).

29. That is, Spinoza’s infinite God, in thinking of himself and his property of extension, must conceive of his extension not as actually existing infinite space, so that his mind holds the infinitude of space within itself, but as one single thought that is not itself extended.

30. God, that is, is One because His “pure” being is not qualitatively or quantitatively different in each particular thing, and therefore God’s unity allows for different beings to be qualitatively and quantitatively differentiated from one another without compromising the sameness or the purity of the being found in all of them.

31. Jacobi claims here that Spinoza’s God is the pure primordial Existence that precedes any essence or concept, and that this primordial Existence is pure Existence or Being—that is, the “thatness” of each particular “what.” Again, Mendelssohn finds the notion of pure *thatness* without any *whatness* to be incoherent because he is working within the Wolffian ontology where the fact that something exists first of all means that what it is, in other words, what predicates it instantiates, does not contradict the law of contradiction; that is, the predicates do not contradict one another as they do, for example, in the expression “square circle.” In this ontology, logical possibility precedes actual existence. Mendelssohn had criticized the view that Jacobi is advancing, which is the view of Kant in *One Possible Basis* (1979), in a critical review of Kant’s essay (Mendelssohn 1764). Jacobi refers to Mendelssohn’s critical review and disparages its lack

of appreciation for Kant's brilliance in *David Hume on Faith* (Jacobi 1994, 284–85). It is not clear from Mendelssohn's remarks whether he recognizes the source of Jacobi's claims in Kant's essay or whether he simply finds Jacobi to be making incoherent claims that he, Mendelssohn, is charitably saying he does not understand. Given Mendelssohn's familiarity with Jacobi's position in its first expression in the Kant treatise, I do not think it is likely that Mendelssohn simply did not understand what Jacobi was driving at.

As Manfred Frank (2004) has pointed out, the first philosopher to fasten upon and develop Jacobi's interpretation of Spinoza's Being as undetermined *thatness* or pure, conceptless Existence is F. W. J. Schelling (1775–1854) in his 1795 treatise *Vom Ich als Prinzip der Philosophie* (Schelling 1907, 1–96). Schelling avoids Spinozism by granting to Being one determination: that it is an “I.” On Schelling's appropriation of Jacobi, see Frank 2004, 77–85. We have here the source of the famous description, first offered by Hegel, of the turn away from Spinoza taken by German idealism as the reconciliation of Substance and Subject.

32. That is, each thing is a self-standing unity and is not responsible for relating itself to the unity of the larger whole of which it is a part. Mendelssohn discusses this in *MH*, Lecture 13, par. 12.

33. The distinction Mendelssohn is drawing here is between a single embracing idea that has a plurality of sub-ideas, as, for example, the idea of animal embraces the ideas of the many species of animals, and a sheer multiplicity of individual beings, as, for example, all the many animals that have existed and will exist throughout time.

34. The Wolffian natural theology posits God as containing “all compossible realities in the absolutely highest degree.” See Wolff 1738, par. 21.

35. Mendelssohn and Jacobi are indeed going around in circles in their dispute with each other. Mendelssohn imagines that Spinoza is operating on the assumption that substantial being is possessed only by a being that exists independently of all other beings, and that God as this substantial being embraces all dependent beings within Himself in two modes: as (possibly) existing beings with a location in space and time (extension, in other words) and as the thoughts of these things without reference to their place in space and time. Jacobi imagines that Spinoza is operating on the assumption that substantial being is a pure *thatness* (an Existent of which one can only say *that* it exists and not *what* it is), and that every existing thing (a *what*) exists only because it is grounded in this pure *thatness*. The *whattiness* of each existing thing (what it is: a tree or a dog, for example) is simply a modification of the underlying *thatness*. Jacobi, claiming that Spinoza begins with an infinite *thatness*, argues that Spinoza considers finite beings to be infinitely many *whats*; Mendelssohn, claiming that Spinoza begins with an infinite *whattiness* (unity of all compossibles or *whats*), thinks that Spinoza differentiates this infinite *whattiness* into infinitely many possible *thatnesses* (possible existents). Both agree that Spinoza begins with the Infinite, but each characterizes Spinoza's Infinite in a way that for the other is the distinguishing feature of finitude (for Jacobi, the distinguishing feature of the Infinite is sheer *thatness*, or sheer existence; for Mendelssohn, the distinguishing feature of the Infinite is its *whattiness*, its all-embracingness as a thought of all possible

beings. So Mendelssohn cannot understand how Jacobi's interpretation of Spinoza's God could be anything more than a sum of finitudes, and Jacobi cannot understand how Mendelssohn's interpretation of Spinoza's God could be the ground of all finite existence and not just an infinite thought without existence. Mendelssohn actually does believe that Spinoza's God is an infinite thought without existence, because Mendelssohn takes existence to be a consequence of the will for what is best (*perfectissimum*), and he believes that Spinoza deprived God of a goal-directed will. For Mendelssohn himself, God's existence is provable only because the world of existent things is not an illusion; since something exists, there must be a will that produces it as the best at that time and place. And, not entirely unlike Mendelssohn, Jacobi also finds fault with Spinoza's idea of God because it reduces God to a self-positing *thatness* without any reason to posit itself: it is a sheer, blindly necessary *thatness*. Jacobi claims that Spinoza fails to recognize that sheer existence, or *thatness*, can only be the product of a will that posits its existence *for a reason*, because *it is good to exist*. For Jacobi, in contrast with Spinoza, God eternally chooses (posits) His existence, and therefore His existence is good. God, therefore, is the ground not only of thingly existence but also of human freedom: each existent thing shares in God's self-positing will, but humans share in the will to posit oneself as good. Humans are free to exist not only as blindly self-positing existents like other things but also to exist *supernaturally*—that is, to exist in relation to God's transcendent will for the good. Ironically, both Jacobi and Mendelssohn come to similar conclusions in their criticism of Spinoza. Jacobi, however, stresses God's transcendently free will as what brings the good—that is, freedom itself—into existence; Mendelssohn stressed God's transcendent understanding that conceives of each thing as good because the whole of which it is a part is good. For Jacobi, every existing human stands in a direct relation to God by virtue of her awareness of her freedom to choose without prior determinations. This awareness is simply *revealed* to each human in an inward perception of her existence as arising out of nothing other than God's will.

36. Mendelssohn is thinking about, for example, temperature, and he is asking how the grade or degree of some object's temperature could be increased by increasing the size of the object. Water of a certain temperature is not warmed by addition of more water of the same temperature.

37. The Spinozist wants to claim that the Infinite has a qualitatively different kind of existence (true substantiality) from that of any finite thing (which is only a mode of the Infinite). However, he also seems to claim that the Infinite is the sum or aggregate of infinitely many finite things. The Spinozist, Mendelssohn concludes, is switching the concepts of qualitative degree and quantitative augmentation: an infinite aggregate of things of one kind of existence somehow jumps over into a single substance with a different kind of existence.

38. In the following passage taken from the opening of his letter of April 26, 1785, Jacobi accuses Mendelssohn of having a mistaken notion of Spinoza's system and of therefore having entirely missed the point of his, Jacobi's, arguments. As I have suggested, Jacobi had been pressing a concept of being as undetermined existence without

any conceptual determination. Mendelssohn found this idea to be incoherent, since it exactly matched the Wolffian definition of nothingness. Jacobi did not include this part of his letter in his own first edition of the *Spinoza-Letters*, but rather eliminated this entire passage and started further along in the letter in his quotation from it. In the second edition of *Spinoza-Letters* (1789; in Jacobi 2000), Jacobi explains that he left out the introduction of the letter because “it had a harsh ring” (“er [der ganze Beylage] etwas hart klingt”) and because he did not include Mendelssohn’s “Demurrers” in his first edition, so he thought it inappropriate to include his criticism of them. Jacobi’s words are indeed “harsh,” and meant to be so. Mendelssohn obviously felt it necessary to show the world the provocation he experienced from Jacobi, a provocation he refrained from responding to in his *MH*. Mendelssohn explains that he would have never published this letter or referred to it in any way had it not become necessary to do so in order to show that for his part he had acted without rancor or malicious intent in publishing *MH* without first showing Jacobi the manuscript. Jacobi also says in the second edition of *Spinoza-Letters* that the publication of this part of his letter “had afterward been trumpeted about in various respectable circles so that people’s horror at my offense would go on without end” (166). In other words, Jacobi is complaining after Mendelssohn’s death that these words of his had been maliciously circulated to show how offensive he had been to Mendelssohn. Any judgment of Jacobi’s personal motives in criticizing Mendelssohn and raising the charge of atheism against Lessing must take into account this letter and Jacobi’s suppression of it in his first edition of *Spinoza-Letters*. Jacobi reveals himself here to be filled with a personal animus against Mendelssohn. It is also revealing that Leo Strauss, in his commentary on this passage, only quotes from Jacobi’s defense of this passage in the second edition of *Spinoza-Letters* without making any comment, and he quotes the defense without referring to its concluding remarks about the maliciousness of Mendelssohn’s friends in using this letter as evidence of his offensive tone. Strauss’s commentary on *TFL* consistently sides with Jacobi against Mendelssohn. Strauss himself agreed with Jacobi about the inability of reason to claim the right to judge the truth of revelation. While Strauss sided with Jacobi’s basic criticism of reason, Strauss had a vastly different conception of revelation than that of Jacobi. Strauss took revelation to be the commandments of the Torah, something Mendelssohn would have endorsed. Strauss sides with Jacobi because he considered Mendelssohn’s defense of Jewish revelation to be too weak, too much influenced by the Enlightenment’s deference to reason as the ultimate judge of what constitutes religious fanaticism and what constitutes religious open-mindedness. Strauss lived after the declaration of the “death of God” by philosophical reason, and he therefore was wary of any attempt like Mendelssohn’s to build religious faith on rational foundations. This being said, however, it remains the case that Strauss’s bias toward Jacobi colors his commentary on *TFL*.

39. Abraham von Moivre (1667–1754) was a French-born mathematician who later became a close friend of Isaac Newton and a member of the Royal Academy.

40. Since Jacobi believes that to exist is to posit oneself, and since he furthermore believes that finite beings posit their existence against or in relation to other finite be-

ings, he considers the rudimentary feeling of resistance to be the feeling of self-positing. This idea that the feeling of resistance is a feeling of existence leads Jacobi to hold that the most rudimentary existent things have a rudimentary sense of their existence, and this sense, according to Jacobi, is a rudimentary form of consciousness. Mendelssohn did not understand this, because he did not accept Jacobi's identification of existence with self-positing. For Mendelssohn, existence is the coming-into-actuality of a possibility because that possibility is judged (by God) to be "the best" at that particular time and place.

41. Mendelssohn is incapable of grasping the way that Jacobi identifies Being with the power that makes something a determinate entity. In the letter to Hemsterhuis, Jacobi puts these words in the mouth of Spinoza: "everything strives to preserve its essence [*Wesen*]; and this striving is what we call its nature [*Natur*]” (*Spinoza-Letters* 90). Jacobi identifies this striving with the "natural desire" of the thing. Jacobi had previously represented Spinoza as holding that the will is "Being that feels itself and acts as a determinate entity." Being "in general" is thus the totality of the striving of all determinate things; however, this totality is not looked at as the sum of the power of all strivings but is rather the selfsame power underlying all determinate strivings: it is undetermined Being, or Being without any negation (since according to Spinoza every determination involves negation). Being without negation is Being "par excellence." This is the concept of Being that Mendelssohn finds incomprehensible. Why does Mendelssohn say that he cannot understand this concept of Being? Simply put, Mendelssohn cannot accept that undetermined Being, a Being lacking any essence, has any Being at all. "*Nihilum dicimus, cui nulla respondet notio*" [We call that *nothing* to which no concept corresponds] is the Wolffian definition of "nothing," but it is also what Jacobi is claiming to be the definition of "being *par excellence*"—that is, being without any conceptual determination whatsoever, pure *thatness* or pure self-positing (see Wolff 1736, par. 57). What confuses Mendelssohn is not only how completely undetermined Being could ever be anything at all, but also that Jacobi himself also believes that undetermined Being is nothing. Indeed, this is the heart of Jacobi's critique of Spinoza's system. For Jacobi, Spinoza's God, as the undetermined Being underlying all finite entities, is Nothing. Spinoza, Jacobi declares unequivocally, is an atheist. Spinoza's God is a Nothing-God, a God of nothingness. But Jacobi wants to retain the idea that Being is the power that is expressed when an entity acts in accordance with its nature. Being, for Jacobi, is always a determinate being and a particularized power. God, for Jacobi, is a *particular* Being, a Person, whose nature it is to posit its own existence and also to create other self-positing, finite beings. Thus, Spinoza is the only logically consistent philosopher of Being, but he fails to understand the inescapable connection between Being and Personhood: *for God to be is to be a person, free to choose the good*. Again, it is ironic that Mendelssohn, also critical of Spinoza's God, who makes no free choices, is closer to Jacobi than he is to Spinoza, whom he is defending here.

42. Mendelssohn told Elise Reimarus to make this request of Jacobi on his behalf. Mendelssohn says in the "Preliminary Remarks" to *MH* that the work is the first of two

parts. The second part was, he says, intended to deal more closely with the inciting cause of his undertaking to write about the existence of God in the first place. Mendelssohn is obviously referring to the correspondence he had been engaged in with Jacobi. In the second part of *MH*, therefore, Mendelssohn intended to directly take up Jacobi's challenge and refute the claim that the Leibnizian-Wolffian philosophy was no less atheistic than Spinoza's philosophy. We see that the refutation of this claim was largely undertaken in *TFL*, where Mendelssohn's strategy is to attack Jacobi's interpretation of Spinoza as incoherent on its face and therefore no less incoherent as an interpretation of Leibnizian-Wolffian philosophy. Mendelssohn also mentions in *TFL* that he still intends to write a "continuation" of *MH*, in which he will show that any human being "whose reason is not yet spoiled by sophistry need only follow the direct lead of his own mind, and his happiness stands secure" (see above, par. 36).

43. As I have explained in the previous commentary to pars. 44 and 47, Jacobi's interpretation of Spinoza rested upon the idea that Spinoza posited an entirely undetermined Being as the ground of all determinate finite entities, so that one and the same infinite Being—*infinite* in the sense of having no determination, i.e., no limitation—is understood to be the ground of every finite entity's existence. Mendelssohn could not understand the claim—or considered it to be simply incoherent—that above and beyond the specific existence of every finite entity there was an undetermined Being that somehow also was the ground of each finite existence. There was much room here for confusion, to be sure. Jacobi himself, it should be recalled, did not agree with this way of looking at the Being of finite entities, but he did think that Spinoza had drawn the only consistent conclusion about the Being of finite beings based upon the premise that *nothing can come from nothing*. According to Jacobi, Spinoza adopted this premise because he wanted to free himself from the *personal God of revelation* and replace this God with an *impersonal God of reason*. Thus, Spinoza argued (according to Jacobi) that if nothing can come from nothing, then non-Being (nothing) cannot exist, and, further, that the determination of one entity as different from (as not-being) another cannot introduce a negation or limitation in Being itself, which must be one and the same Being despite the multiplicity of finite entities. Nor can undetermined Being be different from all finite entities, for then Being would be determined (as other than the totality of finite entities). Jacobi thought that this was the only consistent interpretation of Being if one does not allow *creation from nothing*. If, however, the difference of one entity from another is real—if, in other words, one entity is truly different in its Being from another—this requires that each finite entity's ground of Being is not one undetermined Being. Jacobi opposed Spinoza's God of undetermined Being with a Supreme Being who creates each thing from nothing and gives it a determined power of existing as what it is, in accordance with its specific nature and in relation to other finite beings. (To humans, according to Jacobi, God gives a power of existing beyond their nature, of positing their existence in relation to God rather than to other finite beings.) Mendelssohn's rational theology indeed did not include the doctrine of creation from nothing, a doctrine that was inconsistent with his Wolffian ontology, where

the concept of nothing was the same as the concept of the logically impossible. God could not create something out of what was logically impossible; indeed, God actualizes only what is possible. Mendelssohn stands in the tradition not only of Wolff but also of Maimonides, who had admitted he would have no reason to accept the doctrine of creation out of nothing were it not for his faith in the divine revelation of the Bible and for the fact that the contrary doctrine, the eternity of the universe, could not be rationally demonstrated beyond all doubt. Mendelssohn disagreed with Maimonides about there being any doctrine established through revelation. In rejecting the doctrine of creation from nothing, Mendelssohn in effect sided with Spinoza against Maimonides. But Mendelssohn refused to be persuaded by Jacobi that the only consistent conclusion he could then draw was that God is an undetermined Being underlying all finite entities, no one of which had any really separate existence either from God or from the totality of all other finite entities. From the remarks that Mendelssohn goes on to make in the following passage, it seems rather clear that he actually did understand what Jacobi meant when he spoke of Spinoza's God as undetermined Being, but he could not reconcile this interpretation with his view that Spinoza's God was an Infinite Mind that never brought anything into existence but rather left everything in a state of possibility. But whether or not Mendelssohn really understood Jacobi, he considered Jacobi to be, at best, a sophist engaged in debunking rational theology so as to make room for blind faith in the revealed doctrine of creation out of nothing.

That Jacobi was not raising a critical doubt, in the manner of Maimonides or, much later, Kant, concerning the rational demonstrability of the eternity of the world seemed pretty clear to Mendelssohn from the rather dogmatic assertions he made about how the truth of creation from nothing was revealed. That Jacobi did not mean that it was revealed in the Bible but rather in the human being's feeling of the freedom of his will to initiate an action spontaneously was a nuance that Mendelssohn can be forgiven for missing. Although Mendelssohn could not ultimately find anything worth responding to in Jacobi's interpretation of Spinoza's God as undetermined Being, one of Schelling's earliest essays begins by taking Jacobi's argument seriously and goes on to offer an argument for God as the Being that is only determined as an "I," or as "Absolute Subject." Schelling thought that he had thereby restored selfhood and personhood to Spinoza's God, but Jacobi believed that Schelling's God had nothing to do with the personal God of revelation. Jacobi carried on a quarrel with Schelling that was, if anything, more vituperative than that which he had had with Mendelssohn.

44. On page 176 Jacobi says that he had expected Mendelssohn to allow him to see the manuscript of *MH* and allow him a chance of writing a complete response to it before it was published so that both men could present their views to the world at the same time.

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MOSES MENDELSSOHN (1729–1786) was the central figure in the emancipation of European Jewry. His intellect, judgment, and tact won the admiration and friendship of illustrious contemporaries. His enormously influential *Jerusalem* (1783) made the case for religious tolerance, a cause he worked for all his life.

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