

The *Pantheismusstreit* and the Spiritualization of Spinozism

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Abstract

This article deals with the way the controversy on the presumed Spinozism of G.E. Lessing during the eighties of the eighteenth century, also known as the *Pantheismusstreit*, was the start of a new interpretation of Spinoza as a spiritual thinker. At a time when Spinozism was generally considered a form of immoralism, this new interpretation of Spinoza came about as a defence strategy against those who tried to discredit Enlightenment ideas by attacking those harbouring such ideas for being Spinozists.

Keywords

Spinozism – Spinoza – Pantheismusstreit – Gotthold Ephraim Lessing – Johann Gottfried Herder – Heinrich Heine – Johann Wolfgang von Goethe – Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi

In 1834, the German writer, poet, and essayist Heinrich Heine declared: “Der Pantheismus ist die verborgene Religion Deutschlands.”¹ He did so in a book called *Zur Geschichte der Religion und Philosophie in Deutschland*, which he wrote in Paris as a French immigrant from Germany.² In this book, Heine aimed to explain his native Germany to a French audience. The declaration on the

1 Heinrich Heine and Hans Kaufmann, *Werke und Briefe / Heinrich Heine* (Berlin: Aufbau, 1980), 235.

2 Jeffrey L. Sammons, *Heinrich Heine: A Modern Biography* (Manchester: Carcanet, 1979), 188. The book was published in French together with *Die Romantische Schule* under the title *De l'Allemagne*.

hidden religion of Germany was intended to help in that endeavour. With these words, Heine tried to reveal to the French a secret that could help the inventors of secularism and *laïcité* better understand their neighbouring country to the East – a country which seemed to have integrated the Enlightenment legacy quite differently from the secular and rational ways they were familiar with. To Heine, in order to understand Germany, one had to be aware of its hidden religion, which he declared to be Pantheism.

Heine's use of the word Pantheism did not primarily refer to classical or oriental philosophy. Pantheism referred first and foremost to the *Pantheismusstreit* (Pantheism controversy), a philosophical controversy, which, at the end of the eighteenth century, held almost all major German intellectuals in its grip and which could be seen as one of the major sources of significant German cultural and philosophical movements, such as German Romanticism, German Idealism and perhaps even German Nationalism. Its significance lay in the rediscovery of Spinoza's philosophy, which stood at the centre of the controversy, and which, as we will see, came to be summarized as Pantheism. In another context, Heine could formulate the key to understanding Germany in a somewhat different way: "Alle unsere heutigen Philosophen, vielleicht oft ohne es zu wissen, sehen sie [die Welt] durch die Brillen, die Baruch Spinoza geschliffen hat."³ In other words, Germany could only be understood with an awareness of its hidden religion, namely, Pantheism – the system of thought that in modern Western philosophy was epitomized by Spinoza.

To make Spinoza into the prophet of a secret religion may be cause for some wonder. Spinoza had waged many wars with the custodians of religions he encountered during his life. His heterodoxy had almost certainly resulted in his excommunication by the Portuguese-Jewish community in which he had grown up. The Jews had excommunicated him, but he never converted to Christianity. That meant that he was not a member of any religious community, which put Spinoza in a unique situation for his time and must have brought with it many particular social difficulties. However, this position was in accordance with his philosophy: Spinoza's thought broke down virtually all of the essential foundations of religion. Its central notion, that God and Nature are in fact the same, summarized in the famous phrase *Deus sive Natura* entailed a categorical rejection of any classical anthropomorphic image of God. To Spinoza, Scripture was a book like any other book, and the laws governing nature also determined the laws determining the mind, including the free will. The soul could not be punished or rewarded by God after the death of the body.

3 Heine and Kaufmann, *Werke und Briefe* / *Heinrich Heine*, 90.

All these ideas were founded upon Spinoza's unflinching faith in reason, and his willingness to pursue reason to its ultimate consequences. This, and not God's revelation in miracles, revealed texts, and their interpretations by theologians, was, to Spinoza, the only true source of knowledge. It should come as no surprise, then, that Spinoza's important books were forbidden immediately upon their publication. Spinoza came to be known as an atheist and Spinozism as a form of atheism. This led to Spinoza's reputation as a father of the radical Enlightenment, a thinker who epitomized secularism and rationalism, the values associated with the territories to the West of the Rhine, France, England and the Netherlands, values which were more often detested than embraced in Germany.

So how could Heine place Spinoza at the centre not only of German culture, but of the religious nature of that culture? How could a rational secular atheist, as Spinoza seemed to be, also function as the prophet of a hidden religion? The answer lies in Heine's interpretation of Spinozism – based upon the way Spinoza had come to be understood in Germany – as a particular form of spirituality. The idea central to this notion of spirituality was that a rejection of religious dogma and religious authority did not have to entail the rejection of some kind of divine experience. It was this spirituality that had infused the minds of the bearers of German culture in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. To understand Spinozism as such a form of spirituality, we need to return to the moment when this interpretation was articulated, the *Pantheismusstreit*.

I will argue here that it was the *Pantheismusstreit* that changed the way Spinoza was read, that it replaced one reading for another, and that in this new reading such spirituality was discovered, a reading which would offer German thinkers a spiritual alternative to Enlightenment secularism and was all the more powerful because it was rooted in Spinoza. I will do so by first of all describing the details of this controversy. Then I will discuss how the debate changed the way Spinoza was interpreted and I will conclude with some examples of the way this Spinozist spirituality was expressed in the writings of some of the most prominent German minds of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Finally, this will lead to some reflections on the role this kind of spirituality served in the persistence of Enlightenment thought in general.

To understand what happened during the *Pantheismusstreit*, it is necessary to know something about the importance of Spinoza when the debate erupted at the end of the eighteenth century. As said, Spinoza's radical thought had made him into an extremely controversial figure and perhaps even more than that. From the time Spinoza's works were published, they were consid-

ered dangerous. The Dutch authorities outlawed the *Tractatus Theologico Politicus*, as well as the posthumous *Opera Omnia*, (which included the *Ethics* and other important books) immediately after they had been published. Although Spinoza's ideas were passed on often either illegally or through texts that claimed to be refutations, it remained dangerous to associate oneself with Spinoza's thought. This also meant that the stigma of Spinozism could seriously threaten one's career, if not one's life. Being a Spinozist was equated with being an atheist, lacking morals, and therefore being subversive. This connotation of Spinozism was a powerful weapon in the hands of those wanting to prevent the spread of Enlightenment thinking. Philosophers wanting to stress the importance of Enlightenment values, such as reason and religious tolerance or equality, or wanting to uphold the ideal of a natural religion, always had to take the utmost care not to be accused of also secretly being Spinozists. The German philosopher Christian Wolff (1679–1754) is a good case in point. He had to defend himself his entire life against the charge of supporting Spinozist ideas after he had written in praise of Chinese thought, which was associated at the time with Spinoza.⁴ Charges of Spinozism were the reason he was ordered to resign from his first chair in Halle in 1723 and ordered to leave Prussia within forty-eight hours. He also suffered royal decrees against selling and even discussing his works.⁵

The *Pantheismusstreit* may be understood as one last attempt to halt the advance of Enlightenment with the proven method of accusing progressive philosophers of Spinozism. However, in this case, the accused was more respectable than ever: he was the widely recognized playwright and thinker, the father of German Enlightenment, Gotthold Ephraim Lessing.

It all started in 1783 with a number of letters from Friedrich Heinrich, most of them addressed to Lessing's friend, the Jewish thinker Moses Mendelssohn, which Jacobi published in 1785 in his so called *Spinozabüchlein*.⁶ In these letters, Jacobi claimed that Lessing had confided to him that he had been a Spinozist and that he knew no philosophy other than Spinoza's, something Jacobi also claimed Lessing had never told Mendelssohn. Mendelssohn was writing a biography of Lessing, and Jacobi argued that this made it his duty to

4 Jonathan Israel, *Radical Enlightenment: Philosophy and the Making of Modernity 1650–1750* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 544.

5 Israel, *Radical Enlightenment*, 545, 547, 550.

6 Heinrich Scholz, ed. *Die Hauptschriften zum Pantheismusstreit zwischen Jacobi und Mendelssohn, Herausgegeben und mit einer historisch-kritischen Einleitung versehen*, vol. VI, *Neudrucke seltener philosophischer Werke* (Berlin: Reuther and Reichard, 1916), 45–283.

pass this news on to Mendelssohn. It is no wonder that Mendelssohn attempted to clear his deceased friend's name. But Jacobi's assault ran deeper.

In Jacobi's letter revealing Lessing's presumed Spinozism, Jacobi had given an elaborate account of his conversation with Lessing, and in the course of this account made clear his own argument against Spinoza. This argument (very shortly summarized) ran as follows: First of all, Spinoza equated God with Nature. In nature, the determinist laws of nature applied, and as Nature to Spinoza was all there was, everything was determined. *Deus sive Natura*, therefore, presumed a determinist worldview. As a result, Spinoza's world excluded free will, which also made it fatalist. In a fatalist world, there exists no freedom to make moral choices. This made Spinoza's world an immoral world and his philosophy an immoral philosophy.

Secondly, Jacobi argued that Spinozism was also the ultimate consequence of the application of reason to philosophy. It is for this reason that he thought it so significant that Lessing had confessed to being a Spinozist.⁷ In Jacobi's recount of their conversation, Jacobi pushed and pressed Lessing to admit that Spinozism had to be the ultimate result of his rational methods, and, finally, Lessing did so. Therefore, Lessing's Spinozism functions to prove Jacobi's point that rationalism leads to Spinozism. Jacobi's final conclusion was that all thinking that was based upon the light of reason necessarily led to immoralism. Jacobi himself offered a quite radical solution to this predicament. He argued that one should not follow reason's path at all. He opted for what he called a *salto mortale*, a leap of faith, that would make him land safely the secure and moral ground of revealed religion.

This philosophical point was joined with a particularly stinging personal issue. Mendelssohn and Lessing had been personal friends. But theirs was not an ordinary friendship. Lessing was the son of a clergyman, was schooled in theology, and was a successful playwright in Frederick the Great's Prussia. Mendelssohn was the son of a poor Thora-scribe in Dessau and came to Berlin in the footsteps of his rabbi. In his play *Die Juden*, Lessing had expressed his conviction – in opposition to the generally held opinion – that Jews, even if they did not share the same religion as Christians, could be just as moral as Christians.⁸ When Mendelssohn was introduced to Lessing, reportedly as a good chess player, Lessing believed he had found the living example of such a noble Jew.⁹ The friendship with Lessing introduced Mendelssohn into the

7 Heinrich Scholz, ed. *Die Hauptschriften zum Pantheismusstreit*, 78.

8 Amos Elon, *The Pity of it All* (New York: Picador, 2003), 38.

9 Alexander Altmann, *Moses Mendelssohn: A Biographical Study* (Oxford: Litmann Library of Jewish Civilization 1998), 36.

highest intellectual circles of Prussia, which was a revolutionary achievement for a German Jew and served to show how good German-Jewish relations could be. Therefore, the charge of Spinozism was not only an attack on Lessing, but it also cast doubt on the sincerity of the friendship between Lessing and Mendelssohn. As a result, it called into question all the symbolic associations of this friendship such as tolerance between Judaism and Christianity and between religions in general.

Mendelssohn recognized Jacobi's discoveries as an outright assault. Jacobi's charges occupied him during the end of his life, and in the introduction to Mendelssohn's book, *An die Freunde Lessings*, Mendelssohn's posthumously published public reply to Jacobi, the editor, Mendelssohn's friend Johann Jacob Engel, argued on the authority of Mendelssohn's doctor that Jacobi's accusations against Lessing had contributed to Mendelssohn's death.¹⁰ Thus, Jacobi was indirectly accused of having killed Mendelssohn. In this book, Mendelssohn stated his motives for defending Lessing, who, in his eyes, had been unjustly accused of heresy, with the following words:

Ueber alle Bedenklichkeiten hinweg, wirft er [Jacobi] den Zankapfel in das Publikum, und klagt unsern Freund, *Gotthold Ephraim Lessing*, (...) den grossen bewunderten Vertheidiger des Theismus und der Vernunftreligion, bey der Nachwelt, als Spinozisten, Atheisten und Gotteslästerer an. Was nun zu tun? Wollen wir die Vertheidigung unseres Freund übernehmen? Das strengste Glaubensgericht pflegt diesen Beystand dem Angeklagten Ketzern nicht zu mißgönnen.¹¹

We already see here that it was difficult for Mendelssohn to deny outright that Lessing had said what he had said. To do so, would imply that Jacobi had deliberately fabricated his conversation with Lessing, and it was impossible for Mendelssohn to know whether he had done so. However, Mendelssohn also recognized that Jacobi's accusations were not only an assault on Lessing's thought and his honesty, but were also an attack on the fundamentals of the entire German Enlightenment: the belief in reason. After all, if rational thought led to Spinozism, this implied that not only Lessing but also all other "metaphysische Demonstranten," including Wolffians, and Leibnitzians were fatalists, Spinozists, and atheists.¹²

10 Scholz, ed. *Hauptschriften zum Pantheismusstreit*, 288.

11 Scholz, ed. *Hauptschriften zum Pantheismusstreit*, 293.

12 Scholz, ed. *Hauptschriften zum Pantheismusstreit*, 305.

Thus, Mendelssohn tried to defend Lessing, without denying that he had said what Jacobi had reported. One of the ways he did so was downplaying the whole affair by suggesting that Lessing had not really been serious in his conversation, but playing a game with Jacobi, sparring intellectually and, for that purpose, defending Spinoza. But he also developed another much more radical and interesting line of defence. This, too, was a way of downplaying Lessing's Spinozism, but it contained the seeds for a drastic new interpretation of Spinoza, which would develop in a form of spirituality that was to have a profound influence on European thought. Apart from casting doubt on Jacobi's understanding of Lessing's words and thus on the question of whether Lessing had been a Spinozist, Mendelssohn argued that being a Spinozist – and this was quite revolutionary – was not the worst thing in the world. He wrote on the charge that Lessing was a Spinozist:

Je nun! Was haben die spekulativen Lehrsätze mit dem Menschen gemein? Wer würde sich nicht freuen, Spinozen Selbst zum Freunde gehabt zu haben, so sehr er auch Spinozist gewesen? Wer sich weigern, Spinozens Genie und vortreflichen Charakter Gerechtigkeit wiederfahren zu lassen? – So lange man mein Freund noch nicht als Heimlichen Gotteslästerer, mithin auch als Heuchler, anklagte, war mir die nachricht: Lessing sey Spinizist gewesen, so ziemlich gleichgültig.¹³

Mendelssohn thus took issue not so much with the idea that Lessing had been a Spinozist, but with Jacobi's contention that a Spinozist necessarily had to be also a *Gotteslästerer*, a blasphemer. Mendelssohn continued arguing that a certain kind of Spinozism could well go together with Judaism and even that Spinoza could have remained an orthodox Jew, regardless of his speculative philosophy.¹⁴ With other words, he argued that one could be religious – at least Jewish religious – and Spinozist at the same time.

Mendelssohn did not go so far as to deny that Spinoza's philosophy had its flaws. Like many others, Mendelssohn still felt the need to give his own refutation of Spinoza. He did so in his book *Morgenstunden*, where he attacked Spinoza's monistic thought for not being capable of accounting for diversity in the universe.¹⁵ But what Mendelssohn wrote about Spinoza was an important step. For the first time, someone of his stature not only seriously engaged with

13 Scholz, ed. *Hauptschriften zum Pantheismusstreit*, 295.

14 Scholz, ed. *Hauptschriften zum Pantheismusstreit*, 295.

15 Scholz, ed. *Hauptschriften zum Pantheismusstreit*, 7–10.

Spinoza's philosophical ideas, but also publicly argued that Spinozism was not a dangerous philosophy and there was no reason to discredit someone who claimed to be a Spinozist.

With this, Mendelssohn managed to change the nature of the controversy Jacobi had hoped to ignite. Its focus was no longer Lessing, and the question of how dangerous his thought had been, but Spinoza himself. When other thinkers got involved, which they did massively, many of them did not focus on Lessing, but on Spinoza. And, where Mendelssohn still tried to refute Spinoza, many now also dared to openly defend the presumed atheist and immoralist.

This led to a true Spinoza renaissance. Up until then, Spinoza had been known largely from second hand sources, most notably the entry on Spinoza in Pierre Bayle's *Dictionnaire* from 1697.¹⁶ Now people started to read and discuss Spinoza's own texts. Virtually all significant German thinkers became involved, including Kant, Goethe, and Herder. But not everyone sided against Jacobi. The originator of the controversy received support from figures such as Johann Georg Hamann, Johann Kaspar Lavater, and Thomas Wizenmann. I will, however, be concerned here with Jacobi's opponents, as it was these who opened the way for a further step in the acceptance of Spinoza as a serious philosopher: the outright adaptation of his thought among some of the most respected German thinkers. But it should be noted that the Spinoza they embraced was a new Spinoza, a Spinoza who may well be called "spiritual."

To make this clearer, let me now turn to a short discussion of one aspect of Spinoza's philosophy. One of the reasons his thought has inspired and continues to inspire so many people is that there is a certain degree of ambiguity in his writing. Spinoza's thought may be considered one massive attack on revealed and organized religion but, at the same time, his writings are permeated with traditional religious concepts such as the immortality of the soul, Good and Evil, and, most of all, God. What he does throughout his works is argue that these concepts have always been wrongly understood and he formulates what he knows to be their true meaning.

He titled his most important book the *Ethics*, and one of the first things he does there is prove the existence of God. Spinoza calls the highest form of knowledge the *amor dei intellectualis*, the intellectual love of God. But Spinoza's God is equated with nature, which means God is not Nature's creator but its essence; God is not a Being that can punish or reward in an afterlife. The intellectual love of God is the same as knowledge of Nature.

16 Pierre Bayle, *Dictionnaire historique et critique* par Pierre Bayle (Amsterdam: Compagnie des libraires, 1734).

There are two different ways to understand this endeavour. The first way has been expressed in the twentieth century by Leo Strauss in his famous article "How to Study Spinoza's Theologico-Political Treatise", but was implicit in all Spinoza interpretations that held Spinoza to be an atheist. This is to say that what Spinoza did was basically a trick – a sophistic trick meant to surmount the difficulty of expressing ideas that could be held dangerous and also intended to fool authorities. It enabled him to maintain that he was not an atheist, while his thought, if truly understood, did indeed deny the existence of God, the immortality of the Soul, and of the possibility of morality. Or, to quote a passage from the introduction to his *Tractatus Theologico Politicus*, he had ensured that his writings were "in complete agreement with our country's laws, with piety, and with morality."¹⁷

The other way of understanding Spinoza is to interpret Spinoza's religious concepts as the expression of a different but nevertheless profound and even authentic sense of religiosity. According to this view, Spinoza had truly understood the central concepts of religion, most of all God, as he did not have to make recourse to revelation or authority in the same sense as organized religion. He had found the source of religion in humanity itself. Spinoza's *Deus sive Natura*, his equation of God and Nature, far from being a credo of atheism, would express the religious experience one underwent in confrontation with nature. This, of course, was a view ready-made for the German Romantics, who never tired of praising the beauty of nature. It is this understanding of Spinoza that developed in the wake of the *Pantheismusstreit* and which served to rescue Lessing and all those who wanted to save the values Lessing represented. Let me give two examples of two influential German thinkers.

Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's works are ridden with elaborate descriptions of nature. Goethe did not devote much space in his works to Spinoza, but he had been involved right from the start of the Pantheism controversy. Jacobi and Goethe had been friends ever since a momentous trip they had made over the Rhine from Düsseldorf to Cologne in 1774, in which both were impressed by the beauty of the natural landscape their ship passed through.¹⁸ As Goethe's friend, Jacobi knew of an unpublished poem by Goethe on Prometheus. In the poem, Prometheus addresses Zeus, and expresses contempt for the Gods: "Ich kenne nichts ärmeres/ Unter der Sonn, als euch, Götter!"¹⁹ Jacobi began

17 Spinoza, *Complete Works*, trans. Samuel Shirley (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2002), 394.

18 Helmut Rehdre, "Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi und Goethe," *Monatshefte fuer deutschen Unterricht* 30, no. 3/4 (1938): 121.

19 Scholz, ed. *Hauptschriften zum Pantheismusstreit*, 76.

his conversation with Lessing by asking Lessing's opinion on this poem. Jacobi pressed Lessing to denounce the poem for its heretical nature, but according to Jacobi's account, Lessing, instead, expressed sympathy for the worldview the poem conveyed. Jacobi later published the poem anonymously and without Goethe's permission in his *Spinozabuchlein*. Goethe was, as may be expected, not amused about this, but apart from that, he also did not agree with Jacobi's view on the dangers of Spinozism for which Jacobi used this poem as an illustration. Goethe, more a poet than a philosopher, did not feel obliged to venture into the details of Spinoza's philosophical system. He also admitted that he did not understand everything from it. Still, he felt sure enough to argue that, to him, Spinoza was the complete opposite of an atheist. He wrote to Jacobi:

Er [Spinoza] beweist nicht das Dasein Gottes, das Dasein ist Gott. Und wenn ihn andere deshalb Atheum schelten, so möchte ich ihn theissimum und christianissimum nennen und preisen.²⁰

Later in his autobiographical *Dichtung und Wahrheit*, Goethe added to this:

Der Geist, der so entscheiden auf mich wirkte und der auf meine ganze Denkweise so grossen Einfluss haben sollte, war Spinoza (...) Ich führe die "Ethik" von Spinoza immer bei mir (...) ich fühle mich ihm sehr nahe.²¹

Goethe's stature as one of the greatest German minds can hardly be exaggerated. In later years, those who wanted to argue for Spinoza's religiosity would frequently appeal to Goethe's authority, often referring to these quotations.²²

The second example is Johann Gottfried Herder, who also corresponded with Jacobi on his Spinoza letters. Far from rejecting Lessing for his Spinozism, Herder expressed joy that Jacobi's revelations made him discover that he shared his personal sympathy for Spinoza with the great Lessing. Jacobi tried to convince Herder in letters of the fallacies of the Spinozist system, but to no avail. Herder continued answering that Jacobi had not understood the religious significance of Spinoza's notion of God.

²⁰ Scholz, ed. *Hauptschriften zum Pantheismusstreit*, CVIII.

²¹ Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Aus meinem Leben: Dichtung und Wahrheit* (Augsburg: Weltbild, 2006), 213.

²² David J. Wertheim, *Salvation Through Spinoza: A Study of Jewish Culture in Weimar Germany* (Leiden: Brill, 2011) 47–57.

In 1787, Herder worked these discussions into a book with fictional philosophical dialogues tellingly titled *Gott, einige Gespräche*.²³ Here, Herder attempted to put forward what he believed to be the true meaning of Spinoza to a wider audience.

In these dialogues, two figures called Philolaus and Theophon extensively discuss Spinoza. Philolaus starts off comparing thunderstorms, which after having darkened the heavens, made way for the sun with the rejection of Spinoza's thought by "eine gesündere Philosophie."²⁴ Theophon answers by asking whether Philolaus had actually read Spinoza first hand. This turns out not to have been the case, which prompts Theophon to patiently instruct Philolaus on the true Spinoza. He relates how Spinoza's thought had been distorted, how he had always led a modest and virtuous life, and finally gives Theophon a copy of the *Ethics*. After having read this book, Philolaus returns to Theophon with an account of his conclusion, which, at the same time, is one of the best illustrations of the way the *Pantheismusstreit* resulted in a new appreciation of Spinoza:

Das er [Spinoza] kein Atheist sei, erscheint auf allen Blättern; die Idee von Gott ist ihm die erste und letzte (...) Ohne den Begriff Gottes vermag seine Seele nichts, auch nicht sich selbst zu denken (...) Dieser Begriff ist ihm so unmittelbar und innig geworden, daß ich ihn gewiß eher für einen Schwärmer fürs Dasein Gottes, als für einen Zweifler oder Lügner desselben hielte. In die Erkenntniß und Liebe Gottes setzt er alle Vollkommenheit, Tugend und Glückseligkeit der Menschen; und daß dieses nicht etwas eine angenommene Maske, sondern sein tiefstes Gefühl sei, zeigen seine Briefe, ja ich mochte sagen, jeder Theil seines philosophischen Gebäudes, jede Zeile seine Schriften.²⁵

Here we see the traditional interpretations of Spinoza as an atheist being completely overturned. To Herder, an accurate reading revealed that Spinoza, far from having been a blasphemer, profoundly believed in God. The argument that Spinoza was dangerous and immoral because of his atheism was replaced with the complete opposite argument that Spinoza's understanding and awareness of God demonstrated his virtuousness. Such statements did much for Spinoza's legacy. From that moment on, Spinoza truly became like any other

23 Johann Gottfried Herder, *Sämmtliche Werke*, ed. Bernhard Suphan et al., 33 vols. (Berlin: Weidmann'sche Buchhandlung, 1877–1913), vol. 16, 401.

24 Johann Gottfried Herder et al., *Herders Sämmtliche Werke*, vol. 16, 412.

25 Johann Gottfried Herder et al., *Herders Sämmtliche Werke*, vol. 16, 439.

thinker in the sense that there were no risks involved in discussing his ideas. But, these statements also served a further goal. With the Spinoza that Goethe and Herder had produced, Jacobi's attack on the values of the Enlightenment were off target. If Spinoza could be capable of the sort of religious feelings they described, and if these inspired his ideas on what virtue and happiness were, there was no need for a *salto mortale* in order to retain faith in revelation.²⁶ Not only was Spinoza's faith in reason thereby saved but, with it, the whole Enlightenment project, which Jacobi had set out to destroy, was also saved.

The result of this religious interpretation of Spinoza was a different understanding of what religiosity, or better, theism, entailed. This understanding was based not upon some kind of teaching or deduction, but on a direct experience of divinity. It is therefore deliberately vague: Goethe was not embarrassed to argue for Spinoza's theism, while simultaneously conceding that he did not really understand Spinoza. Herder made his case with the indistinct argument that Spinoza's belief in God infused all of his writings. It was a religiosity that did without religious authority or dogma and, in that sense, it may well be taken as a form of spirituality.

This is also the secret behind the power of this interpretation of Spinoza. While Enlightenment thinking broke down dogma and religious authority, a Spinozist spirituality could integrate some kind of religious experience in the Enlightenment ideals of tolerance and reason. This paved the way for the spiritual moods behind the Romantic movement, until Pantheism truly had become the secret religion of Germany.

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26 Scholz, ed. *Hauptschriften zum Pantheismusstreit*, 81.

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