

REASON, NEGATION, AND THE VOCATION OF PHILOSOPHY

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Abstract. *The following essay discusses a distinct kind of negation, the negation of philosophy, as it appears in F.H. Jacobi's writings. Following a brief account of the topic and a concise review of the history of the scholarship on Jacobi's thought (sections I and II), I will briefly chart the polemical targets of non-philosophy (section III) and eventually present an analysis of three recent publications on Jacobi's notion of non-philosophy (by O. Koch, K. Sommer, and E. Pistilli in section IV, V, and VI respectively). I will finally assess the value of a further negation, which hints at the origin of the thought about being.*

Keywords. *Jacobi; non-philosophy; negation; Unphilosophie; moral theory.*

I. Negation appears to be pertinent to philosophy as long as it relates to our rational or linguistic operations. We may wonder what might happen if we were to negate philosophy as such: is negation still rational, or is it now the first act that raises inordinate forces of irrationality? And where does negation come from, if it is not an expression of our rational nature? These questions hardly surprise us today. They may have looked ambiguous at the end of the 18th century, but we are now accustomed to overriding traditions, revoking rationality, and subverting thinking to the extent that one may suspect we suffer of an abuse of 'invalidating rationality'. On the other hand, if we take this negation as a rational deed, the act of negating philosophy seems to imply that philosophy has not been radical enough in its search for the truth, and that rationality exceeds philosophy; this crucial negation can elicit either a thorough opposition to the philosophical tradition and the consequent

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access to other kinds of wisdom, or the belief that philosophy does not have unlimited reach but rather a very partial field of expression.

At the end of the 18th century, when the term *critique* did not yet mean dismissal or rejection, F.H. Jacobi critically raised the issue of *negating philosophy* not to banish rationality but, on the contrary, to recover an original attitude that, in his opinion, rational thinking had long lost. While he aimed at maintaining his *logos* within the boundaries of rationality, he finally deemed his efforts a negation of philosophical endeavor. His attempt was certainly critical of the form philosophy had taken, but he also longed for the rehabilitation of a rational faculty that the history of western thought had progressively undermined and that he believed was imperative to recover. He called his effort «*Unphilosophie*», non-philosophy, and saw it as the last shelter from a progressive nihilism that was plaguing modern minds. Ultimately, to Jacobi negation meant liberation and his non-philosophy was intended to near transcendence.

II. As it is well known, interest in Jacobi's philosophy has been flourishing thanks primarily to the publication of the German critical edition of his works (which began in 1988 and has almost reached completion) and of his correspondences (to date eleven volumes have been published along with nine of commentaries). It would, however, be hasty to believe that we are witnessing some kind of 'Jacobian-Renaissance'. As early as 1970, Gerhard Höhn published a brief report in the «*Revue philosophique de Louvain*» entitled *La renaissance de la pensée de F.H. Jacobi*¹. In fact, since the late 1960s interest in Jacobi's philosophy had been witnessing a growth that reached a peak between the early 1970s and the late 1990s, when scholars in Germany, Italy, France, and North America started considering Jacobi's philosophy for its own sake rather than as a counter-party in scientific analyses of

¹ G. Höhn, *La renaissance de la pensée de F.H. Jacobi*, «*Revue philosophique de Louvain*», LXVIII, 1970, pp. 100-103.

other philosophers². As a consequence, the originality of his theoretical view became the topic of Jaeschke and Sandkaulen's volume *Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi* (2004)³. The volume brings to the fore the highly philosophical nature of issues Jacobi considers in his works and letters. In light of this, Jacobi's definition of his own philosophy as an *Unphilosophie* may sound questionable: why should something philosophically engaging be defined as non-philosophy?

To counter this first impression, we would like to indulge in a metaphor. We could suggest that Jacobi took philosophy as a model. A model usually plays a crucial role in our education; we posit it in front of ourselves, it guides our thoughts and generates our tentative but cardinal archetypes; ultimately, it becomes our rival. Like a mirror, it embodies the inversion of our own form

² Bibliographical information can easily be found in U. Rose, *Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi. Eine Bibliographie*, Stuttgart-Weimar, Metzler, 1993; M. Ivaldo, *Introduzione a Jacobi*, Roma-Bari, Laterza, 2003; V. Verra, *F.H. Jacobi. Dall'Illuminismo all'idealismo*, Torino, Edizioni di Filosofia, 1963; K. Hammacher, *Kritik und Leben. II: Die Philosophie F.H. Jacobi*, München, W. Fink Verlag, 1969; B. Sandkaulen, *Grund und Ursache. Die Vernunftkritik Jacobis*, München, Fink, 2000; K. Homann, *F.H. Jacobis Philosophie der Freiheit*, Freiburg-München, Karl-Alber, 1973; S. Kahlefeld, *Dialektik und Sprung in Jacobis Philosophie*, Würzburg, Königshausen u. Neumann, 2000. 1969 can be considered a turning point in the scholarly research on Jacobi. At Jacobi's *Haus* in Düsseldorf, celebrating his 150th death anniversary, the most prominent specialists gathered together following the impulse that few publications had given to the debate. In fact, two volumes in the early sixties, V. Verra, *F.H. Jacobi. Dall'Illuminismo all'idealismo* and O.F. Bollnow, *Die Lebensphilosophie F.H. Jacobis*, Stuttgart, Kohlhammer, 1933 (re-edited in 1966), and two volumes in 1969, K. Hammacher, *Die Philosophie Friedrich Heinrich Jacobis*, München, Fink, and G. Baum, *Vernunft und Erkenntnis. Die Philosophie F.H. Jacobis*, Bonn, Bouvier, gave new life to the study of Jacobi's thought. M.M. Olivetti gave an account of this congress two years before the proceedings were published, cf. M.M. Olivetti, *La 'Jacobi-Tagung' a Düsseldorf*, in «Bollettino Filosofico», III (12), 1969, pp. 221-222, while the proceedings were published in *Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi. Philosoph und Literat der Goethezeit. Beiträge einer Tagung in Düsseldorf (16.-19. 10. 1969) aus Anlaß seines 150. Todestages und Berichte*, hrsg. von K. Hammacher, Frankfurt a. M., Vittorio Klosterman, 1971.

³ W. Jaeschke und B. Sandkaulen, *Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi: Ein Wendepunkt der geistigen Bildung der Zeit*, Hamburg, Meiner Verlag, 2004.

and, in the moment as we consider it, we actually speculate on ourselves to assess our value. *Unphilosophie* represents the speculative counterpart of philosophy; not only does *Unphilosophie* refer to its negative polemically, but it essentially shapes its own design according to this opposition.

In the present essay, we will try to define what non-philosophy is. Moreover, towards the end of this short study we will briefly discuss the possibility of surpassing the dichotomy between philosophy and non-philosophy. In fact, philosophy and non-philosophy seem to appeal to a further dimension of thought which gives value and significance to both. We will eventually analyze the definition of this additional dimension of thought.

Jacobi's clear definition of *Unphilosophie* first appeared in his *Letter to Fichte* (1799) where he confessed what his true intellectual vocation was. While applauding to the unprecedented perfection of theoretical architecture that Fichte's philosophy represents, Jacobi admits that his «non-knowledge» opposes Fichte's doctrine of knowledge⁴. Jacobi seems to state the weakness of his intellectual understanding in comparison with the powerful reach of Fichte's insight, but Jacobi's deceptive confession introduces some further notes on the real meaning of his writings. In the Preface to the edition of the fourth volume of his works (1819) – which represents Jacobi's last true philosophical essay – he claims that his non-philosophy can be understood only in opposition to a science that «is called the *true and pure* science, the *only* science, which consists in the self-production of its object, it creates the true and the truth, it is absolutely independent, and turns into nothing anything that falls outside it»⁵.

In the end, the systematic knowledge of philosophy molds the truth insofar as it does not acquire the truth from outside of

⁴ Cf. F.H. Jacobi, *Jacobi to Fichte* (1799), in Id., *The Main Philosophical Writings and the Novel Allwill*, tr. and ed. by G. di Giovanni, Paperback edition with new Preface, Montréal & Kingston, McGill-Queen's University Press, 2009, pp. 501.

⁵ F.H. Jacobi, *Über die Lehre des Spinoza Erweiterung der dritten Auflage. Vorbericht* (1819), in *Werke*, hrsg. von K. Hammacher und I.-M. Piske, Hamburg, Meiner, 1998, Bd. 1,1, p. 344.

itself. Yet, to Jacobi it is clear that the discursive thought – that Fichte's doctrine of knowledge so well expresses – makes philosophy as much authoritative as blind; truth becomes the final outcome of a mechanism that shows itself in the structure of a systematic and coherent whole, but this philosophical truth is merely a creation of the self that thinks its own thought⁶. In the dimension of moral philosophy this apex of self-reflection shows its cracks. In Jacobi's opinion, what philosophy cannot think (what philosophy is blind to) is an absolutely independent item, a singular free being, because philosophical thinking can only 'give reasons'. In a system where everything is defined by its causes «we are not in a position to form the representation of a being that subsists completely on its own». Freedom, individuality, and the epitome of free individuality, God, are exiled from the horizon of the conceivable.

Moreover, Jacobi diagnoses further repercussions of the essential inability to think an absolute being: «[i]t is equally undeniable, however, that we are even less in position to form the representation of an absolutely dependent being. Such a being would have to be entirely passive. Yet it *could* not be passive, since anything that is not already something cannot simply be *determined* to be something [...] not even a relation is possible with respect to it»⁷. It eventually turns out that systematic thinking limps on both legs: it cannot conceptualize an autonomous being – in which according to Jacobi real truth lies – and at the same time it proves its blatant inconsistency as it is even unable to define the objects of its system, because those objects become mere positions of the self, relations within an indefinite chain of justifications, and eventually fade into nothing. At this stage, the reasons for the negation of philosophy appear to be promising.

III. To be sure, what precedes is just a concise summary of a much broader commitment that links Jacobi's criticism of

⁶ V. Verra's first analysis of Jacobi's philosophy focused on the issue of non-philosophy, *Jacobi e il rifiuto della filosofia*, «Filosofia», IV-IV, 1953, pp. 575-600.

⁷ F.H. Jacobi, *Concerning the Doctrine of Spinoza in Letters to Moses Mendelssohn (1789)*, in Jacobi, *The Main Philosophical Writings*, p. 344.

Spinoza's philosophy to Jacobi's interpretation of Fichte's philosophy. Recently, some publications on Jacobi have drawn decisive attention to the historical sources and theoretical fruit of his non-philosophy. Based mainly on the results of Sandkaulen's volume *Grund und Ursache* (2000)⁸, two monographs present different but consonant approaches to *Unphilosophie. Individualität als Fundamentalgefühl* (2013) by O. Koch, and *Zwischen Metaphysik und Metaphysikkritik* (2015) by K. Sommer⁹.

Oliver Koch – whose book I consider for its take on Jacobi more so than for its interpretation of Jean Paul – points to the principle 'ex nihilo nihil fit' as the defining axiom of the *Geist des Spinozismus*¹⁰. He introduces a clear layout of Jacobi's analysis of Spinoza, Kant, and Fichte's philosophy aimed at better understanding the reasons behind the contraposition between the *Geist des Spinozismus* and non-philosophy.

We need to remember that Jacobi understands Spinoza's philosophy as a display of the *Formularmethode der Geometer* according to which any thing can be thought only through the principle of sufficient reason¹¹.

Spinoza's statement of the principle of sufficient reason firstly appeared in *The Principles of Descartes' Philosophy* (1663) where the eleventh axiom of Part I states: «Nothing exists of which it cannot be asked, what is the cause (or reason) [causa (sive ratio)],

⁸ B. Sandkaulen, *Grund und Ursache: Die Vernunftkritik Jacobis*, München, Fink, 2000.

⁹ O. Koch, *Individualität als Fundamentalgefühl. Zur Metaphysik der Person bei Jacobi und Jean Paul*, Hamburg, Meiner, 2013; K. Sommer, *Zwischen Metaphysik und Metaphysikkritik. Heidegger, Schelling und Jacobi*, Hamburg, Meiner, 2015.

¹⁰ The principle, which goes back to Lucretius' *De Rerum Natura*, is given relevance in Descartes' *Principles of Philosophy*: «[...] when we recognize that it is impossible for anything to come from nothing, the proposition *Nothing comes from nothing* is regarded not as a really existing thing, or even as a mode of a thing, but as an eternal truth which resides within our mind. Such truths are termed common notions or axioms». R. Descartes, *Principles of Philosophy*, in R. Descartes, *Selected Philosophical Writings*, trans. by J. Cottingham, R. Stoothoff, and D. Murdoch, Cambridge et al., Cambridge University Press, 1988, p. 176.

¹¹ Cf. Jacobi, *Über die Lehre des Spinoza*, p. 56.

why it exists»¹². In the explanation Spinoza elaborates: «Since existing is something positive, we cannot say that it has nothing as its cause (by Axiom 7). Therefore, we must assign some positive cause, or reason, why [a thing] exists – either an external one, i.e., one outside the thing itself, or an internal one, one comprehended in the nature and definition of the existing thing itself». Finally, the reference to axiom 7 introduces an alternative to the principle of ‘ex nihilo, nihil fit’: «no actually existing think and no actually existing perfection of a thing can have nothing, *or* a thing not existing, as the cause of its existence»¹³. In the end, a chain of finite causes displays the whole of reality that does not have beginning in time or space.

Furthermore, the connection between empirical and intellectual origin of a thing is made explicit in another *locus* in Spinoza’s body of works; the second definition in Part II of the *Ethics* reads: «I say that to the essence of any thing belongs that which, being given, the thing is necessarily posited and which, being taken away, the thing is necessarily taken away; or that without which the thing can neither be nor be conceived, and which can neither be nor be conceived without the thing». Conclusively, the corporeal existence and the theoretical definition of a thing coincide, and they both depend on another being to provide the cause or reason of that thing. But, at this point, the relation of dependency can take two forms – as it is well known: «what cannot be conceived [*concipi*] through another, must be conceived through itself» (*Ethics*, axiom 2, Part I¹⁴). In fact, the principle of sufficient reason rules over the relation to others and the relation to itself as well. It can therefore be applied to develop a chain of finite beings (corporeally and theoretically) connected to each other, or can reflect onto itself to shape an autonomous being. This second expression of the relation of

¹² B. Spinoza, *Descartes’ Principles of Philosophy*, in *The Collected Works of Spinoza*, ed. and tr. by E. Curley, New Jersey, Princeton University Press, 1985, vol. 1, p. 246.

¹³ Ivi, p. 244.

¹⁴ All quotations come from B. Spinoza, *Ethics*, in *The Collected Works of Spinoza*, ed. and tr. by E. Curley, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1985, vol. 2.

dependency gives rise to the concept of *causa sui*: «By cause of itself I understand that whose essence involves existence, or that whose nature cannot be conceived except as existing» (*Ethics*, definition 1, Part I). Conclusively, Jacobi sees in the principle of sufficient reason the engine of the internal coherent architecture of reality, which includes both the existence and essence of finite things. This way, the *causa sui* is interpreted as an immanent principle that, while causing itself, causes the chain of the reasons of objects.

IV. Generally speaking, Jacobi's reading of Spinoza seeks to unveil the consequences of the equation between concrete generation and theoretical definition¹⁵. Indeed, within this geometric dimension, we are unable to think a real absolute beginning; for example, the very concept of *free action* turns meaningless. Within this geometry we cannot deem ourselves the origin of any deed, because we must admit that it is intellectually unreasonable to oppose the Spinozistic geometry of reality¹⁶: we are spurred to define our actions as coming into existence from us, but the principle of sufficient reason throws our actions into the chain of reasons and turns what we call 'free action' into a necessary consequence of a system. Therefore, the notion of 'free action' would require another way to think, which would finally oppose the principle of sufficient reason. Yet, this brief and general analysis of Jacobi's argument introduces us to a very specific theme: Jacobi's philosophical effort does not focus on finite objects in general, but rather on finite subjects, which are not – this is his assumption – passive elements within a geometrical whole, for they represent absolute and individual beginnings. Thus, the underlining interest of Jacobi's interpretation of Spinoza's texts is not strictly theoretical but practical, and it finally harmonizes with a vision in which the finitude of the subject (i.e. its being absolutely enclosed and limited, hence defined in itself) is also the source of his autonomy.

¹⁵ Koch, *Individualität*, p. 49 ff.

¹⁶ Ivi, p. 60.

But how can we conceptualize this autonomy if the principle of sufficient reason rules over our intellectual activities? Is the autonomy of a human agent a mere delusion? The apparent empirical dimension of the discourse about actions and agents becomes ‘transcendent’ in the very moment we accept – as Jacobi seems to do – that there is no way to know reality objectively other than the one that the principle of sufficient reason provides. Therefore, we must appeal for a transcendent attainment of what concerns freedom, person, and those other ‘*Dinge*’ that elude scientific thinking. Koch underlines that Jacobi considers Spinoza’s philosophy as a coherent and consistent system *prima facie*, but he also observes that it implies the rejection of the individuality of moral agents. Yet this rejection can be bypassed if we call for a different epistemology.

The second edition of the Letters on Spinoza brings Jacobi not only to elaborate on his concept of *faith* (*Glaube*), but also to praise the constitutive attitude of Kantian practical reason. As it is well known, practical reason is regulative in the field of the empirical world; however, practical reason also shows the possibility to constitute unconditioned objects, ideas. They represent the paradigm of those absolute objects that inhabit an alternative epistemology to the systematic thinking. Koch leads the reader through the pages of the dialogue *David Hume* while keeping track on the development of Jacobi’s interest in Kant’s practical reason¹⁷. For the sake of clarity, let us consider a key factor in the constitution of the new way of thinking that seems to emerge from Jacobi’s reflection on Kant’s moral philosophy. The author assesses the relevance of the concept «*Sinnlichkeiten*», which becomes one of the crucial concepts of Jacobi’s thought: *Sinnlichkeit* is synonym of the subject’s openness to the other, and it applies to both the empirical and moral world. If on the one hand *Sinnlichkeit* is the essential feature to any moral agent, on the other hand it also entails the capacity to establish a relation between two different and separate items: a subject and an object. In other words, *Sinnlichkeit* gives Jacobi the means to shape a new

¹⁷ Ivi, pp. 78 and ff.

kind of relation, upon which he builds his practical and theoretical philosophy.

At the same time, Jacobi helps us understand that systematic thinking does not include absolute otherness or absolute identity, and therefore systematic thinking is trapped in the solitary activity of an *ego*. On the contrary, Jacobi explains his firm confidence in the epistemological and moral necessity of the *Sinnlichkeit*, which leads Koch's analysis of Jacobi's texts to the latter's dramatic conflict with Fichte's philosophy. The real (Fichtian) «science of the truth», so Jacobi, reaches perfection in the architecture of a theoretical egoism, whereby the subject knows everything because it produces everything systematically¹⁸. *Sinnlichkeit*, on the contrary, is synonym for the subject's openness to the other. Hence, this openness represents (a) the general ability of identifying objects which are not mere products of the subject's intellect (empirical apprehension), and (b) the ability for the agent to transcend the bare 'chain of causes' and eventually act freely. *Sinnlichkeit* proves to be an empirical as well as a practical necessity for the individual.

In other words, *Sinnlichkeit* is the key to approach Jacobi's notion of Metaphysics, which rejects neither science nor its perfect geometry (at least not entirely) but alludes to the necessity for openness to what is different from the subject. Once the subject is confronted by something different from itself, both his actions and his knowledge regain meaning: as for the former, I can deem myself the real cause of my actions and not a simple joint in a progression of events; as for the latter, I can deem my knowledge of the world the knowledge of a real object and not the production of my thinking. As Koch highlights, *Sinnlichkeit* consists in the *medium* between two substances¹⁹ which must be conceived as «unconditioned» and distinct. This means that they must hold on to themselves. In fact, only if they are conceived as unconditioned, they are not reduced to being mere 'links of a chain'. And this is what Jacobi presents as the imperative

¹⁸ Ivi, p. 99.

¹⁹ Ivi, p. 120.

assumption if we aim to define a 'person'. Jacobi does not present this assumption according to the same theoretical consistency that governs Fichte's «science»; instead, he nourishes a dualism made of science on one side, and faith (which took other names through Jacobi's *oeuvre*) on the other.

We could indulge in supplementary elaborations on this subject matter, as Koch does, but we would like to dwell on the topic at hand, which yields those consequences that attract most of the contemporary interests in Jacobi. In fact, Koch points to the fact that Jacobi's *Handlungstheorie* is his first concern in the constitution of his theory of the «unconditioned». But if it is true that Jacobi's *Handlungstheorie* constitutes the essence of a radical definition of human freedom, it also unravels a lexicon for a new ontology.

V. No surprise, therefore, if one of the most interesting analysis of Jacobi's non-philosophy appears in a book that moves from Schelling's *Freiheitsschrift* and focuses on the relation between the critique against metaphysics and a possible ontology. Sommer's *Zwischen Metaphysik und Metaphysikkritik. Heidegger, Schelling und Jacobi* seems to embark on a backwards journey from Heidegger to Jacobi in search of the sources for a critique against systematic philosophy. In reality, Sommer relies on F.W.J. Schelling's *Philosophische Untersuchungen über das Wesen der menschlichen Freiheit und die damit zusammenhängenden Gegenstände* (1809) in order to provide a comprehensive and clear investigation on those topics that connect Schelling's text with Heidegger's *Kehre*²⁰. Sommer shows that this connection is not grounded on the lectures Heidegger held on Schelling's philosophy only; instead, it goes back to a broader panorama of criticisms against the epistemological limits dictated by Kantian subjectivity. Therefore, Sommer's reference to Jacobi (and his critique of Spinoza) – although not supported by Heidegger's writings – is crucial in framing the long process of emancipation from systematic thinking that philosophy should undergo.

²⁰ Sommer, *Zwischen Metaphysik*, p. 36.

In opposition to the usual fashion of commenting philosophers with scholars' analysis, we dare paraphrase Sommer's purpose with the help of Heidegger's words:

The adequate execution and completion of this other thinking that abandons subjectivity is surely made more difficult by the fact that in the publication of *Being and Time* the third division of the first part, «Time and Being», was held back... Here everything is reversed. The division in question was held back because thinking [*Denken*] failed in the adequate saying of this turning [*Kehre*] and did not succeed with the help of the language of metaphysics. [...] This turning is not a change of standpoint from *Being and Time*, but in it the thinking that was sought first arrives at the location of that dimension out of which *Being and Time* is experienced, that is to say, experienced from the fundamental experience of the oblivion of Being²¹.

Sommer's somehow covert line of reasoning consists in the thesis according to which understanding Heidegger's *Kehre* can be useful to appreciate the real scope of Jacobi's *Unphilosophie*. Therefore, if the *Beiträge zur Philosophie (Vom Ereignis)* (1936–37) is usually regarded as the text that best represents the inception of the *Kehre*, Sommer does not limit herself to it, but enhances the great relevance that *Der Satz vom Grund* (1955–56) has in defining the dimension of the alternative thinking that Jacobi inaugurated against the entire post-Kantian philosophy.

Yet, the complete picture unfolds with Sommer's analysis of Schelling's thought. As it happened with Jacobi, Schelling's *Freiheitsschrift* introduces freedom as neither the first, nor the ultimate element, but the center of the whole system of philosophy. The opposition between Schelling and Jacobi takes shape with Schelling's attempt to include freedom in a coherent intelligible system; in fact, Schelling tries to counter Spinoza's

²¹ M. Heidegger, *Letter on Humanism*, in M. Heidegger, *Basic Writings*, ed. by D.F. Krell, New York, Harper, 2008, pp. 213–265, here pp. 231–232.

fatalism according to a spinozistic fashion, i.e. by incorporating freedom (systematically) into immanence, and by defining human action within God's life. The final result consists in thinking of existence as a manifestation of a *Grund*, that discloses itself in a general life or *Lebendigkeit*²².

This «*Pantheismus* of freedom» distances itself from Jacobi's efforts to define the personhood in its unconditioned singularity, and suggests that – so Schelling argues – systematic theory and theory of praxis should be thought concurrently and anew²³.

One century later, Heidegger sees in Schelling's text on freedom not only the climax of German Idealism, but also the cradle of those sources that might renovate metaphysics and expand rationality. Heidegger, in this way, sees the notion of free action not only under the frame of a *Handlungstheorie*, but in its ontological relevance, i.e. as the possibility to define the being based on human freedom²⁴.

Sommers painstakingly highlights those fundamental passages which show that Heidegger conceives freedom as the only conceptual key that reveals the hidden connection between system and pantheism²⁵. According to Sommer's interpretation of Heidegger's theory, pantheism is not to be conceived as a driving force that annihilates the singular essence of finite things, but as the ground on which finite things can be defined according to their essential freedom²⁶. Unfortunately, we cannot indulge in a detailed analysis of Sommer's passages, although they attract the reader for their clear prose and documented investigation do not abdicate even when the subject matter turns intricate.

What strikes those who follow the author's most revealing suggestions is that neither Heidegger nor Jacobi manifest any elusiveness in their adherence to the tension between philosophical thought and the notion of the «unconditioned». And yet Heidegger – as opposed to Jacobi – does not foresee the

²² Sommer, *Zwischen Metaphysik*, p. 123.

²³ Ivi, p. 95 and p. 151.

²⁴ Ivi, p. 184.

²⁵ Ivi, pp. 210-214.

²⁶ Ivi, p. 226.

capitulation of logic in a «leap» towards the absolute. Unlike Jacobi, Heidegger elaborates a different style in thinking that surpasses the jurisdiction of human *needs*²⁷ and develops a distinct understanding of the notion of system. In the end, Heidegger's different interpretation of both system and human rational needs contrasts with Jacobi's critique against metaphysics. Nevertheless, Heidegger elaborates his thinking on the basis of a feature that Jacobi also puts at the ground of his non-philosophy, namely, receptiveness.

VI. As we have seen, rational receptiveness plays a crucial role in the constitution of the possibility for human beings: they can perform free actions and consider themselves autonomous existing individuals only as long as they are real 'I's before real 'other's'²⁸. Moreover, the concept of «individual existence» must be deemed as the real preoccupation of Jacobi's first attempts to enter the philosophical debate. His early non-philosophy revolves around the impossibility to deduce the individual existence, which becomes the point of disclosure of a new tradition of thought.

On this topic, Emanuela Pistilli clearly declares²⁹ the great impact that the texts by Moses Mendelssohn (*Über die Evidenz der metaphysischen Wissenschaften*) and, especially, Immanuel Kant (*Der einzig mögliche Beweisgrund zu einer Demonstration des Daseyns Gottes*), written in occasion of the *Preisfrage der Akademie der Wissenschaften* (1763), had in constituting Jacobi's philosophical paraphernalia. Pistilli does not limit herself to exploring this issue only; along with a dissection of Jacobi's education as thinker and writer, the author's argument points at both Jacobi's insight into the methodology of metaphysics and his criticism of demonstrative thinking. Pistilli shows that *existence* is the prime conundrum for the metaphysics of principles and corollaries, and therefore the

²⁷ Ivi, pp. 341 and ff.

²⁸ Receptiveness makes explicit the connection between distinct substances, it even echoes (problematically) the Kantian dimension of postulates. Ivi, pp. 372 and ff.

²⁹ E. Pistilli, *Tra dogmatismo e scetticismo. Fonti e genesi della filosofia di F. H. Jacobi*, Pisa-Roma, Serra, 2008.

notion of existence constitutes the first philosophical topic that shapes the focus of non-philosophy. As reported in a letter to La Sage dated February 2nd, 1767, Jacobi aims at defining intuition as the epistemological tool for those sciences that conceive existence as their primal focus: moral sciences.

According to Jacobi's reading of Kant's *Beweisgrund*, moral sciences can grant immediate and objective access to the true³⁰, so as to make existence the first predicate of those special objects to which no systematic knowledge can be applied. Therefore, existence is neither a special qualification of being, nor a selective definition of human condition, but the character of a reality that can only be grasped through intuition. The debate about the meaning of existence is therefore methodological but, nonetheless, gives the appropriate insight into what non-philosophy addresses. Thanks to Pistilli's work, we can now appreciate the original compass and depth of Jacobi's understanding of non-philosophy, that is practical philosophy in the first place, but goes as far as moral rationality requires. This unique ontology – that rejects metaphysics – replaces the transcendental definitions of the subject, makes of existence the fundamental quality of autonomous beings, and brings forth a different world made of absolute *Dinge*.

VII. As a final remark, we shall take a step aside from everything that has been said up to now and ask ourselves if Jacobi is indeed defining a new philosophical language and a new ontology. We may wonder whether Jacobi's efforts should be seen as mere reaction to the limits of systematic thinking (as it is often the case in secondary literature), or whether they should be understood *via positiva* as an attempt at defining a new rational faculty; on these latter terms, this new form of rationality would surpass the principle of 'giving reason' and ultimately opens the *logos* of existence. Unfortunately, this question cannot be answered thoroughly, but it can function to lure our attention into the confrontation between philosophy and non-philosophy.

³⁰ Ivi, p. 122.

It is overt that philosophy and non-philosophy should not be related, they should be seen as two distinct fields. We are therefore prompted to ask whether a form of *logos* is to be found in the «leap» that Jacobi asks himself and his reader to perform in the act of leaving systematic thinking to land onto the ground of his non-philosophy. At first it seems that no *logos* is admitted in the region between philosophy and non-philosophy: as Jacobi made explicit, the moral dimension of thought (which represents the core of his non-philosophy) dwells outside of discursive thinking and an unsurmountable cliff extends between moral sciences and systematic thinking. As a consequence, the Jacobinian *Handlungstheorie* does not welcome any other kind of thinking but its own, it opposes the system of discursive thinking and creates a strict dualism (both in content and form): *aut* systematic thinking *aut* Jacobi's non-philosophy.

Nevertheless, our ability to think this dichotomy can partially overcome this dictum and stretch our thinking in a dimension where the origin of the rational forms (or ideas) shows neither the structure of *Grund* nor that of *Ursache*.

As a general feature, this third dimension of thinking is not discursive, nor is it based upon the structure of an absolute and free agent, but it welcomes – though is not reduced to – both opposing contenders. We would suggest that this universal origin of philosophy and non-philosophy be thought of as a further kind of *negation* that arises at the first light of thinking. Of all kinds of negations, a basic one strikes for its simplicity; one that individuals ought to hold onto for the sake of their basic intellectual orientation: the non-being is not.

Without question, our thinking may transcend this precept and wander where different dialectics about the 'being of non-being,' or the 'equation between being and non-being' are discussed and made productive. But this maxim gives us the most precious tool to orient ourselves within a horizon of primeval intellectuality. This original negation does not disclose a moral dimension and yet it bears traces of what non-philosophy yielded: the absolute negation of the other and the consequent capitulation of dialectic.

Yet, of this original and elemental negation – ‘non-being is not’ – we have only memory. This memory does not announce the complex problem of being, it only refers to the negation that lays the foundations of the thinking about the being. It does not imply operations because it only evokes the one negation that the thinking assumes. This memory – which, one might say, represents a platonic form of knowledge – leads to the dogma of non-being and hosts a pre-philosophical principle that we can access immediately and that we bear in the mind unfruitfully but permanently. We face the dictum ‘non-being is not’ as if we were facing the most inarticulate thought of all and the most primitive and mute form of consciousness. This origin of thinking shows itself as the barren memory that non-being is not: it grants our reason the simplicity of this certitude. In the end, it represents a memory without nostalgia, for it includes nothing but that negation. We can even affirm that this memory is a solid possession of our understanding and that it does not elicit action nor requires investigation. As a memory, this negation implies a different way to thinking about the origin, one that makes the origin neither *Ursache* nor *Grund*. In fact, this memory seems to state a new form of principle, one that does not have the features of a ‘condition of possibility’ nor of a ‘postulate’, as it manifests itself through the characters of a vocation. This is the vocation of human endeavor to think, whose questions and deeds bear traces of this original form.