FROM GOODNESS OF THE WILL TO IRONIC CONSCIOUSNESS: A HEGELIAN CRITIQUE OF SUBJECTIVE ETHICS IN *PHILOSOPHY OF RIGHT*

DA BONDADE DA VONTADE À CONSCIÊNCIA IRÔNICA: UMA CRÍTICA HEGELIANA DA ÉTICA SUBJETIVA NA *FILOSOFIA DO DIREITO*

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RESUMO: Este artigo examina a crítica de Hegel à "bondade da vontade" e sua relação com o conceito de consciência irônica de Friedrich Schlegel, utilizando a obra de Friedrich Jacobi como lente comparativa. A partir das observações (d) e (f) ao §140 da *Filosofia do direito* e da figura da boa-consciência (*Gewissen*) na *Fenomenologia do espírito*, o artigo traça a progressão conceitual da bondade da vontade, passando pela convicção subjetiva, até a ironia romântica. Hegel critica a "bondade da vontade" por privilegiar intenções subjetivas em detrimento de normas éticas objetivas, visão que encontra eco na noção de Jacobi do "gênio moral" expressa no romance Woldemar. Embora Schlegel concorde com a crítica de Hegel à ênfase de Jacobi na certeza subjetiva, dele diverge ao assumir a consequência que Jacobi denominava "niilismo": a impossibilidade de um fundamento último para as normas éticas e jurídicas, que, embora objetivas, têm validade apenas histórica. O artigo mostra que a consciência irônica, tal como representada por Schlegel, constitui a forma mais alta e explícita do subjetivismo já presente na bondade da vontade. Em última análise, a análise de Hegel revela os perigos dos sistemas éticos fundados exclusivamente na subjetividade individual, desprovidos de referenciais éticos objetivos.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Hegel; Friedrich Schlegel; Jacobi; ironia; bondade da vontade

ABSTRACT: This paper examines Hegel's critique of the "goodness of the will" and its relation to Friedrich Schlegel's concept of ironic consciousness, using Friedrich Jacobi's work as a comparative lens. Drawing on Remarks (d) and (f) to §140 of the Philosophy of Right and on the figure of Conscience (Gewissen) in the Phenomenology of Spirit, the article traces the conceptual progression from goodness of the will through subjective conviction to romantic irony. Hegel criticizes the "goodness of the will" for prioritizing subjective intentions over objective ethical norms, a view he sees echoed in Jacobi's notion of the "moral genius" as expounded in the novel Woldemar. While Schlegel agrees with Hegel's critique of Jacobi's emphasis on subjective certainty, he diverges by embracing the consequence that Jacobi called "nihilism": the impossibility of an ultimate foundation for ethical and legal norms, which, though objective, are historical in their validity. The paper shows that ironic consciousness, as represented by Schlegel, constitutes the highest and most explicit form of the subjectivism already present in the goodness of the will. Ultimately, Hegel's analysis reveals the dangers of ethical systems grounded solely in individual subjectivity, devoid of objective ethical frameworks.

KEYWORDS: Hegel; Friedrich Schlegel; Jacobi; irony; goodness of the will

1. Introduction

Hegel criticizes the subjectivity which perceives itself above any concrete determination or content in the Remarks to § 140 of the *Philosophy of Right.* The author begins Remark (f)

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by stating that "Finally, the supreme form in which this subjectivity is completely comprehended and expressed is that to which the term 'irony', borrowed from Plato, has been applied".[1] Hegel then refers to romantic irony, whose main exponent is Friedrich Schlegel. The Swabian thinker considers that Plato had taken from Socrates the notion of irony as a dialogical strategy by which an interlocutor simulates ignorance about a subject that is supposedly the object of knowledge of the other. According to Hegel, Socrates treated ironically those who claimed to know the idea of truth and justice, but never the idea itself, because "Irony concerns only a manner of speaking in relation to *people*" .[2]

But Hegel holds that the irony cultivated by Friedrich Schlegel rejects the substantiality of the idea and posits subjectivity as the instance that decides on truth and falsehood, justice and injustice.[3] This ironic consciousness does not deny the existence of the ethically objective, but it perceives itself above any concrete content – Right, law, duty – and conceives itself as the absolute, unconditional instance of this knowledge. A form which, Hegel adds, "is already implicitly *[an sich]* present within the preceding forms".[4] Then, the romantic irony is the final phase of a process begun with the "goodness of the will" – analysed and criticized in Remark (d) by Hegel – which continued with the subjective conviction – analysed and criticized in Remark (e).[5]

The goal of this paper is to demonstrate that the differences and similarities between the "goodness of the will" and ironic consciousness can be verified through the criticism that Friedrich Schlegel directs at Friedrich Jacobi's thought in his review of *Woldemar* (1796). To achieve this goal, it is necessary, first of all, to explain the link between "goodness of the will"

[1] HEGEL, G. W. F. **Elements of the Philosophy of Right.** Translated by H. B. Nisbet. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991, § 140, Remark (f), p. 180. HEGEL, G. W. F. **Grundlinien der Philosophie des Rechts oder Naturrecht und Staatswissenschaft.** Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1986, § 140, Anmerkung (f), p. 277: "Die höchste Form endlich, in welcher diese Subjektivität sich vollkommen erfaßt und ausspricht, ist die Gestalt, die man mit einem von *Platon* erborgten Namen *Ironie* genannt hat."

[2] HEGEL. **Elements of the Philosophy of Right**, § 140, Remark (f), p. 180. HEGEL. **Grundlinien der Philosophie des Rechts**, § 140, Anmerkung (f), p. 277: "Die Ironie betrifft nur ein Verhalten des Gesprächs gegen *Personen*".

[3] The position discussed here is that of Schlegel's early writings, on which Hegel's critique in § 140 rests. Schlegel's later thought developed in a different direction, particularly after his 1808 conversion; that development, however, falls outside the scope of the present study, which is concerned with the conception of irony available to Hegel in 1821.

[4] HEGEL. **Elements of the Philosophy of Right,** § 140, Remark (f), p. 182. HEGEL. **Grundlinien der Philosophie des Rechts,** § 140, Anmerkung (f), p. 278-279: "welches in den vorhergehenden Formen schon an sich vorhanden ist."

[5] Remarks (d) and (e) to § 140 are cited and analysed in detail below, in the sections on the goodness of the will and on subjective conviction respectively.

and Jacobi's work. The criticism of subjective conviction is not directly linked to the paper's purpose. However, the Hegelian analysis of romantic irony is based on the exposition of the transition from the moment of Remark (e) to the ironic consciousness presented in Remark (f). For this reason, it is necessary to set out subjective conviction before expounding the transition from subjective conviction to romantic irony. Finally, and in order to emphasize Hegel's critical perspective on romantic irony, I will expose the differences between the Schlegelian proposal and the Hegelian stance on Jacobi's thought. It should be noted that the object of this paper is Hegel's critique of Romantic irony as formulated in the Remarks to § 140, and not an independent reconstruction of Friedrich Schlegel's thought. Schlegel's position is therefore presented primarily as the target of Hegel's reading and critique. In the case of Jacobi, however, that reading is confronted with Jacobi's own texts, in order to show that the Hegelian characterization, while identifying a genuine difficulty, does not exhaustively describe the position it criticizes. This does not weaken the critique: Hegel's analysis need not exhaust Jacobi's thought in order to identify the structural difficulty at stake – a subjectivity that posits itself as the unconditioned ground of reality – and the same holds for Schlegel.

1. The goodness of the will

Thus, Hegel refers to the evil of the will, which gives to evil the appearance of good, "For every action has a positive aspect, and since the determination of good as opposed to evil can likewise be reduced to the positive, I can maintain that my action is good with reference to my intention".[6] That means, the evil will is the subjectivity which justifies any action because it is done with good intentions. Hegel referred to "goodness of the will" with the same terms in Remark (d) when he stated that, according to the aforementioned, there were no evil people, since nobody wishes evil for the sake of evil itself. "Goodness of the will" considered that every action had a positive side which implied the agent's redemption; thus, the difference between good and evil, established by moral law, was not valid.

[6] HEGEL. **Elements of the Philosophy of Right**, § 140, Addition, p. 183. HEGEL. **Grundlinien der Philosophie des Rechts**, § 140 Zusatz, p. 284: "Denn jede Handlung hat ein Positives, und indem sich die Bestimmung des Guten gegen das Böse ebenfalls auf das Positive reduziert, kann ich die Handlung in Beziehung auf meine Absicht als gute behaupten."

At the same time, and from this perspective, the classification of crimes in positive law lacked ethical foundation. From Hegel's perspective, "goodness of the will" is, in fact, evil; because it justifies any action, no matter how vile, by arguing that its motive was a good intention. Then, the subjectivity posits itself above any objective ethical norm (the actual duties), and any moral maxim (the difference between good and evil). If the subjectivity uses this justification as a discursive strategy in front of others, it is a simulation. This is what the author expresses when he maintains that "If the self-consciousness passes its action off as good only for the benefit of other people, it takes the form of *hypocrisy*".[7] Because the self-consciousness does not ignore that action is evil; it simply wants to make others believe that it is not.

The situation is more complex if the evil will sincerely believes that the action is simply justified because it was motivated by a good intention. A similar situation means that self-consciousness really believes that there are no evil actions, because all of them are motivated by good intentions; but it also implies that self-consciousness perceives itself above any ethical determination: "but if it is able to assert that the deed is good in its own estimation, too, we have reached that even higher level of subjectivity which knows itself as absolute. For subjectivity of this kind, good and evil in and for themselves have disappeared, and it can pass off as good or evil whatever its wishes and its ability dictate".[8] Hegel's reference to chapter "Das Gewissen" in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* points to the second option.[9] *Gewissen* is the conscience, convinced of its natural predisposition to do what is most beneficial for itself and others.[10]

2.1 Conscience (Gewissen) in the Phenomenology of Spirit

According to Hegel, conscience takes its individual actions to be in agreement with the supreme and universal good, since it understands itself as the consciousness of pure duty. Yet

[7] HEGEL. **Elements of the Philosophy of Right,** § 140, Addition, p. 183. HEGEL. **Grundlinien der Philosophie des Rechts**, § 140, Zusatz, p. 284: "Gibt das Selbstbewußtsein die Handlung nur für andere als gut aus, so ist diese Form die *Heuchelei*."

[8] HEGEL. **Elements of the Philosophy of Right,** § 140, Addition, p. 183. HEGEL. **Grundlinien der Philosophie des Rechts**, § 140, Zusatz, p. 284: "vermag es aber die Tat für sich selbst als gut zu behaupten, so ist dies die noch höhere Spitze der sich als das Absolute wissenden Subjektivität, für die das Gute und Böse, an und für sich, verschwunden ist und die dafür ausgeben kann, was sie will und vermag."

[9] Vid. HEGEL. **Grundlinien der Philosophie des Rechts**, § 140, Anmerkung (f), p. 279-280.

[10] Throughout this article, "conscience" renders the German *Gewissen* and designates moral conscience, as distinct from "consciousness" (*Bewußtsein*). This is the solution adopted by both translations used here, Miller's and Nisbet's.

pure duty, being universal, cannot as such be enacted: every action realizes a *determinate* content, so the law that conscience applies is always a particular determination shaped by its own interpretation of that universal duty. Hence a gap opens between pure duty and determinate law. If the conscience that has applied a determinate law does not admit as much, others take it for an evil conscience that evades its responsibility; if it does admit it, it concedes before others that it has not, after all, realized pure duty but only its own particular content.

This is the decisive point for what follows. Since pure duty cannot be exhibited in the particular deed, its only actuality (*Wirklichkeit*) is in language: duty becomes effective as that which conscience *declares* to others. The action counts as moral not through its objective content but through the subject's declaration of the conviction that moved it. Conviction thus begins to displace content as the criterion of the good – and it is precisely this displacement that Remark (e) will isolate and criticize:

> Conscience, then, in the majesty of its elevation above specific law and every content of duty, puts whatever content it pleases into its knowing and willing. It is the moral genius which knows the inner voice of what it immediately knows to be a divine voice; and since, in knowing this, it has an equally immediate knowledge of existence, it is the divine creative power which in its Notion possesses the spontaneity of life. Equally, it is in its own self divine worship, for its action is the contemplation of its own divinity.[11]

The description of *Gewissen's* characteristics coincides with the representation of the aforementioned "goodness of the will." Because the individual that embodies *Gewissen* also takes any content as its object of knowledge and desire. This means that it has the power to establish what is desirable, what action is justifiable. And it places its object of desire above any pre-established determination. This means that conscience determines any given thing. Other figures of the Spirit presented determinations as "good," "evil," "law," "Right," and so on. These determinations are the "other," which confronts conscience's self-certainty. From the point of view of conscience, the certainty it has about itself as the absolute determination of each given thing is the pure, immediate truth.

[11] HEGEL, G. W. F. **Phenomenology of Spirit.** Translated by A. V. Miller. United States of America: Oxford University Press, 1977, p. 397. HEGEL, G. W. F. **Phänomenologie des Geistes**, Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1970, p. 481: "Das Gewissen also in der Majestät seiner Erhabenheit über das bestimmte Gesetz und jeden Inhalt der Pflicht legt den beliebigen Inhalt in sein Wissen und Wollen; es ist die moralische Genialität, welche die innere Stimme ihres unmittelbaren Wissens als göttliche Stimme weiß, und indem sie an diesem Wissen ebenso unmittelbar das Dasein weiß, ist sie die göttliche Schöpferkraft, die in ihrem Begriffe die Lebendigkeit hat. Sie ist ebenso der Gottesdienst in sich selbst; denn ihr Handeln ist das Anschauen dieser ihrer eigenen Göttlichkeit."

Links between the exposition of Conscience with the work of Friedrich Jacobi

Hegel also refers to this subjectivity when he criticizes Jacobi's thought in *Glauben und Wissen*.[12] When referring to the latter's morality, he relies on passages from *An Fichte*,[13] where Jacobi claims for man a "most sacred certainty" (*heiligste Gewißheit*) and a "right of majesty" (*Majestätsrecht des Menschen*) that place him, in his "divine nature" (*göttliche Natur*), above the letter of the universal law of reason.[14] The terminology Hegel uses in the paragraph on *Gewissen* in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* – the "divine voice", the "divine creative power", the certainty that knows itself as absolute – coincides with this Jacobian vocabulary, a correspondence also registered by the secondary literature.[15] The expression "moral genius" (*moralische Genialität*) points, in turn, to Jacobi's novel *Woldemar*,[16] where genius is presented as the natural force that sets the virtuous rule for others – an instinct prior to all experience, the immediate essence of man that admits of no rational discussion. This lexical correspondence has been developed in detail elsewhere, where it is shown to constitute evidence that Hegel had Jacobi's work in mind when writing Remark (d) to § 140.[17] Here it is enough to retain its result: the Hegelian reference to the conviction of the "goodness of the will" regarding the goodness of its

[12] Vid. HEGEL, G. W. F. Glauben und Wissen oder die Reflexionsphilosophie der Subjektivität in der Vollständigkeit ihrer Formen als Kantische, Jacobische und Fichtesche Philosophie. In: **Werke in zwanzig Bänden**. Vol. 2. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1986.

[13] Vid. JACOBI, F. H. **Jacobi an Fichte**. Hamburg: Friedrich Perthes, 1799.

[14] JACOBI, F. H. Jacobi to Fichte. In: **Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi: The main philosophical writings and the novel Allwill**. Translated and edited by George di Giovanni. Canada: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1994, p. 516. JACOBI. **Jacobi an Fichte**, p. 33: "...denn mit der heiligsten Gewißheit, die ich in mir habe, weiß ich – daß das privilegium aggratiandi wegen solcher Verbrechen wider den reinen Buchstaben des absolut allgemeinen Vernunftgeseßes, das eigentliche Majestätsrecht des Menschen; das Siegel seiner Würde, seiner Göttlichen Natur ist."

[15] Hinchman shows that Hegel paraphrases the critique of Jacobi made in **Glauben und Wissen** when he critically presents the figure of Spirit as the beautiful soul in the **Phenomenology of Spirit**. One example of this is the reference to the majesty of conscience above the law: Hegel used that expression to refer to Jacobi's ethical thought in his letters to Fichte (HINCHMAN, L. P. **Hegel's Critique of the Enlightenment.** Florida: University Presses of Florida, 1984). Gustav Falke and Allen Speight find the same coincidence (FALKE, G. Hegel und Jacobi. Ein methodisches Beispiel zur Interpretation der Phänomenologie des Geistes. **Hegel-Studien**, v. 22, 1987, p. 129-142; SPEIGHT, A**. Hegel, literature and the problem of agency**. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004). Harris likewise states that Hegel's reference to the majesty of conscience above the law points to Jacobi's work: conscience knows no other lawgiver, since it is its own law (HARRIS, H. S. **Hegel's Ladder II: The Odyssey of Spirit**. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 1997, p. 472).

[16] Vid. JACOBI, F. H. *Woldemar*. In: **Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi Werke. Band 7,1**. Edited by Klaus Hammacher and Walter Jaeschke. Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag, 2007.

[17] ALFARO, C. V. A crítica de Hegel à vontade boa e sua vinculação com a filosofia de Jacobi nas *Linhas fundamentais da filosofia do direito*. **Cadernos de Filosofia Alemã**, v. 30, n. 3, 2025, p. 13-22.

intentions is linked to the "sacred certainty" that Jacobi ascribes to man's "divine nature" when acting beyond the limits of the law.

Finally, we can observe that the novel's protagonist expresses his rejection of positive law, social institutions, and the State. He asserts that no human being has ever obeyed the law for its own sake, but rather through the violence with which it is imposed. However, it is the individual's own heart that tells him what is truly good.[18] This last statement corresponds to the Hegelian characterization of the "goodness of the will", which is opposed to *Ethical Life* (*Sittlichkeit*).[19]

A reading of *Von göttlichen Dingen und ihrer Offenbarung* appears to contradict Hegel's interpretation of Jacobi's thought. According to Hegel, Jacobi's philosophy holds that the subjectivity of consciousness is not determined by the objectivity of particular determinations. But Jacobi asserts that human consciousness, separated from external determinations, is pure emptiness without its own content.[20] In fact, he maintains in the aforementioned work that "The rational and finite entity's being (*Seyn*), consciousness and act, is conditional on two elements external to it: a nature below it and a God above it."[21]

The position Hegel attributes to Jacobi is criticized by Jacobi himself, since he considers that a subjectivity which perceives itself as unconditioned conceives itself as the absolute

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[18] JACOBI. *Woldemar,* p. 266-267.

[19] HEGEL. **Elements of the Philosophy of Right**, § 140, Remark (d), p. 176: "But what we describe as a crime is not a general proposition of this kind, left indeterminate and still subject to a dialectic; on the contrary, it is already delimited in a determinate and objective manner. Now what is set up in opposition to this determination – namely that sacred end which is supposed to exonerate the crime – is nothing other than a *subjective opinion* of what is good or better. It is the same thing as happens when volition stops short at the abstract good, so that every determinate characteristic of good and evil or right and wrong which has being and validity in and for itself is cancelled *aufgehoben*\ and this determination is assigned instead to the feeling, imagination *[Vorstellen],* and caprice of the individual." HEGEL. **Grundlinien der Philosophie des Rechts**, § 140, Anmerkung (d), p. 272: "Was sich aber als Verbrechen bezeichnet, ist nicht so eine unbestimmt gelassene Allgemeinheit, die noch einer Dialektik unterläge, sondern hat bereits seine bestimmte objektive Begrenzung. Was solcher Bestimmung nun in dem Zwecke, der dem Verbrechen seine Natur benehmen sollte, entgegengestellt wird, der heilige Zweck, ist nichts anderes als die *subjektive Meinung* von dem, was gut und besser sei. Es ist dasselbe, was darin geschieht, daß das Wollen beim abstrakt Guten stehen bleibt, daß nämlich alle an und für sich seiende und geltende Bestimmtheit des Guten und Schlechten, des Rechts und Unrechts, aufgehoben und dem Gefühl, Vorstellen und Belieben des Individuums diese Bestimmung zugeschrieben wird."

[20] Vid. JACOBI, F. H. *Von göttlichen Dingen und ihrer Offenbarung*, p. 14-15. In: **Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi Werke. Band 3.** Edited by Klaus Hammacher and Walter Jaeschke. Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag, 2000.

[21] LIVIERI, P. **F.H. Jacobi's "On Divine Things and their Revelation": A Study and Translation** (PhD diss., McGill University, 2019), p. XXXIV, available at eScholarship@McGill, https://escholarship.mcgill.ca/concern/theses/hd76s456j. Livieri's translation was subsequently published as **On the Divine Things and Their Revelation** (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2024); it is cited here from the dissertation version.
JACOBI. **Von göttlichen Dingen und ihrer Offenbarung**, p. 40: "Des vernünftigen endlichen Wesens Seyn, Bewußtseyn und Handeln, ist bedingt durch ein doppeltes Außer ihm: eine Natur unter, und einen Gott über ihm."

ground of reality – or, what amounts to the same thing, puts itself in the place of God: "Reason, when isolated, is idealistic and unintellectual (*unverständig*): it denies nature and turns itself into God".[22] Jacobi criticizes the Fichtean system precisely on this ground in *An Fichte*: the subjectivity that creates its own object of knowledge holds a criterion of truth based on the coherence between the subject and the object posited by it, thereby renouncing the "true":

> So if a being is to become for us *a fully* comprehended object, we must cancel it in thought as something *objective, as standing on its own;* we must annihilate it in order to let it become something thoroughly *subjective,* our own creation, *a mere schema.* Nothing must remain in it, and constitute an essential part of its concept, which is not our activity, *now just* a display of our productive imagination.[23]

Jacobi considers idealism to be nihilism, because it denies the existence of a world external to subjectivity: "Truly, my dear Fichte, I would not be vexed if you, or anyone else, were to call *Chimerism* the view I oppose to the Idealism that I chide for *Nihilism*".[24] The denial of an external world also implies the denial of the existence of its creator; subjectivity therefore posits itself as creator: "Man has this choice, however, and this alone: Nothingness or a God. If he chooses nothingness, he makes himself unto a God".[25] Jacobi contemptuously calls "nihilism" a philosophical position which holds that subjectivity puts itself in the place of the divine, unconditioned, absolute ground of reality; yet this is precisely the criticism Hegel had formulated against Jacobi's thought in Remark (d) to § 140.[26]

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[22] LIVIERI. **F. H. Jacobi's "On Divine Things and their Revelation"**, p. XXV, footnote. JACOBI. **Von göttlichen Dingen und ihrer Offenbarung**, p. 27, footnote: "Die Vernunft, isolirt, ist idealistisch und unverständig: sie leugnet die Natur und macht sich selbst zum Gott."

[23] JACOBI. **Jacobi to Fichte**, p. 508. JACOBI. **Jacobi an Fichte**, p. 15-16: "Wenn daher ein Wesen ein von uns vollständig begriffener Gegenstand werden soll, so müssen wir es objectiv – als für sich bestehend – in Gedanken aufheben, vernichten, um es durchaus subjectiv, unser eigenes Geschöpf – ein blosses Schema – werden zu lassen. Es darf nichts in ihm bleiben und einen wesentlichen Theil seines Begriffs ausmachen, was nicht unsere Handlung, jezt eine blosse Darstellung unserer productiven Einbildungskraft wäre."

[24] JACOBI. **Jacobi to Fichte**, p. 519. JACOBI. **Jacobi an Fichte**, p. 39: "Wahrlich, mein Lieber Fichte, es soll mich nicht verdriessen, wenn Sie, oder wer es sey, Chimärismus nennen wollen, was ich dem Idealismus, den ich Nihilismus schelte, entgegensetze."

[25] JACOBI. **Jacobi to Fichte,** p. 524. JACOBI. **Jacobi an Fichte**, p. 48-49: "Eine solche Wahl aber hat der Mensch; diese Einzige: das Nichts oder einen Gott. Das Nichts erwählend macht er sich zu Gott."

[26] Vid. CROWE, B. Jacobi and Philosophy: Rationalism and Skepticism. In: **Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi and the ends of the Enlightenment: Religion, Philosophy, and Reason at the Crux of Modernity**. Edited by Alexander J. B. Hampton. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2023, p. 9-33. According to Jacobi, speculation operates through abstractions: universals emerge at the expense of negating the particularities of things. The understanding is the capacity to identify and equate things (*gleichsetzen*), eliminating the particularities that distinguished individuals and forming abstract concepts based on characteristics shared by the group. Furthermore, human rationality is finite, conditioned, and part of nature; it cannot be conceived as a capacity for producing universals. Pure *a priori* reason does not exist. True human reason is inextricably linked to the physical realm and is both limited and conditioned.

Jacobi points out that a consciousness which perceives itself as the absolute ground of reality is arbitrary and contingent. For that reason, he holds that there is not only a world external to consciousness, but something superior to it, which is necessary to it. Woldemar's author holds that human reason is finite and incapable of creating the true, the beautiful and the good by itself:

> This reason, therefore, cannot possibly be the source itself of that wisdom for which we yearn as the highest good. Nor can it first awaken the thirst for this wisdom; it can only make it more sensitive, thus increasing it. That we are of a divine nature is something primal, deeply hidden in the soul, that tells us; it is proclaimed to us by an impulse of ungenerated nature within us, an impulse that strives to transform the perishable into the imperishable, to impart the nature of the eternal to the temporal, and to grant independence to the dependent: an impulse that could much more readily conceive of reason than be conceived by reason.[27]

What consciousness knows about its own divine nature is thus not its own product but is announced to it by something it has not generated.

However, the Hegelian characterization is not without foundation. For Hegel does identify a difficulty in the way Jacobi grounds the existence of God. Jacobi places the necessary and universal – God – above a consciousness that he himself describes as finite and contingent. Yet access to that ground is the immediate intuition of that very consciousness, and its sole warrant is the conviction with which it perceives it. The existence of the entity meant to place limits on subjectivity is guaranteed only by subjectivity itself. Jacobi states this in two passages of *Woldemar*, expressly ruling out the existence of an intermediate term of comparison:

> There are propositions that require no proof – and indeed admit of none – because anything that could be adduced as proof is weaker than the conviction already present, and serves only to confuse it. We articulate such a proposition when we say: "I am!" This conviction is an immediate knowledge; all other knowledge is tested against it, measured by it, and evaluated in relation to it.
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> Of the same nature is the conviction that the seemly – virtue – must be preferred to the agreeable – happiness. There is, evidently, no third standard against which both might be measured, or by which, through a comparison of degree, a decision could be reached regarding the precedence of the one over the other. Here, our conscience decides immediately, just as our knowledge does regarding existence; that is to say, we

[27] JACOBI. *Woldemar*, p. 272: "Diese Vernunft kann daher unmöglich die Quelle selbst jener Weisheit seyn, nach der wir, als dem höchsten Gut, verlangen. Auch den Durst nach dieser Weisheit kann nicht sie zuerst erregen; nur empfindlicher kann sie ihn machen: also ihn vermehren. Daß wir göttlicher Natur sind, sagt uns etwas in der Seele tief verborgenes Ursprüngliches; verkündigt uns ein Trieb unerzeugter Natur in uns, der Vergängliches in Unvergängliches zu verwandeln, Zeitlichem die Natur des Ewigen mitzutheilen, Abhängigem Unabhängigkeit zu geben strebt: ein Trieb, der viel eher sich Vernunft ersinnen, als durch Vernunft ersonnen werden könnte." (There is no published English translation of Woldemar; the translation is mine).

> discover within our own will that it chooses the decent over the agreeable – that this is its nature and, consequently, the law of our being.[28]

Thus, Jacobi does not demonstrate the objective existence of an absolute, universal, and necessary foundation. In fact, the basis for its existence is the subjective conviction (*Überzeugung*) of consciousness. Yet, if the sole proof of the existence of a substantial principle is the conviction regarding its presence, then the ultimate foundation of every judgment, act of reasoning, and action performed is that very consciousness which declares itself convinced of the substance's existence.[29]

Remark "e"

Conscience first perceives the absolute as "other" which lives together with it in its interiority: the divine voice which determines what is good.[30] However, the determinations are abstractions which serve as justification for any action. The author of *Philosophy of Right* refers in similar terms to the hypocrisy adopted by evil will, which turns any transgression of positive law or moral norms into something good for it.[31] The interior intuition of the absolute cannot be communicated to other people, because it is the ineffable feeling of the presence of the divine living together with the self-consciousness. The subjectivity just has its conviction as a ground: it is the feeling of conviction that the will has when it acts, and that it posits the moral norm at the same time. This is the perspective which is analysed in Remark (e). According to Hegel,

[28] JACOBI. *Woldemar*, p. 270-271: "Es giebt Sätze, die keines Beweises bedürfen, und keines Beweises fähig sind, weil alles, was zum Beweise angeführt werden könnte, schwächer ist, als die schon vorhandene Ueberzeugung, und diese nur verwirrt. Einen solchen Satz sprechen wir aus, wenn wir sagen: Ich bin! Diese Ueberzeugung ist ein unmittelbares Wissen, und alles andre Wissen wird an ihm geprüft, mit ihm gemessen, nach ihm geschäzt. Von derselben Art ist die Ueberzeugung, daß dem Angenehmen das Schickliche: Tugend der Glückseligkeit vorgezogen werden müsse. Es ist, offenbar! kein drittes vorhanden, mit welchem bey des gemessen, an welchem beydes verglichen, und, durch Mehr oder Weniger, über den Vorzug des Einen vor dem Andren entschieden werden könnte. Unser Gewissen entscheidet hier unmittelbar, so wie beym Daseyn unser Wissen; das heißt: Wir finden in unserem Willen selbst, daß er das Anständige vor dem Angenehmen will; daß dies seine Natur: folglich, das Gesez unseres Wesens ist."

[29] Vid. VILLACAÑAS BERLANGA, J. L. **Nihilismo, Especulación y Cristianismo en F.H. Jacobi: Ensayo sobre los orígenes del irracionalismo contemporáneo**. Barcelona: Editorial Anthropos, 1989, p. 433. Jacobi faces the problem of rationality lacking a rational foundation. Such rationality can only be grounded in a subjective "proof" – namely, certainty or conviction. Vid. LAUSTER, J. Jacobi and the German protestant tradition. In: **Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi and the ends of the Enlightenment: Religion, Philosophy, and Reason at the Crux of Modernity**. Edited by Alexander J. B. Hampton. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2023, p. 139-151. Individual certainty regarding an objective truth is intersubjectively untransferable and renders the convinced intolerant. Jacobi emphasizes the solipsistic aspect of religious certainty concerning revealed truth. Tolerance entails yielding to the other's untransferable certainty – implying the potential loss of one's own personal certainty.

[30] Vid. HEGEL. **Phänomenologie des Geistes**, p. 481.

[31] Vid. HEGEL. **Grundlinien der Philosophie des Rechts**, § 140, Zusatz, p. 284-285.

"The inadequacy of this is that everything is made to refer solely to conviction, and that there is no longer any right which has being in and for itself, a right for which this conviction would merely be the form".[32] Conviction, which would only be the form, also occupies the place of content, since the law is reduced to the subjective conviction about what is just and what is not.

The evil will is thus divided into two moments. The first is the one observed in (d), closer to the Conscience, developed in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, which refers to a subjectivity whose sovereignty over legal determinations is based on the supposed capacity of immediate perception of the absolute (God or the divine voice). The second moment refers to Remark (e) and emerges from the conviction the subjectivity has about the norms it posits and about its own actions.

Transition from (e) to (f): from the subjective conviction to irony

On the one hand, the subjectivity of (e) is also convinced of the existence of other subjects like itself, for it interacts with others as if they were rational beings like it. On the other hand, the relationship between subjectivities convinced of their sovereignty over objective determinations cannot be harmonious: each sets itself above every objective determination and takes its own conviction as the sole measure of what is right. Whatever does not coincide with that conviction – including the conviction of the other – is thereby reduced to a mere contingent positivity. The other subject is thus at once a rational being and a contingent phenomenon. But if the others are conceived under this duality, the subjectivity that so conceives them must regard itself in the same way, since it holds itself to be their equal.

That means that every subjectivity considers that its conviction about what is good is the only possible ground to establish the morally right. However, each subjectivity recognizes the other as similar, which means that it must respect the convictions of the other subjectivities. In other words, it must recognize that the conviction of the other is the ultimate ground of the morally right, although it is contrary to its own conviction. At the same time, it considers that determinations external to its will are contingent. Therefore, it contradicts itself and it does not

[32] HEGEL. **Elements of the Philosophy of Right**, § 140, Addition, p. 184. HEGEL. **Grundlinien der Philosophie des Rechts**, § 140, Zusatz, p. 285: "Das Mangelhafte ist hier, daβ es bloβ auf die Überzeugung sich beziehen soll und daβ es kein an und für sich seiendes Recht mehr gibt, für welches diese Überzeugung nur die Form wäre."

recognize the validity of the other subjectivities' convictions. But one must recognize that the same thing happens with the evaluation that other subjectivities make of their own conviction: "Now this form is *irony,* the consciousness that such a principle of conviction is of little value and that, within this supreme criterion, only arbitrariness prevails".[33]

Links and contradictions between "goodness of the will" (d) and irony (f)

We thus observe the journey through the various forms: from "goodness of the will" – also called Conscience in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* – to subjective conviction; and from the two previously mentioned – together called the 'evil will' – to irony. The links and contradictions between good will (d) and irony (f) can be analysed in Friedrich Schlegel's review of *Woldemar*.[34] The latter correctly points out that the thematic core of Jacobi's novel is man's capacity for intuition of the presence of the divine within him; an impulse that dwells within him, but which tends toward the infinite.[35] Schlegel also recognizes that the novel pursues the same purpose as much of Jacobi's work: to restore to the heart, to the feelings, to faith in a personal God, the authority that has been taken from it by the philosophy of his time. Jacobi's contemporary thinkers label as mysticism, even fanaticism, the attempt to place faith in God as the ultimate foundation of ethics. According to Schlegel, Jacobi is right to remind his critics that virtue cannot be explained; that is, the understanding cannot ground a morality.[36]

However, Friedrich Schlegel criticizes the image of woman implicitly outlined by Jacobi in the depiction of the relationship between Woldemar, Allwine and Henriette. Woldemar had married Allwine, although he did not love her; at the same time, he had a close friendship with Henriette, whom he secretly loved. According to Schlegel, Jacobi cannot conceive of woman as both a friend and object of desire at the same time; that means that he considers that sexuality – and with it, the exteriority of the body -, is opposed to the interiority of the character. Woldemar would consider the two to be mutually exclusive, so that one must choose between them. Woldemar's exceptionality would be shown in the love triangle, since only he is allowed

[33] HEGEL. **Elements of the Philosophy of Right**, § 140, Addition, p. 184. HEGEL. **Grundlinien der Philosophie des Rechts**, § 140, Zusatz, p. 285: "Diese Form nun ist die *Ironie,* das Bewußtsein, daß es mit solchem Prinzip der Überzeugung nicht weit her sei und daß in diesem höchsten Kriterium nur Willkür herrsche."
[34] Vid. SCHLEGEL, F. Recension von Jakobi's Woldemar. Nach der Ausgabe von 1796. In: Schlegel, F.; Schlegel, A. W. **Charakteristiken und Kritiken**. Erster Band. Königsberg: bei Friedrich Niccolovius, 1801, p. 3-46.
[35] Vid. SCHLEGEL. Recension von Jakobi's Woldemar, p. 3.
[36] Vid. SCHLEGEL. Recension von Jakobi's Woldemar, p. 6.

such a relationship; this peculiarity is also criticized by Schlegel, since it is a mere display of the vanity of someone who is the centre of attention of the community to which he belongs: "The tendency to find their nature, their actions, and their relationships extraordinary, strange, peculiar, and incomprehensible, both for themselves and among each other, is a characteristic family resemblance among Jacobi's characters. However, no one is as completely possessed by this tendency as Woldemar".[37] The protagonist's attempts to express the infinitude of his interiority culminate in descriptions of external nature meant to mirror his inner experience; yet, as Schlegel observes, the depiction of a day or a scene becomes "more the history of the weather than of the heart", and what it reaches is only "an empty concept of the infinite", as unpresentable as the infinite itself.[38] According to the reviewer, the protagonist, who was defined as a "moral genius", is a narcissistic hero who loses himself in following the dictates of his own heart; and therefore, he must submit to the guidance of someone more rational than himself in order not to fall into madness.[39]

Schlegel observes that the novel written by Jacobi serves to achieve a goal other than the realization of artistic beauty.[40] It is not a philosophical artwork either, since its trivial remarks cannot count as such.[41] According to the reviewer, Jacobi has separated philosophy from reason and has established that philosophy is the personal life expressed in concepts and words.[42] Schlegel states that "so one must assume that truth and science are not the ultimate goal here but are deliberately sacrificed to a higher purpose".[43] Supposedly, the goal is the depiction of mankind as such,[44] but Schlegel affirms that the so-called "mankind" includes only the figure of Friedrich Jacobi. *Woldemar*'s protagonist is no more than the reflection of his

[37] SCHLEGEL. Recension von Jakobi's Woldemar, p. 19: "Die Tendenz, ihr Wesen, ihre Thaten und ihre Verhältnisse für sich und unter einander außerordentlich, seltsam, sonderbar und unbegreiflich zu finden, ist eine charakteristische Familienähnlichkeit der Jakobischen Menschen. Keiner ist aber von diesem Hange so ganz besessen, wie Woldemar". [Translation is mine]

[38] Vid. SCHLEGEL. Recension von Jakobi's Woldemar, p. 24: "Er ist genöthigt , die Einzelheiten der schönen Natur so aufzuzählen , daß die Darstellung eines Lages, eines Auftritts oft mehr die Geschichte desWetters , als des Herzens ist: überall tritt ihm nur ein leerer Begriff des Unendlichen entgegen , deſſen eingebildeter Genuß so undarstellbar ist, als es selbst." (Translation is mine)

[39] Vid. SCHLEGEL. Recension von Jakobi's Woldemar, p. 25.

[40] Idem.

[41] Vid. SCHLEGEL. Recension von Jakobi's Woldemar, p. 26.

[42] Vid. SCHLEGEL. Recension von Jakobi's Woldemar, p. 33.

[43] SCHLEGEL. Recension von Jakobi's Woldemar, p. 27: "so muβ man vorausseβen, daβ Wahrheit und Wissenschaft hier nicht leβter Zweck sei, sondern einer höhern Absicht mit Bedacht aufgeopfert werde." [Translation is mine]

[44] Idem.

author, of his desires, of his thoughts.[45] This suggests that, according to Schlegel, the attempt to express a universal is always condemned to failure, for a proposition is itself born conditioned.

Jacobi's great goal has always been the enjoyment of the invisible, of the divine, of the God-person of the Gospels.[46] It is not possible to consider the author of *Woldemar* a philosopher, because the first subjective condition of philosophy is the disinterested and pure interest in knowledge and truth, as Socrates demonstrates. The reviewer points out that the essential component of the philosophical genius is the *logical enthusiasm*. The expression "logical enthusiasm" (*logische Enthusiasmus*) is not casual. This was coined by Jacobi in *An Fichte* to refer to the philosophical need to find a ground for every proposition: "that is, *a purely self-intending and self-contemplating activity, simply for the sake of acting and contemplating, without any other subject or object; without inherence, point of departure, purpose, or point of arrival*".[47] According to the author of *An Fichte*, the search for a foundation for each proposition leads to nihilism, since there always remains an unprovable premise at the end of the chain of reasoning. Since it is not feasible to demonstrate the truth of this last proposition with evidence, it is necessary to assume that we only have faith in its veracity, or to accept that the chain of reasoning lacks logical basis. The second option is the result of "logical enthusiasm." However, Schlegel maintains that it is precisely this quality that distinguishes the morality of the philosopher: the pursuit of truth, regardless of the consequences. What Jacobi calls "nihilism" would be the expected consequence of the attempt to give a human, finite, expressible form to the unconditioned, infinite, ineffable content that underlies propositions as their truth. Socrates was able to verify this and make it public by acknowledging his ignorance. Jacobi, on the other hand, prefers to deny the fate of the philosopher and embrace faith in God as a last refuge. In Schlegel's own words: "Every thinker for whom science and truth have no unconditional value, who subordinates their laws to his own desires and selfishly misuses them for his own ends, is a sophist; no matter how sublime these desires and ends may be and how good they may

[45] Vid. SCHLEGEL. Recension von Jakobi's Woldemar, p. 28.
[46] Vid. SCHLEGEL. Recension von Jakobi's Woldemar, p. 30.
[47] JACOBI. **Jacobi to Fichte**, p. 511. JACOBI. **Jacobi an Fichte**, p. 23: "Ein nur sich selbst vorhabendes und betrachtendes Handeln, blos des Handelns und Betrachtens wegen, ohne anderes Subject oder Object; ohne in, aus, für oder zu."

seem".[48] Jacobi is therefore a sophist, for he manipulates concepts in order to defend his own faith from any philosophical criticism. His genius is not that of the moral genius he so often celebrates, since theological talent despotically dominates his philosophical and poetic insights.[49]

Schlegel's critique is directed not only at the divine foundation presupposed by Jacobi, but also at the division that such a foundation produces. Schlegel holds that the separation and singularization of human forces, which might remain in harmony, constitutes the sin of modern formation,[50] and he observes that "Woldemar's inner and outer self is irretrievably shattered. After such remorse, he may well rise to the obedience of a good servant, but never to the dignity of a free man".[51] That division manifests itself as unsociability: Jacobi's ideal of friendship seeks to recover the ancient communion in the face of a modernity that separates, yet it ends in contempt for the modern condition, in solitude, and in a love directed towards God alone, so that the soul oscillates without harmony between solitude and devotion. Schlegel, by contrast, conceives the relation to the other as a condition of individuality itself. In *Lucinde*, Julius becomes more sociable through his bond with Lucinde, and with her help he comes to form a wider circle of relations;[52] and the "I", Schlegel writes, can feel its infinite unity only in the response of a "you".[53]

[48] SCHLEGEL. Recension von Jakobi's Woldemar, p. 29-30: "Jeder Denker, für den Wissenschaft und Wahrheit keinen unbedingten Werth haben, der ihre Geseβe seinen Wünschen nachseβt, sie zu seinen Zwecken eigennüβig misbraucht, ist ein Sophist; mögen diese Wünsche und Zwecke so erhaben sein, und so gut scheinen, als sie wollen." [Translation is mine]

[49] Vid. SCHLEGEL. Recension von Jakobi's Woldemar, p. 38.

[50] Vid. SCHLEGEL. Recension von Jakobi's Woldemar, p. 6.

[51] SCHLEGEL. Recension von Jakobi's Woldemar, p. 11: "Woldemar's Innres und Außres ist unheilbar zerrüttet. Nach einer solchen Reue kann er sich wohl zum Gehorsam eines guten Knechts, aber nie zur Würde eines freien Mannes erheben." (Translation is mine).

[52] Vid. SCHLEGEL, F. **Lucinde and the fragments**. Translation by Peter Firchow. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1971, p. 102-103. Vid. SCHLEGEL, F. **Lucinde**. Leipzig: Verlag von Philipp Reclam, 1910, p. 73-74.

[53] SCHLEGEL. **Lucinde and the fragments**, p. 106: "Not hate, as the wise men say, but love, separates living creatures, and shapes the world; and only in love's light can you find this and observe it. Only in the answer of its "you" can every "I" wholly feel its boundless unity. Then the mind tries to unfold the inner bud of godlikeness, comes ever closer to succeeding, and is determined to shape the soul as the artist shapes the one work he loves most. In the mysteries of creation the spirit sees the operation and laws of destiny and life." SCHLEGEL. **Lucinde**, p. 78: "Nicht der Haß, wie die Weisen sagen, sondern die Liebe trennt die Wesen und bildet die Welt, und nur in ihrem Licht kann man diese finden und schauen. Nur in der Antwort seines Du kann jedes Ich seine unendliche Einheit ganz fühlen. Dann will der Verstand den innern Keim der Gottähnlichkeit entfalten , strebt immer näher nach dem Ziele und ist voll Ernst, die Seele zu bilden, wie ein Künstler das einzig geliebte Werk."

Schlegel also considers Jacobi's ethics, based on feelings, to be a way of avoiding reflective thought. Those who base their way of life on the dictates of their heart are easily discouraged when they experience resistance from the outside world: they fall into despair or disbelief.[54] Virtue founded on love, without recognition of any law, implies the absence of self-determination: whoever does not submit to a law of his own free will is condemned to live under the yoke of strangers or sink into his own melancholic state of mind.[55] Jacobi's morality (*Sittlichkeit*) can only be love or religious mercy, and "he also seems to know of no virtue which honors law and proves itself in deeds".[56] The love to which Jacobi refers, and which his characters desperately seek, is the love for that primordial "you" that cohabits in the interiority of the individual: God. Love for divinity, the absolute, the infinite, is at the expense of those around the lover; they are merely finite beings who do not deserve his attention.[57] The moral genius is, thus, an antisocial individual, whose virtue denies the ethical and legal determinations of the society he inhabits: "No, in them lives, breathes and glows a seductive spirit of consummate self-indulgence of the soul, of a boundless excess which, in spite of its noble origin, utterly annihilates all laws of justice and propriety".[58]

This is precisely the charge Hegel brings against the "goodness of the will" in Remark (d): a subjectivity that, heeding the dictates of the heart, shuns the everyday demands of social interaction and refuses to submit to the institutions proper to ethical life, ending in inaction or in the justification of any conduct. On this point Schlegel and Hegel converge: the critique Schlegel directs at Jacobi's ethics of feeling coincides with the one Hegel directs at the goodness of the will. This convergence allows us to read the movement from Remark (d) to Remark (f) as a genuine *Aufhebung*: since Schlegel already leaves behind the immediacy of feeling in which Jacobi remains, ironic consciousness stands one step beyond the goodness of the will rather than alongside it. It is this that allows Hegel to turn against romantic irony without thereby relapsing into his critique of Jacobi – the two are distinct moments of a single development, not one and the same reproach.

[54] Vid. SCHLEGEL. Recension von Jakobi's Woldemar, p. 36.
[55] Vid. SCHLEGEL. Recension von Jakobi's Woldemar, p. 40.
[56] SCHLEGEL. Recension von Jakobi's Woldemar, p. 41: "auch scheint er von keiner Tugend zu wissen, welche Geseße ehrte, und sich in Thaten bewiese." [Translation is mine]
[57] Vid. SCHLEGEL. Recension von Jakobi's Woldemar, p. 43-44.
[58] SCHLEGEL. Recension von Jakobi's Woldemar, p. 39: "Nein, in ihnen lebt, athmet und glüht ein verführerischer Geist vollendeter Seelenschwelgerei, einer grenzenlosen Unmäßigkeit, welche trotz ihres edlen Ursprungs alle Gefeße der Gerechttigkeit und der Schicklichkeit durchaus vernichtet." [Translation is mine]

Similarities and Differences between Hegel's criticism of Jacobi's philosophical perspective and Schlegel's criticism of the novel Woldemar

The first thing that draws attention to Friedrich Schlegel's review is how similar its perspective appears to Hegel's. The reviewer argues that Jacobi's thought reveals a vision of subjectivity abstracted from relationships with other members of the community. The supposed immediate intuition of God within conscience is the author of Woldemar's attempt to establish the objectivity of his virtue ethics. But the rejection of the question of the truth of the logical principles upon which his thought is founded, and the recognition of subjective certainty as its basis, are the manifestation of a theological doctrine founded on the sovereignty of subjectivity above any determination. In Schlegel's reading, the subjectivity outlined by Jacobi rejects any conditioning established by ethical norms or positive laws and contrasts it with a virtue ethics founded on the intimate and ineffable feeling of love for God.

But Friedrich Schlegel's approach differs from Hegel's in that the former embraces the consequences of "logical enthusiasm" – which Jacobi calls "nihilism" –, since the divine and absolute cannot be represented through the language of human finitude. What Jacobi feared is true for Schlegel: we create a system of propositions and representations that refer to each other. The so-called system tends to a coherent wholeness, but never actually reaches it. Unlike Hegel, who understands that the truth is a wholeness, which goes through and beyond the consciousness that thinks it, Friedrich Schlegel thinks that the system is never actually reachable.[59] Since the principle on which the system rests is always the object of a new reflection. That is what the founder of *Athenaeum* finds in Romantic poetry – which is, to him, poetry itself ("for in a certain sense all poetry is or should be romantic") –, as he states that it "can raise that reflection again and again to a higher power, can multiply it in an endless succession of mirrors".[60] Schlegel points out that this kind of poetry, which could be called transcendental poetry, represents the producer along with the product.[61]

[59] Vid. BEHLER, E. **German Romantic Literary Theory**. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993, p. 154.
[60] SCHLEGEL. **Lucinde and the fragments**, fragment 116, p. 175-176. SCHLEGEL, F. **Athenaeum. Eine Zeitschrift von August Wilhelm Schlegel und Friedrich Schlegel**, v. 1, n. 2, 1798, p. 28-30: "diese Reflexion immer wieder potenzieren und wie in einer endlosen Reihe von Spiegeln vervielfachen." Cf. KFSA 2:182-183.
[61] Vid. SCHLEGEL. **Lucinde and the fragments**, fragment 238, p. 195. SCHLEGEL. **Athenaeum**, p. 65-66. Cf. KFSA 2:204.

Neither legality nor ethical normativity has an ultimate justification, even if they are objective: their validity is historical. As Schlegel says referring to systems in general, "It's equally fatal for the mind to have a system and to have none. It will simply have to decide to combine the two".[62] As noted above, Friedrich Schlegel holds that a system cannot be completed. For that would imply that the system could represent and determine itself – something impossible. Consequently, the system remains incomplete and indefinitely perfectible. Thus far, we encounter a line of reasoning that might be shared by certain Enlightenment intellectuals: indefinite progress as a normative criterion and narrative within a philosophy of history.[63] Yet the founder of the *Athenaeum* claims something even more radical: the system remains incomplete because we do not know its founding principle either; that is, we cannot explain the initial proposition from which this system of propositions and representations derives. This first proposition is arbitrarily conditioned, and it, in turn, conditions the propositions deduced from it. For this reason, the system represents not merely an incompleteness tending toward completion, but also the expression of something conditioned unable to attain the unconditioned nature of the Absolute. In short, it lacks an absolute, infinite, and universal foundation.[64] If neither legality nor ethical normativity has an ultimate justification, Schlegel's demand for respect for the positive laws of a society cannot rest on their rational foundation, but only on the individual's need to submit to external rules: "A hero as misguided as Woldemar does well to bow to the yoke of some form of obedience rather than to set himself up – by virtue of his moral genius – as a universal legislator for the art of the good. From this follows the moral: "He who relies on an obstinate, pampered heart is a fool."[65] Schlegel criticizes Jacobi's ethical perspective because he considers "moral genius" to be a subjectivity to which the immediate intellectual intuition of the divine voice is attributed. Thus, Schlegel's critique is directed at the supposed

[62] SCHLEGEL. **Lucinde and the fragments**. Fragment 53, p. 167. SCHLEGEL. **Athenaeum,** p. 15: "Es ist gleich tödlich für den Geist, ein System zu haben, und keins zu haben. Er wird sich also wohl entschließen müssen, beides zu verbinden". Cf. KFSA 2:173.

[63] Vid. BEHLER. **German Romantic Literary Theory**, p. 70-71.

[64] SCHLEGEL. **Lucinde and the fragments**. Fragment 84, p. 171: "Viewed subjectively, philosophy, like epic poetry, always begins in medias res". SCHLEGEL. **Athenaeum**, p. 22: "Subjektiv betrachtet, fängt die Philosophie doch immer in der Mitte an, wie das epische Gedicht."

[65] SCHLEGEL. Recension von Jakobi's Woldemar, p. 25: "Ein so verfehlter Held, wie W. , thut sehr wohl, sich lieber unter das Joch irgend eines Gehorsams zu beugen, als sich kraft seines sittlichen Genies zum allgemeinen Gesetzgeber für die Kunst des Guten zu constituiren. Daraus ergiebt sich denn die Nußanwendung (sic) : 'Wer sich auf ein eigensinniges, verzärteltes Herz verläßt , ist ein Thor.'" (Translation is mine)

divine foundation presupposed by Jacobi's ethical approach. Since, as shown above, no proposition can reach an unconditioned first principle, Schlegel concludes that no ethical or juridical determination can claim an ultimate foundation; the ironic consciousness must therefore hold itself at a distance from every determination it affirms.

Hegel, however, would object that the perspective of Schlegel's ironic consciousness develops only the subjective moment – the capacity to withdraw from any given determination –while abandoning the objective one: the realization of the will in a determinate ethical content. A subjectivity that rises above every determination without realizing itself in any of them does not attain a genuine infinity, but only a spurious one (*schlechte Unendlichkeit*): the indefinite repetition of a withdrawal that never arrives at a content of its own. And since no determination binds it, it becomes itself the instance that decides what counts as good and evil, placing itself above both and presenting itself as the supreme criterion of moral judgement.[66] Thus, Hegel declares that:

> It is not the thing *[Sache]* which is excellent, it is I who am excellent and master of both law and thing; I *merely play* with them as with my own caprice, and in this ironic consciousness in which I let the highest of things perish, I *merely enjoy myself*' – In this shape, subjectivity is not only *empty* of all ethical *content [die Eitelkeit alles sittlichen Inhalts]* in the way of rights, duties, and laws, and is accordingly evil (evil, in fact, of an inherently wholly universal kind); in addition, its form is that of *subjective* emptiness *[Eitelkeit]*, in that it knows itself as this emptiness of all content and, in this knowledge, knows *itself as* the absolute.[67]

Thus, the subjectivity outlined by Jacobi – called "goodness of the will" or "conscience" by Hegel – perceives itself above all ethical content. But this conception of itself is based on the supposed intuition of the absolute, the divine, which lives within its interiority. According to Hegel, ironic consciousness – represented by the thought of Friedrich Schlegel – is a finite subjectivity, which has no immediate connection with the divine. The denial of any tie to the

[66] Vid. BOSSERT, T. **Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi und die Frühromantik. Dissertation zur Erlangung der Doktorwürde bei der Philosophischen Fakultät der Hessischen Ludwigs-Universität zu Giessen.** Giessen, 1926, p. 24. Schlegel extends the precept of subjectivity to all the functions of life, so that morality reaches its subjective culmination in Romanticism. Vid. WERLE, M. A. O domingo da vida e os dias da semana: Ironia e negatividade em Hegel e no romantismo. **Viso: Cadernos de estética aplicada**, v. 9, n. 17, 2015, p. 148-165.

[67] HEGEL. **Elements of the Philosophy of Right**, § 140, Remark (f), p. 182. HEGEL. **Grundlinien der Philosophie des Rechts**, § 140, Anmerkung (f), p. 279: "Nicht die Sache ist das Vortreffliche, sondern Ich bin der Vortreffliche und bin der Meister über das Gesetz und die Sache, der damit, als mit seinem Belieben, *nur spielt* und in diesem ironischen Bewußtsein, in welchem Ich das Höchste untergehen lasse, *nur mich genieße.* – Diese Gestalt ist nicht nur die *Eitelkeit* alles sittlichen *Inhalts* der Rechte, Pflichten, Gesetze, – das Böse, und zwar das in sich ganz allgemeine Böse, sondern sie tut auch die Form, die *subjektive* Eitelkeit, hinzu, sich selbst als diese Eitelkeit alles Inhalts zu wissen und in diesem Wissen *sich* als das Absolute zu wissen."

absolute implies positing itself as the absolute: the subjectivity of the ironic consciousness knows itself as the absolute, reducing the objectivity of any determination to a being posited by itself.

Conclusion

Hegel's reflection on the goodness of the will and its further development in ironic consciousness reveals a profound critique of ethical positions that base morality on individual subjectivity, isolating it from the objective determinations of social life. Hegel disapproves of the "goodness of the will" that, under the guise of noble intentions, justifies immoral actions, subverting the objective ethical order. This criticism extends to Schlegel's ironic consciousness, which, albeit from a different perspective, also exalts subjectivity above ethical norms and laws.

The treatment of Jacobi's work, particularly his novel *Woldemar*, serves as a focus of analysis for both Hegel and Schlegel, highlighting the similarities between the "goodness of the will" and the conception of "moral genius". Both thinkers agree that Jacobi promotes a subjectivity that isolates itself from otherness, but they differ in their conclusions about the implications of this position. Schlegel, unlike Hegel, does not accept the possibility of knowledge of the rational principles on which each proposition is based. For Schlegel, both ethical norms and positive laws, though objective, lack an ultimate foundation, since their validity is historical. In contrast, Hegel, critical of the subjective conception of the goodness of the will, reaffirms the objectivity of ethical life (*Sittlichkeit*), in which subjectivity is not suppressed but realized.

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RECEBIDO EM 13/04/2026
ACEITO EM 05/10/2026