

SECTION I

F. H. JACOBI AND THE PHILOSOPHY OF SENTIMENT*

*Duplex est cognitio . . . una quidem speculative . . .
alia autem affectiva seu experimentalis.*

Thomas Aquinas¹

*Videte ne quis vos decipiat per philosophiam.*²

Col 2:8

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INTRODUCTION

Philosophers are, to a great extent, responsible for philosophy's notoriety and the prejudices that currently weigh upon it. This is the reason why it is urgent not only to consolidate—and to a great extent, elaborate—a *philosophia perennis*, but also to succeed in its rehabilitation.

This investigation considers itself to lie within a line of the *justification of philosophy*; it attempts to contribute to a *sophodicy* whose need is intensely felt in our times. We must justify the role of philosophy in life, we must reassess wisdom, rescuing it from the dominion of the particular sciences. The philosopher may not be the *wise man*, but the scientist certainly is not.

* Original spanish text first published in the journal *Sapientia*, La Plata (Buenos Aires), 1948. Translation from Spanish by Carlotta Ros.

¹ “There is a double type of knowledge: speculative, and sentimental or experimental” (*Sum. theol.*, II-II, q.97, a.2, ad 2).

² Literally: “Do not let anyone deceive you with philosophy.”

At times, philosophy is burdened with the imposition of a mission that does not belong to it, along with an equally inadequate methodology. Hence so many of its failures. And consequently, also, the fact that Jacobi's philosophy becomes exemplary. Perhaps the error lies in the personal situation of the philosophers, who bring their personal preoccupations—existential, or of another nature—into their philosophies. In order to properly mature, fruits require water from the fields but also the sun from the sky. Irrigation from intelligence is not enough; God must provide the sun of faith in order for the fruit to ripen—thus the anxiety of those who only worry about the water that flows through the earth without counting on the sun that comes from above. In the Western (Christian) condition, philosophy is not enough for an authentic and true conception of the world.

We have chosen Jacobi especially because of his *latent* relevance. This vocational philosopher—who was never a professor of philosophy—who criticized Kant before anyone else, and who exercised a profound influence on his own time, was temporarily buried by the nascent Idealism. When Idealism later subsided at the end of the nineteenth century, Jacobi returned and had a powerful influence on the European philosophical mentality. We can affirm that his spirit constitutes one of the main foundations of modern systems of thought, of the philosophy of life and of existentialism. He inspired many thinkers indirectly through Dilthey, though in general Jacobi is not widely mentioned. This is due to the fact that his ideas constitute the framework, the point from which one departs, the natural climate in which problems are proposed, which is practically taken for granted as something obvious and seems almost anonymous, like part of our universal patrimony. By studying Jacobi, many modern philosophical problems appear more clearly. Plato, Augustine, and Duns Scotus are not the only historical antecedents of certain directions of modern philosophical thought. There are more concrete and immediate predecessors, and Jacobi is one of them. We mention some examples throughout this study.

The distinction between inference and assent, for example, which John Henry Newman defends as two natural states of certainty, and which had always been admitted in the theological supernatural plane (Christian faith attributes a superior type of certainty to the same rational evidence), has a distinct Jacobian flavor. In Newman, inference and assent do not take disparate paths, as in Jacobi, but rather these two types of certainty complement each other. For Newman, reason is the support that clarifies what already exists in us potentially by *reasonable* assent. In Jacobi, rational influence will be in outright contradiction with vital assent. Here lies all the tension of his system. Newman's *real assent* would, for Jacobi, be on the side of sentiment and opposite reason.

It is curious to note that French existentialism makes use of the same method of diffusion of its thought as Jacobi: the novel, even in its predominantly autobiographical and epistolary forms.³

We do not wish to elaborate a historical study in this work, emphasizing Jacobi's influence in our times,⁴ but solely to assist in the birth of an irrationalist philosophy.

This is the reason why this work is also not an account of Jacobi's doctrines—their connections with modern systems of thought would then come to light—as, even if they have been somewhat forgotten, they are not, to say the least, unknown.⁵

³ Cf., for example, the recent novels of the main French existential philosophers: *La Nausée*, *Les sandales d'Empédocle*, *Le Mythe de Sisyphe*, *L'Étranger*, *Être et Avoir*, *Les Chemins de la Liberté*, etc.

⁴ This influence is sometimes recognized so explicitly that it seems impossible not to place other thinkers next to it. See E. Castelli, "Esistenzialismo cristiano?," in *Archivio di Filosofia* (Roma, 1946), 142, where only Pascal and Jacobi are mentioned as precursors of this movement.

⁵ Cf., for example, the histories of philosophy by Willm and Überweg, and the meticulous work of Lévy-Bruhl, *La philosophie de Jacobi* (Paris: Alcan, 1894).

We are also not carrying out a critique of the Jacobian system, according to Thomist, Hegelian, or Diltheyian categories;⁶ instead, this work is exclusively about trying to understand Jacobi's fundamental philosophical attitude and, once its sufficiency has been demonstrated, to integrate it into a plenary vision of reality within the realist and theist line of a *perennial philosophy*.⁷

⁶ For the point of view of the latter, see the work of O. F. Bollnow, *Die Lebens-philosophie F. H. Jacobis* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1893).

⁷ References to Jacobi refer to his complete works, *Friedrich Heinrich Jacobis Werke*, 6 vols. (Leipzig, 1812–1825) (hereafter *SW* followed by the number of the volume and the page).

1

THE PHILOSOPHY OF SENTIMENT

*In den moralischen Gefühlen
ist eine Ahnung von Ewigkeit.*¹

Jacobi, *SW* VI.108

Origins

*Nulla est homini causa philosophandi nisi ut beatus sit.*²
Augustine, De Civitate Dei XIX.1.3

The human spirit is a trinity composed of knowing, wanting, and feeling; of intelligence, will, and sentiment, in intimate concatenation and unity; even if this may not be a homogeneous division, as sentiment is not on an equal plane as the other two powers.

On the other hand, Man aspires to God with *his entire* nature. In this aspiration lies his desire to reach the Absolute, to penetrate as best he can into the whole of reality.

But in his desire for perfection, Man realizes that he is not able to solve problems by means of pure knowledge, but rather that it is his entire being that tends irresistibly toward God. In the first place, he experiences the mutual influence between intelligence and will, which reveals to him that his reason is not absolutely autonomous. But he also discovers that even with the help of will, intelligence cannot solve all the problems that it encounters.

Man would sometimes like to rely on his reason and yet cannot. Many arguments truly *prove*, yet they do not *convince*. To demonstrate is not to convince. Furthermore, when Man experiences that to be convinced is not also to be *converted*, that faith is not mere conviction, he suspects the existence of another sphere. And leaving personal experiences aside, the history of thought itself clearly shows the existence of some a-logical kernel in the intellectual life of humanity. When observing the movements, the variations, the abrupt changes in human interest—history, as well as biology, presents *mutations*—one feels that this motion, this dispersal, cannot be due to a logical process of thought, to an organic development of truths discovered by the intellect, but rather that some nonrational element has become intertwined in the life of people, and that it has crystallized in history.

What, then, is this force that leads reason from one field to another, and offers it the possibility of conquest? What is the element that is prior to reason and uses it as a common instrument? Isn't feeling, more than reason, what links people to life?

It is obvious that Man's desire is not fulfilled merely with what reason provides. Yet it is

¹ "In moral sentiments there is a hint of eternity."

² "There is no other reason for Man to do philosophy but to be happy."

this very reason that discovers the existence of enigmas, even if it cannot penetrate into them. Moreover, when human intelligence faces an enigma it does not know how to decipher, it claims the existence of something suprarational.

There are two types of enigmas, from a natural point of view. Some are raised by reason itself. These are the speculative problems that the human mind cannot solve. The essences of spiritual things, for example, are only known to us imperfectly. But there is a second type of antinomy that life itself poses to reason. Perhaps their existence is a consequence of the first kind of enigmas, but these can appear—and in fact they do appear—without necessarily being explicitly posed by the first kind. We are referring to the vital aporias that trouble Man and demand a pressing decision from him. Furthermore, all of this is inscribed within the superior theological area of the supernatural *mystery* itself. Besides the extrarational, there is the suprarational given by divine revelation.³

Man has no choice but to appeal to something superior to reason. Thus, when he does not have a supernatural faith, he tries to capture the Absolute—ultimately, Divinity—and the hidden connections of things, with his sentiment. This becomes the substitute of faith. Either faith is admitted above reason, or a new sense (sentiment) is necessary for apprehending the reality that lies beyond the reach of the mind.

Thus, we understand that irrationalism has emerged from reason's frustrated attempt to tackle the monopoly of knowledge. For rationalism, there can be nothing unintelligible; therefore, the philosophy of sentiment emerges quite powerfully once we have lost the margin of trust—also irrational—placed in reason by the culture of the past centuries, which believed that, in time, reason would be able to decipher the mystery of the world.

We can thus understand why sentimental systems are always born when there is no living faith. Philosophy must then be a substitute for religion. And in fact, isn't the belief that philosophy must govern human actions toward the achievement of their end and solve fundamental questions by, in one word, instilling meaning to life, at the heart of any philosophy of sentiment?⁴ And, as it does not find an immediate and indisputable rational solution to these problems, it turns to something that does not require either faith (which it does not have) or humanity's progress toward reaching a place where these problems are solved; it turns to something that is *given* immediately to all mortals: feeling/sentiment. A religious preoccupation for existence without religion leads to irrationalism. There is an appeal to sentiment with the hope of sanctioning Man's situation: one deprived of faith and unable to decipher the mystery that surrounds him by solely relying on his intelligence.

If Jacobi still believes in a personal God, it is because that is how he solves the internal problems of his spirit. He searches for God within himself, but without previously—or subsequently—having found Him outside himself: "Man finds God because he cannot find himself unless it is, precisely, with God."⁵ The modernity of this posture is extraordinary!⁶

In this position, essentially swelled with pride, Man finds it quite difficult to come to recognize two great limitations of the human mind, and he attempts to overcome them by appealing to sentiment each time.

³ *Mystery* is here opposed to *enigma*, and the former is reserved for that which is strictly supernatural.

⁴ See, for example, what Karl Jaspers says about philosophy in his *Psychologie der Weltanschauungen* (Berlin, 1925), 2. Even the language is reminiscent of Jacobi.

⁵ *SW* III.48.

⁶ *Modernism* returns once again in our times because it was not enough to defeat it by an official condemnation; rather, it is necessary to address from an orthodox position the real concern that heresy attempts to appease.

Reason cannot adequately know spiritual natures; this is why it does not fully know its own human spirit.⁷ Sentiment, instead, would give us direct, clear, and precise self-knowledge. This is why we cannot express spiritual essences with adequate words, and we must turn to negative sources by de-materializing language. On the other hand, the perfect expression of spiritual reality is proper to sentiment. Art is not a chimera. To awaken one's own sentiment in another is not a possibility for everybody, but the artist claims to achieve this.

And, in the second place, the human spirit may err—and in fact, it errs much too frequently: this is the great scandal of “Pharisaic” philosophers. It is not that reason qua reason is fallible, but that Man errs in managing his reason. On the other hand, sentiment declares itself to be infallible as it is immediate. Perceiving sentiments would then be truth itself.

Irreligiosity, pride, and experience of the mind's impotence are, thus, three factors that influence the origin of the philosophy of sentiment. Once faith has been discarded because Man does not suffer the weakness of his reason, it seems justified to turn to feelings and sentiment.

Historical Precedents

*Ich bedürfte einer Wahrheit, die nicht mein Geschöpf,
sondern deren Geschöpflich wäre.*⁸

SW IV.1.xiii

The philosophy of sentiment is a product of *modern* philosophy, understanding by such not strictly contemporary philosophy, but rather all post-Cartesian thought. It could be defined as the philosophy that claims reason's complete independence.

All medieval philosophy depends, one way or another, on revealed fact. The relationship between reason and faith constitutes the axis of philosophy. Sometimes, when the balance cannot be maintained, complete separation emerges and the existence of two independent realms of truth is proclaimed, in such a way that what is true in one does not have to be so in the other. This is the theory of the two truths held by St. Peter Damian and others. Other times, a more perfect harmonic synthesis is attempted, as in the work of St. Thomas. But medieval philosophy always keeps both forms of knowledge in mind and gives priority to faith. Reason is never fully autonomous.

The philosophical work of Descartes, on the other hand, attempts to radically separate theological from philosophical knowledge. At first glance, it seems to be a new theory of the two truths in a nominalist key, but little room is left for theological truth. Descartes wants to found everything on reason and with full independence of faith. Reason aspires to be self-sufficient and the only criteria for truth. This is the *separatism of reason*.

By completely doing away with faith as a superior form of knowledge, reason is left as the ultimate judge, and so a vital problem emerges, one that comes before we comprehend the nature of what we know: the philosophical concern for the value of our faculty of knowledge itself, the critical problem. Strictly speaking, it is not that this critical problem was entirely unfamiliar in the Middle Ages, but it was posed in different terms, on another prior base. In the Middle Ages, the problem was about reason and its relationship to faith; ultimately this is purely a methodological problem. Can reason attain the truth that, alternatively, faith is

⁷ There is an intellectual intuition of the soul, but it is in its actions and through the *species* (in its Scholastic sense) that the intellect acts. See Thomas, *De Veritate*, q.8, a.6, c. And nevertheless, it is true intuition. See below.

⁸ “I would need truth not as a creation of mine, but a truth of which I may be a creation.”

able to give us? Reason has to justify itself; it has to explain *how* it attains truth—a truth that is undeniably there.

When Descartes eliminates theology—and with it, faith—for “not having dared to submit revealed truths to the weaknesses of my reasoning,”⁹ the critical problem becomes absolute and truly critical, as it is formulated directly in the face of truth. It is no longer about *how* I can arrive at the truth, but rather about whether or not I can really reach it. Because there is nothing superior to reason, and reason can only be founded on itself, the problem becomes an anxiety-ridden, vital *preoccupation*,¹⁰ since the *collapsing* of philosophy and, along with this, Man’s *salvation* depends on it. Hence the Cartesian *method of surety*.¹¹

This is how the conviction that our knowledge is relative was born. For Descartes, what is not sure stops being true, and what is sure is that which has proved to be successful (mathematical thought). Surety is a relative value. It is limited to knowledge, and this is where the Kantian critique comes in. However, the relative presumes something absolute. Therefore, there must be absolute knowledge above the knowledge of the human mind. Only this second knowledge, which Man may not possess, will be able to apprehend what things *are*. So there is a domain of the relative, of the phenomonic, where the human mind is inscribed, and a domain of the absolute, of the noumenic, which is transcendent with regard to the human mind. This is Kant’s critical oeuvre: the analysis of the impotence of our reason and the daring consequence that there is a reality that is unknowable and inaccessible to the human mind, and whose existence must be postulated. But what is most crucial is that this thing, which *in itself* is unknowable, is true reality. This is the basis on which the entire philosophy of feeling will lie.

In fact, Kantian agnosticism is somewhat unstable. The *metaphysical instinct* must be satisfied, one way or another. History proves this sufficiently, and nobody, not even Kant himself, remains in agnosticism. His entire philosophy is an attempt to overcome agnosticism. It is the need of a *counterweight*, which appears as soon as we come to believe in the relativity of our knowledge. Because of this *instinct of compensation* we try to apprehend what theoretical reason is impotent to achieve through another medium.¹² Reality is apprehended by an irrational faculty. This is the assumption of all philosophies of sentiment. For Kant himself, knowledge has a relative value; only will, a good will, possesses absolute value. That is to say, *action* dominates *knowledge*.

The religious-historical factor of the Reformation also had a powerful influence on the rise of sentimentalist philosophy. People searched for more intimacy with God, but for Luther, reason was impotent, and authority even more so. The only thing left was the sentimental subjective method. Kantian agnosticism will later justify this Protestant posture.

Formulation

*Das reale Sein gibt sich im Gefühle allein zu erkennen.*¹³

SW II.105

⁹ Descartes, *Discours de la Méthode* (Paris: Flammarion, 1935), 7.

¹⁰ “Preoccupation,” rather than “care” or other words, is I believe a more correct translation of the German concept of *Sorge*.

¹¹ See my “La ciencia biomatemática. Un ejemplo de síntesis científica,” *Arbor* 3 (1944).

¹² Lévy-Bruhl speaks of doctrines of compensation. See *La philosophie de Jacobi* (Paris: Alcan, 1894), xv.

¹³ “The real Being can only be known through sentiment.”

Feelings cannot be imprisoned in the cold molds of language, which is why they find their most adequate expression in art. But the artistic sign is not univocal; in fact, it basically represents the expression of an individual experience. This is why subjectivity, *interiority*, is the common characteristic of the different sentimental philosophies. The more objective reason is, the clearer, more distinct, and more universal it is. With feelings, it is the exact opposite: the more subjective they are, the purer and less universal—less communicable—in a certain sense. They are characterized by their individuality, their uniqueness. A feeling that is repeated, if it is something more than an intellectual or an imaginary memory of the original feeling, will be different from the one that precedes it. A second feeling that is the *subsequent* repetition of a first one is not identified with the latter, whereas with reason there would be this identity. There is a rational logic that operates with objectified reasons, but a sentimental logic that does the same thing with feelings is not possible without the destruction of its defining characteristics.

It is one of Man's invariant characteristics that, when recognizing his own limitations and feeling the anxiety of the infinite and of self-improvement, he will plaintively lament his own finiteness. And because he does not know that which bothers him through his reason, it turns out that all those affirmations stemming from his profoundest depths are perfect for formulating a philosophy of sentiment—without this having to imply that the authors of such are sentimentalists. It is one thing to recognize enigmas in human life, and another to want to elucidate them by means of sentiment.

There are two entirely separate moments in the formulation of a philosophy of sentiment, although they are not always distinguished in the different sentimental systems. One initial moment entails recognizing the impotence and finiteness of reason. Not necessarily its absolute finiteness, but rather the finiteness that is relative to our own anxiety of knowing. This primary study is where all descriptions of the imbalance and tension of our being, submitted to desires and ambitions that it is not able to satisfy, fit. The fact of the limitation of our reason is obvious: not a negative limitation (contradiction), but rather a positive one. There is an affirmation by Pascal that expresses this initial moment: "Tout ce qui est incompréhensible ne laisse pas d'être."¹⁴ Up to this point there is no sentimentalism whatsoever, but rather the recognition of a profound philosophical problem.

The philosophy of sentiment is conditioned by a secondary moment that consists of a peculiar reply to the aforementioned problem. Instead of ascending to a suprarationalism in order to overcome the limitation of reason, it descends to an irrationalism. Instead of recognizing that our reason occupies a lowly position in the scale of intellectual natures—a healthy intellectualism is the surpassing of rationalism—it affirms that reality is irrational, and therefore understandable by some special irrational sense. Pascal, who, precisely along with Fénelon, had such a strong influence on the formation of Jacobi's spirit, also has a characteristic formula for this: *Le cœur a ses raisons que la raison ne connaît point.*¹⁵

We said that these two moments are undifferentiated in sentimentalism, as it does not admit that there is any other resource to overcome the limitations of the mind than a sentimental system, which is nominally called suprarational even if all its features are infrarational. Jacobi himself is a typical example of this when he calls sentiment "reason."

The Pascalian formula is susceptible to a twofold interpretation.¹⁶ The first is that the

¹⁴ "What is incomprehensible keeps on existing nonetheless" (Pascal, *Pensées* 47 [ed. L. Brunschwig], n. 430).

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 277. "Heart has its reasons which Reason cannot know."

¹⁶ See M. Scheler, "Der Formalismus in der Ethik und die materiale Wertethik" (Halle: Niemeyer, 1916).

heart also has its reasons; that is to say, there are reasons—intellectual reasons, after all—that reason does not know, in the sense that we would never be able to reach it if we left the heart out of consideration. There is an *ordre du cœur* that the human intellect must respect, but which, in short, is also composed of a set of reasons that we must integrate into a global vision of reality. In this sense, Pascal formulates a truth that fits perfectly within a genuine Scholastic tradition.

It is instructive to observe that along this same line we find a man like Cardinal Newman, who we can hardly say has been suspected of rationalism. Newman defined philosophizing as the “power of referring every thing to its true place in the universal system, of understanding the various aspects of each of its parts, of comprehending the exact value of each, of tracing each backwards to its beginning and forward to its end.”¹⁷

But the second (and opposite) interpretation, entirely sentimentalist, is also possible, that is: “There are certain types of experiences whose objects remain fully closed off to reason; for which the latter is as blind as hearing is to colors; instead, these experiences guide us to certain authentic objects and objectives and to an eternal order among these.”¹⁸ We are not interested in discussing whether Scheler’s interpretation is genuinely Pascalian; suffice it to say that it constitutes a formulation of sentimentalism.

Nevertheless—and this is a thorn embedded within sentimentalism itself—among the reasons of the heart, however they are interpreted, and those of intelligence, there must be a mutual relationship, not only of influence, but also of primary and superior unification, in order to be able to preserve human unity. It is not possible that the domain of values (to put it in Scheler’s terms) be given to us in a sentimental intuition and that the dominion of being in a speculative vision without there being a connection between both dominions and a mutual order that guarantees Man’s unity and saves us from metaphysical chaos.

This irrational, sentimental position must not be confused with the suprarationalist, Christian mystical point of view. When St. Augustine, for example, appears to declare that the approval of truth is something more than pure logical evidence, as Man’s heart must also approve,¹⁹ he is not referring to any natural feelings, but rather to a quasi-experimental mystical faith,²⁰ though confused and obscure, as Man realizes that he is incomprehensible to himself.²¹ Newman shares this line of thought.

¹⁷ J. H. Newman, *Oxford University Sermons* (1909), 291.

¹⁸ M. Scheler, op. cit., 120.

¹⁹ “Cum ea didici, non credidi *alieno cordi*, sed *in meo* recognovi, et vera esse approbavi” [When I learned these things, I did not believe *with another’s heart*, but I recognized them *in my own* heart, and I accepted them as true] (Augustine, *Confessions*, X.10.2).

²⁰ “Tu enim Domine diiudicas me: quia etsi nemo scit hominum, quae sunt hominis nisi spiritus hominis qui in ipso est [1 Co 2:11]; tamen est aliquid hominis, quod nec ipse scit spiritus hominis, qui in ipso est. Tu autem scis eius omnia, qui fecisti eum” [Be you my judge, O Lord. In fact, even though no-one knows Man and Man’s things except his spirit within him, there is however something unknown by Man’s very spirit within himself. But you—as his Creator—do know everything of him] (Augustine, *Confessions*, X.5.1). The human spirit does not know it, though it feels it; it is somehow aware of it, since it says it. Even though Augustine here refers to the level of infused wisdom—a gift of the Holy Spirit—the only thing we wish to point out here is the insufficiency of the rational intellect, which explains the need to turn to a new medium for comprehending the Real.

²¹ “Nec ego ipse capio totum quod sum. Ergo animus ad habendum seipsum angustus est” [Nor can I comprehend/embrace my whole being. So, Man’s mind (*animus*) is too small to be able to possess himself] (Augustine, *Confessions*, X.8.5).