



Briefwechsel – Nachlaß – Dokumente. Briefwechsel. Reihe I: Text. Band 10: Briefwechsel Juni 1792 bis September 1794

Tom Giesbers

To cite this article: Tom Giesbers (2017) Briefwechsel – Nachlaß – Dokumente. Briefwechsel. Reihe I: Text. Band 10: Briefwechsel Juni 1792 bis September 1794, British Journal for the History of Philosophy, 25:2, 417-422, DOI: [10.1080/09608788.2016.1176901](https://doi.org/10.1080/09608788.2016.1176901)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/09608788.2016.1176901>



© 2016 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group



Published online: 28 Apr 2016.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)




Article views: 880



View Crossmark data [↗](#)

criticisms of the ontological argument, and recent readings of Kant's account of the role of intuition in geometry) than one can engage with in a brief review. I suspect detailed criticism will focus less on Anderson's take on Kantian analyticity *per se* (which I found compelling) and more on the significance he perceives for it within Kant's project in the first *Critique*. Anderson claims a 'master argument' (the one sketched above regarding the limitations of concepts' ability to determine anything on their own regarding objects) is central for the overall strategy of the *Critique*, especially in the Dialectic. Anderson says little on the relevance of this argument to the project of transcendental idealism ('transcendental idealism' does not even appear in the index of the book). More specifically, the claim, if true, would seem to entail that the extended detailing of the arguments in the Antinomies, Paralogisms, etc. are not strictly speaking necessary to Kant's aims in the Dialectic, since the master argument is sufficient to debunk rationalist aspirations. If this is the case, one might wonder (as Anderson acknowledges) why the master argument is not more visible in the text, nor explicitly highlighted as functioning as a premise in various arguments. Kant seems to engage with opponents on their own ground, showing their arguments to be internally inconsistent, but it is unclear why he does this if the master argument renders it unnecessary. Anderson claims that the 'core ideas of the master argument decisively imprint their shape on the most general reasoning Kant does use to frame his approach' (277). One might sanguinely accept this claim, however, while still raising doubts about what role the master argument might be playing in individual arguments. Given the impressiveness of the scholarship deployed, Anderson's work will undoubtedly shape the discussion of such issues for many years to come.

John J. Callanan
King's College London
 john.callanan@kcl.ac.uk

© 2016 John J. Callanan
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/09608788.2016.1176900>



 OPEN ACCESS

Briefwechsel – Nachlaß – Dokumente. Briefwechsel. Reihe I: Text. Band 10: Briefwechsel Juni 1792 bis September 1794, by Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi, Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt, Frommann-Holzboog Verlag, 2015, 418 pp., €268.00 (hardcover), ISBN: 978-3-7728-2664-1

Most scholars of the modern history of philosophy are familiar with Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi (1743–1819) as one of Immanuel Kant's earliest critics. He is, however, a far more complex contributor to the philosophical developments of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, as evidenced by this volume of his letters

from the period of June 1792 through September 1794. Jacobi was in fact the de-facto founder of a philosophical realism, which both rivaled and informed German idealism and provided the first fully philosophical formulation of the problem of nihilism (based on Jacob Hermann Obereit's and Daniel Jenisch's work).

Those interested in the day to day experiences of life in the wake of the French revolution will find much to their liking in this volume, as Jacobi sends and receives war bulletins from and to his friends and ultimately has to flee from Pempfort in 1794. On 25 June 1793, Jacobi received an interesting dinner guest, whose identity might tickle historians: George Richard St. John, Lord Bolingbroke, who had fled to the continent to facilitate a romantic relationship with his half-sister. Jacobi reports (letter 3183) that the noble family Hompesch was also present at the dinner. A year later, Lord Bolingbroke would leave his half-sister and children for Isabella Hompesch, who was likely also present at the dinner party. All Jacobi deigns to remark regarding his encounter with this scandalous love-triangle is: 'I had to get dressed and was disturbed.'

During this time Jacobi was working on the publication of the second edition of his novel *Allwill* (1792) and the composition and publication of the much-expanded second edition of his second novel *Woldemar* (1794). Both new editions make major contributions to the ethical dimensions of his philosophical position. Wilhelm von Humboldt sent Jacobi an in-depth and favourable review of *Allwill* (letter 3319, Jacobi's response in 3321), which will serve those who are interested in that text well. Jacobi's strained relationship with Herder is somewhat mended during this time, after Herder's commitment to Spinozistic monism in *Gott: Einige Gespräche* (1787), paving the way for Herder's eventual contributions to realism in *Metakritik* (1799). Another author who would be a realist at the turn of the century, and whose strained relationship with Jacobi is also mended during this time is Karl Leonhard Reinhold. In the 1790 edition of his *Briefe über die Kantische Philosophie* Reinhold had softened his judgment of Jacobi, now only seemingly concerned with how people might take up Jacobi's attempt to escape the atheism of Spinozism (as emblematic for systematic philosophical reflection) through a 'salto mortale' towards belief. Jacobi now wrote to him, praising the book for giving him the insight required to develop his own position (letter 3148). This letter is important in several respects: i) it shows a degree of influence of Reinhold on Jacobi's defense of Immanuel Kant, ii) it provides an insight into the direction which Jacobi's work took in the 1790s, ultimately leading him to develop his own formulation of nihilism in relation to Kant, Fichte and Schelling and iii) it shows the foundations of the mutual respect and theoretical inclinations which would allow Reinhold to shift towards the realist camp towards the end of the decade.

Jacobi specifically praises the twelfth letter of *Briefe über die Kantische Philosophie*, which outlines a reading of religion throughout history, as externalized and progressive formulations of reason and the moral law. His personal views on the matter come into focus through arguably the most important issue addressed in this collection of Jacobi's letters: his surprising defense of Kant's moral philosophy against the attacks of his own friend Johann Georg Schlosser. Schlosser believed that Kant's supposed atheism would lead to violence on a national scale, akin to

the French revolution. The fact that Jacobi comes to Kant's defense is all the more remarkable because, ostensibly, Schlosser should be a theoretical ally of Jacobi's; Schlosser adhered to a Platonism which argued for an inner feeling or intuition, for any human being noble enough to adhere to it. Schlosser spent the 1790s relentlessly attacking Kant. And yet, Jacobi always defended the Königsberg professor (for an account of the personal debate between Schlosser and Kant see Franks, 2006, 294–7). This exchange shows that Jacobi was not an outright opponent of Kant, as he is often characterized in accounts of the period. Despite Kant's fairly antagonistic stance towards religion and the scholastic inclinations of his philosophy, Jacobi believed that many aspects of Kant's philosophy were both major innovations and specifically a progressive manifestation of the age (*Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi Werke* 5,1 2007, 197–200, 211). For instance, he praises Kant's separation of self-interest and the ethical stance (*Werke* 5,1, 216–19).

Jacobi's main objections can be found in letter 3135. For what reasons did Jacobi find himself siding with Kant? The answer to this question plunges us straight into Jacobi's theory of subjectivity, which forms the cornerstone of his entire philosophy. Jacobi quickly expanded the letter into *Zufällige Ergießungen eines einsamen Denkers in Briefen an vertraute Freunde*, a text composed of three fictitious letters, which he wrote in 1793, based on letter 3135. Jacobi thought that the philosophical content of the text was so important that he used it, together with *Allwill*, as the two central texts that open the first volume of his *Werke* (*Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi's Werke, erster Band*, 1812, 254–305). Jacobi chose to compose the publication of his works to provide the best insight into his philosophy, over the chronological publication order of his texts.

From a present-day perspective, the most interesting aspect of Jacobi's response to Schlosser is that he frames it as an attempt to provide a philosophical exposition of *tolerance*: a tolerance woefully absent in Schlosser's attack on Kant. In addition to Jacobi's defense of Kant's significance, we can then also discern a defense of tolerance, which forces him to outline a theory of opinions, which is in turn couched in a theory of subjectivity. Our subjectivity, in Jacobi's view, is organized based on the specific experiential content with which we come into contact. Based on this experience, we compose concepts with the aim to make use of this sensibility. From these concepts we develop the content of our drives, in order to fulfill our needs and ultimately to survive (*Werke* 5,1, 205). It is important to note that any conceptualization of experience is organized in terms of practical use. These concepts are then tied to our very condition of existence and together form our *conviction*, which is more *condicio sine qua non*, than the epistemological construct for which most philosophers of the time held it to be. A key point that we need to recognize, according to Jacobi, is the fact that these concepts, and the resultant conviction, are *historically* constituted. Therefore, any attempt to understand them must not occur through a discursive account of the held conceptual content, but through a reconstruction of the specific personal history involved. In essence, this is an alternative theory of personal identity, one that does not particularly privilege physical features. Yet, we should not be too quick to judge that its sole focus is then psychological continuity, since it is possible, nay likely, that one might not be able to fully recount the

historical formation of one's conviction through an account of psychological continuity. In short, Jacobi is concerned with a historical account, based on a specific theory of subjectivity.

When one expresses oneself with conviction, one produces an *opinion*. Although the concepts that people wield are the result of their personal historical exposure to experience, these concepts might seem so epistemologically or rhetorically vacuous that we might as well call them 'specters' (*Werke* 5,1, 205). In this way Jacobi accounts for our encountering opinions that appear to be so vacuous that they cannot possibly be of use to their wielder; they have become mere signifiers. It seems that Jacobi envisages either a mechanism of erosion of conceptual content or a cultural contagion of opinions in order to account for this, the details of which remain undeveloped. However, the fact that some opinions appear to be conceptually vacuous still seems to be a valid observation today. Presaging later theories of ideology, Jacobi remarks that a *governmentality* [*Regierungskunst*] of signification would be the greatest and most important skill to develop, since signs retain a dangerous connection to the way we conceptualize experience (*Werke* 5,1, 205). This comment suggests vistas of manipulating public opinion in both negative and positive ways, based on a 'knack for thinking without concepts' that were absent in the writings of his contemporaries. Additionally, when Jacobi refers to an adherence to 'external customs' as an example of this knack, he might well be referring to the religious practices of his contemporaries, echoing Reinhold's reading of religion throughout history.

Jacobi argues that we have to respect and understand the historical development of the conviction involved, since these opinions are uniquely tied to the way an individual lives (*Werke* 5,1, 214). In Jacobi's estimation, misrecognition of opinions and the subsequent marginalization of these opinions lead to exactly the sort of violence that Schlosser sought to avoid, but is now promoting through his vilification of the Kantians. Since opinions are so deeply rooted in the mode of existential persistence of a person, misrecognizing them, however vacuous they might be, leads to violent disagreement or even violence itself. Hence, we should not worry too much about specific opinions, like Kant's, especially since, seen from a genetic perspective, there is a certain truth to every opinion, because every opinion derives from a certain intuition of reality. Opinions should then be considered to be a truthful manifestation of the age. In the face of this, Jacobi advocates tolerance.

Jacobi's plea for tolerance is not just concerned with the small-scale matter of Kantian philosophy, but also with the enraged masses of France. However, we should not interpret this as an apologia, given the personal discomfort Jacobi experienced due to the French revolutionaries, which becomes abundantly clear in the current volume. It seems that Jacobi wanted to avoid the easy trap of vilifying a mass of people, disregarding all individual distinctions and the conditions that lead to their violence. Beyond the initial step of recognizing that everyone involved has a conviction, which is experienced as indubitable truth, Jacobi's account of tolerance also has two progressive components. First of all, it allows us to move beyond indignation and attempt to understand (and perhaps ultimately prevent) the misrecognition of opinions and the resultant

violence. If misrecognition of opinions occurs systemically and on a mass scale, in a society where many opinions are homogenized (as is likely the case in any lower class), the resultant violence will occur on a mass scale (such as the French revolution). Jacobi refers to this problem somewhat cryptically as the truth of the age, likely indebted to Reinhold's reading of history (*Werke* 5,1, 211). Because Jacobi has preferred to develop his theory in relation to the Schlosser-Kant altercation, these implications are not drawn out, but they are plain as day due to the way Jacobi connects the two in this volume (letter 3248). Secondly, Jacobi allows for a conceptual strengthening of even the most insubstantial opinions, through the act of trying to understand an opinion and filling in any conceptual gaps until one can defend the position better than the one who initially held it (*Werke* 5,1 214). It seems that Jacobi believes that, because the initial misrecognition has been avoided, the opinionated will now accept the conceptual content as always having been a part of his own position, thereby sidestepping the need for violence, while essentially changing the opinion for the better.

Jacobi's treatment of opinions and tolerance contrasts sharply with Kant's, who often speaks of 'schwärmerei' and 'enthusiasmus' in a mere polemical way. At his most extreme, Kant will even deny the humanity of some (like drunkards and children). As can be gleaned from this volume, during the 1790s Jacobi seems to have been on a lonely road, exploring the questions of how opinions form, even if they lack conceptual content and why outbursts of violence result from this. Fellow realist Friedrich Bouterwek, who restricts himself to convictions with regards to philosophical systems, would later ask similar questions. Kant could offer no explanations for these phenomena besides stupidity, the influence of organized religion or an unenlightened ruler, all of which fail to explain the specificity and heterogeneity of opinions. Whereas Kant restricts himself to polemics, Jacobi offers a progressive course of action. Volumes such as the present one perform the important task of providing the real-life background that informed texts which by themselves seem enigmatic, like *Zufällige Ergießungen*, and are therefore an indispensable research tool for scholars of the period.

At the time Jacobi seems to have intended these reflections to have become part of a larger work, since he wrote to Goethe (letter 3205) that he intended to publish a work entitled *Charactere, Schicksale und Meinungen* by the end of 1793, which was in line with his previous works. For whatever reason the book did not materialize, which is likely what held off the publication of *Zufällige Ergießungen*. The fact that Jacobi nonetheless added the text to the first volume of his *Werke*, as well as the comments on opinions in the second edition of *Woldemar* (*Werke* 7,1, 308) attest to the central significance of this theory of subjectivity and opinions to Jacobi's philosophy.

Other notable letters that might interest scholars concern Jacobi's reception of Fichte's *Begriff-Schrift* (letter 3305), his response to Herder's *Briefe zur Beförderung der Humanität* (letter 3177) and Jacobi's short popular characterization of his philosophical position (letter 3284). The volume of commentaries that will serve as a companion to this publication has yet to appear, as has the separate volume containing the index. While publishing the commentary and index with this volume

would have been optimal, it is commendable that the editors have given priority to publishing the documents themselves.

Tom Giesbers
Utrecht University
 t.giesbers@uu.nl

© 2016 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group
 This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution
 License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>), which permits unrestricted use, distri-
 bution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/09608788.2016.1176901>



The naked self: Kierkegaard and personal identity, by Patrick Stokes,
 Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2015, 256 pp., \$70.00 (hb), ISBN: 978-0-
 19873273-0

Patrick Stokes has established himself as one of the important scholars in contemporary Kierkegaard scholarship; *The Naked Self* is his fourth book on Kierkegaard (as either author or editor) in the past five years. Stokes has contributed important work to the field of Kierkegaard scholarship in his discussion of Kierkegaard's philosophy of death, the role of the imagination in Kierkegaard's account of moral perception, as well as the importance of narrative in the Kierkegaardian account of selfhood. He now turns his attention to the well-worn problems of personal identity, which, Stokes quotes William James as describing, is 'the most puzzling puzzle' (1) we find in philosophy. As Stokes puts this puzzle in his introduction: 'what, if anything, is it to be a self, and what makes us the same self across time?' (1) Stokes's aim, in *The Naked Self*, is to apply what we learn from the Kierkegaardian account of selfhood to the puzzle of personal identity, with a hope of 'gesturing towards a way out' (22) of these puzzling problems.

Stokes begins by outlining John Locke's account of self-identity, which, he claims, has some important similarities with the account of selfhood we find in Kierkegaard's writings. What we find in both Locke and Kierkegaard, Stokes claims, is a shared identification of the self as a kind of consciousness which is somehow connected over time. For both Locke and Kierkegaard, Stokes claims, the account of the self is not primarily a metaphysical one, but rather, an account which can meet a soteriological concern with our eternal happiness; both Locke and Kierkegaard, Stokes tells us, defend a '*phenomenology* of personal identity' (45; emphasis in the original) which is 'concerned with ultimate happiness ... and misery' (45).

For the account of self-identity which Stokes draws from Kierkegaard's works, it is important first to understand what Kierkegaard means when he talks about contemporaneity and the requirement that an individual must be contemporary with Christ. According to Stokes, it would be misguided, as some commentators have