

# Exoteric Teaching

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Le partage du brave homme est d'expliquer librement ses pensées. Celui qui n'ose regarder fixément les deux pôles de la vie humaine, la religion et le gouvernement, n'est qu'un lâche.  
—Voltaire

The distinction between exoteric (or public) and esoteric (or secret) teaching is not at present considered to be of any significance for the understanding of the thought of the past: the leading encyclopedia of classical antiquity does not contain any article, however brief, on *exoteric* or *esoteric*. Since a considerable number of ancient writers had not a little to say about the distinction in question, the silence of the leading encyclopedia cannot possibly be due to the silence of the sources; it must be due to the influence of modern philosophy on classical scholarship; it is that influence which prevents scholars from attaching significance to numerous, if not necessarily correct, statements of ancient writers. For while it is for classical scholars to decide whether and where the distinction between exoteric and esoteric teaching occurs in the sources, it is for philosophers to decide whether that distinction is significant in itself. And modern philosophy is not favorable to an affirmative answer to this philosophic question. The classical scholar Zeller may have believed himself to have cogent reasons for rejecting the view that Aristotle “designedly chose for his scientific publications a style

This essay was originally written by Leo Strauss in December, 1939. The final typed version, with his handwritten corrections, was probably prepared shortly thereafter. It deals primarily with G. E. Lessing (and secondarily with F. Schleiermacher). It was in the immediately preceding years that Strauss had made his rediscovery of exotericism, and this was no doubt partly due to his reading of Lessing in connection with his researches for the *Moses Mendelssohn Jubiläumsausgabe*, Volumes 2, 3 Part 1, and 3 Part 2. Strauss was very conscious of the debt he owed to Lessing, and he mentioned it both in “A Giving of Accounts,” p. 3 (*The College* [Annapolis and Santa Fe] Vol. 22, No. 1 (April, 1970) pp. 1–5), and in his letter of May 28, 1971, to Alexander Altmann (published by him in the ‘Vorbemerkung’ to Volume 3 Part 2 of the *Moses Mendelssohn Gesammelte Schriften: Jubiläumsausgabe*, Stuttgart–Bad Cannstatt: Friedrich Frommann [Günther Holzboog], 1974.) Perhaps this essay is the closest thing we possess to the essay which Strauss said in 1971 that he had wanted to write, since 1937, in order to present the “Zentrum” of Lessing’s teaching “‘de Deo et mundo,’” and to be entitled ‘Taking Leave of Germany.’ Concerning this intention, Strauss also said that “the decisive points are as clear to me today as they were then.” (Cf. the letter to Altmann in the ‘Vorbemerkung,’ *loc. cit.*, p. viii.) The following essay was discovered by the present writer in the Leo Strauss Archive of the University of Chicago Library (final version: Box 9, Folder 18, and rough copy: Box 12, Folder 2), and appears with no changes to the text that could affect the meaning. This essay is published with the permission of the Estate of Leo Strauss, to whose executor, Professor Joseph Cropsey, sincere thanks are due for his kind assistance. The generous interest and assistance of Professor Alexander Altmann is also gratefully acknowledged. —K. H. G.

obscure and unintelligible to the lay mind"; but it must be doubted whether these reasons would have appeared to him equally cogent, if he had not been assured by the philosopher Zeller that the rejected view "attributes to the philosopher a very childish sort of mystification, wholly destitute of any reasonable motive."<sup>1</sup>

As late as the last third of the eighteenth century, the view that all the ancient philosophers had distinguished between their exoteric and their esoteric teaching was still maintained, and its essential implications were fully understood at least by one man. Gotthold Ephraim Lessing united in himself in a unique way the so divergent qualities of the philosopher and of the scholar. He discussed the question of exotericism clearly and fully in three little writings of his: in "Leibniz von den ewigen Strafen" (1773), in "Des Andreas Wissowatius Einwürfe wider die Dreieinigkeit" (1773), and in "Ernst und Falk" (1777 and 1780).<sup>2</sup> He discussed it as clearly and as fully as could be done by someone who still accepted exotericism not merely as a strange fact of the past, but rather as an intelligible necessity for all times and, therefore, as a principle guiding his own literary activity.<sup>3</sup> In short, Lessing was the last writer who revealed, while hiding them, the reasons compelling wise men to hide the truth: he wrote between the lines about the art of writing between the lines.

In "Ernst und Falk," a character, called Falk, who expresses himself somewhat evasively and sometimes enigmatically, tries to show that every political constitution, and even the best political constitution, is necessarily imperfect, the necessary imperfection of all political life making necessary the existence of what he calls freemasonry, and he does not hesitate to assert that freemasonry, which is necessary, was always in existence and will always be. Falk himself is a freemason, if a heretical freemason, and in order to be a freemason, a man must know truths which ought better to be concealed.<sup>4</sup> Which is then the concealed reason of his view that all political life is necessarily imperfect?<sup>5</sup> The intention of the good works of the freemasons is to make good works superfluous,<sup>6</sup> and

1. *Aristotle and the Earlier Peripatetics* (translated by Costelloe and Muirhead), London, 1897, I.120ff.

2. See Lessing, *Werke*, eds. Petersen and von Olshausen, VI.21–60 ("Ernst und Falk") and XXI.138–89 (the two other treatises mentioned above). Compare also Lessing's "Über eine zeitige Aufgabe" (XXIV.146–53).

3. Lessing's exotericism was recognized to a certain extent by Gottfried Fittbogen, *Die Religion Lessings*, Leipzig, 1923, pp. 60ff. and 79ff. Fittbogen does not however see the most important implications of his valuable remarks, since his interpretation of Lessing is based on a Kantian or post-Kantian view of the meaning of philosophy.

4. "FALK. Weisst du, Freund, dass du schon ein halber Freimäurer bist? denn du erkennst ja schon Wahrheiten, die man besser verschweigt. ERNST. Aber doch sagen könnte. FALK. Der Weise kann nicht sagen, was er besser verschweigt" (Second Dialogue, *loc. cit.*, p. 31).

5. In the third dialogue (p. 40), it is explicitly stated that only such shortcomings of even the best political constitution have been explicitly mentioned as are evident even to the most shortsighted eye. This implies that there are other shortcomings of political life as such which are not evident to "short-sighted eyes."

6. First dialogue (at the end) and third dialogue (p. 39).

freemasonry came into being,<sup>7</sup> when someone who originally had planned a scientific society which should make the speculative truths useful for practical and political life, conceived of a “society which should raise itself from the practice of civil life to speculation.”<sup>8</sup> The concealed reasons of the imperfection of political life as such are the facts that all practical or political life is essentially inferior to contemplative life, or that all works, and therefore also all good works, are “superfluous” as far as the level of theoretical life, which is self-sufficient, is reached, and that the requirements of the lower are bound from time to time to conflict with, and to supersede in practice, the requirements of the higher. Consideration of that conflict is the ultimate reason why the “freemasons” (i.e. the wise or the men of contemplation) must conceal certain fundamental truths. It may be added that Lessing points out in “Ernst und Falk” that the variety of religions is due to the variety of political constitutions:<sup>9</sup> the religious problem (i.e. the problem of historical, positive religion) is considered by him as part and parcel of the political problem.

In “Leibniz von den ewigen Strafen” and in “Wissowatius,” Lessing applies these views to an explanation of Leibniz’ attitude toward religion. The explicit purpose of these two little treatises is to discuss “the motives and reasons” which had induced Leibniz to defend certain orthodox beliefs (the belief in eternal damnation and the belief in trinity).<sup>10</sup> While defending Leibniz’ defense of the belief in eternal damnation, Lessing states that Leibniz’ peculiar way of assenting to received opinions is identical with “what all the ancient philosophers used to do in their exoteric speech.”<sup>11</sup> By making that statement, he not only asserts that all the ancient philosophers made use of two manners of teaching, of an exoteric and an esoteric manner; he also bids us to trace back all essential features of Leibniz’ exotericism to the exotericism of the ancients. What, then, are the essential features of Leibniz’ exotericism? Or, in other words, what are the motives and reasons which guided Leibniz in his defense of the orthodox or received opinion?<sup>12</sup> Lessing’s first answer to this question is that Leibniz’ peculiar way of assenting to received opinions is identical with “what all the ancient philosophers used to do in their exoteric speech. He observed a sort of prudence for which, it is true, our most recent philosophers have become much too wise.”<sup>13</sup> The distinction between exoteric and esoteric speech has then so little to do with “mysticism” of any sort that it is an outcome of prudence. Somewhat later on Lessing indicates

7. The contradiction between the statement made at the beginning that freemasonry is always in existence and the statement made toward the end that freemasonry came into being at the beginning of the eighteenth century enables us to see that freemasonry is an ambiguous term.

8. Fifth dialogue (toward the end).

9. Second dialogue (pp. 34ff.).

10. *Werke*, XXI.143 and 181.

11. *Loc. cit.*, 147.

12. Cf. *loc. cit.*, 146.

13. *Loc. cit.*, 147. Cf. Plato, *Theaetetus*, 180c7–d5, with *Protagoras*, 316c5–317c5 and 343b4–5.

the difference between the esoteric reason enabling Leibniz to defend the orthodox doctrine of eternal damnation, and the exoteric reason expressed in his defense of that doctrine.<sup>14</sup> That exoteric reason, he asserts, is based on the mere possibility of eternally increasing wickedness of moral beings. And then he goes on to say: "It is true, humanity shudders at this conception although it concerns the mere possibility. I should not however for that reason raise the question: why frighten with a mere possibility? For I should have to expect this counterquestion: why not frighten with it, since it can only be frightful to him who has never been earnest about the betterment of himself." This implies that a philosopher who makes an exoteric statement, asserts, not a fact, but what Lessing chooses to call "a mere possibility": he does not, strictly speaking, believe in the truth of that statement (e.g. of the statement that there is such a thing as eternally increasing wickedness of human beings which would justify eternally increasing punishments). This is indicated by Lessing in the following remark introducing a quotation from the final part of Plato's *Gorgias*: "Socrates himself believed in such eternal punishments quite seriously, he believed in them at least to the extent that he considered it expedient to teach such punishments in terms which do not in any way arouse suspicion and which are most explicit."<sup>15</sup>

Before proceeding any further, I must summarize Lessing's view of exoteric teaching. To avoid the danger of arbitrary interpretation, I shall omit all elements of that view which are not noticed at a first glance even by the most superficial reader of Lessing, although the obvious part of his view, if taken by itself, is somewhat enigmatic. (1) Lessing asserts that all the ancient philosophers and Leibniz<sup>16</sup> made use of exoteric presentation of the truth, as distinguished from its esoteric presentation. (2) The exoteric presentation of the truth makes use of statements which are considered by the philosopher himself statements, not of facts, but of mere possibilities. (3) Exoteric statements (i.e. such statements as would not and could not occur within the esoteric teaching) are made by the philosopher for reasons of prudence or expediency. (4) Some exoteric statements are addressed to morally inferior people who ought to be frightened by such statements. (5) There are certain truths which must be concealed. (6) Even the best political constitution is bound to be imperfect. (7) Theoretical life is superior to practical or political life. The impression created by this summary, that there is a close connection between exotericism and a peculiar attitude toward political and practical life, is not misleading: "freemasonry," which as such knows of secret truths, owes its existence to the necessary imperfection of all practical or political life.

Some readers might be inclined to dismiss Lessing's whole teaching at once,

14. *Loc. cit.*, 153ff.

15. *Loc. cit.*, 160. Cf. also the remarks about "believing" on pp. 184, 187 and 189.

16. In a private conversation, published only after his death, Lessing said to F. H. Jacobi about Leibniz: "Es ist bei dem grössten Scharfsinn oft sehr schwer, seine eigentliche Meinung zu entdecken." (*Werke*, XXIV.173).

since it seems to be based on the obviously erroneous, or merely traditional,<sup>17</sup> assumption that *all* the ancient philosophers have made use of exoteric speeches. To warn such readers, one must point out that the incriminated sentence permits of a wholly unobjectionable interpretation: Lessing implicitly denies that writers on philosophical topics who reject exotericism, deserve the name of philosophers.<sup>18</sup> For he knew the passages in Plato in which it is indicated that it was the sophists who refused to conceal the truth.

After Lessing, who died in the year in which Kant published his *Critique of Pure Reason*, the question of exotericism seems to have been lost sight of almost completely, at least among scholars and philosophers as distinguished from novelists. When Schleiermacher introduced that style of Platonic studies, in which classical scholarship is still engaged, and which is based on the identification of the natural order of Platonic dialogues with the sequence of their elaboration, he still had to discuss in detail the view that there are two kinds of Platonic teaching, an exoteric kind and an esoteric one. In doing this, he made five or six extremely important and true remarks about Plato's literary devices,<sup>19</sup> remarks the subtlety of which has, to my knowledge, never been surpassed or even rivalled since. Yet he failed to see the crucial question. He asserts that there is only one Platonic teaching—the teaching presented in the dialogues—although there is, so to speak, an infinite number of degrees of the understanding of that teaching: it is the same teaching which the beginner understands inadequately, and which only the perfectly trained student of Plato understands adequately. But is then the teaching which the beginner actually understands, identical with the teaching which the perfectly trained student actually understands? The distinction between Plato's exoteric and esoteric teaching had sometimes been traced back to Plato's opposition to "polytheism and popular religion" and to the necessity in which he found himself of hiding that opposition; Schleiermacher believes he has refuted this view by asserting that "Plato's principles on that topic are clear enough to read in his writings, so that one can scarcely believe that his pupils might have needed still more information about them."<sup>20</sup> Yet, "polytheism and popular religion" is an ambiguous expression: if Schleiermacher had used the less ambiguous "belief in the existence of the gods worshipped by the city of Athens," he could not have said that Plato's opposition to that belief is clearly expressed in his writings. As a matter of fact, in his introduction to his translation of Plato's *Apology of Socrates*, he considers it "a weak point of that writing that Plato has not made a more energetic use of the argument taken from Socrates' service to Apollo, for refuting the charge that Socrates did not believe in the old gods."<sup>21</sup>

17. Compare Clemens Alexandrinus, *Stromata*, v. 58 (365 Stählin).

18. Cf., for a similar example of Lessing's way of expressing himself, his *Briefe antiquarischen Inhalts* VII (*Werke*, xvii. 97ff.).

19. F. Schleiermacher, *Platons Werke*, 1.1, Berlin, 1804, p. 20. 3rd ed., Berlin, 1855, p. 16.

20. *Loc. cit.*, 14. 3rd ed., Berlin, 1855, p. 12.

21. *Platons Werke*, 1.2, Berlin, 1805, p. 185. 3rd ed., Berlin, 1855, p. 128.

If Plato's Socrates believed in "the old gods," is not Plato himself likely to have believed in them as well? And how can one then say that Plato's opposition to "polytheism and popular religion" as such is clearly expressed in his writings? Schleiermacher's strongest argument against the distinction of two teachings of Plato appears to be his assertion that Plato's real investigations are hidden, not absolutely, but only from the inattentive readers, or that attention is the only prerequisite for a full understanding of his real investigations as distinguished from those investigations which are merely the "skin" of the former.<sup>22</sup> But did any man in his senses ever assert that Plato wished to hide his secret teaching from all readers or from all men? Did any man whose judgment can claim to carry any weight in this matter ever understand by Plato's esoteric teaching anything other than that teaching of his dialogues which escapes the inattentive readers only? The only possible difference of opinion concerns exclusively the meaning of the distinction between inattentive and attentive readers: does a continuous way lead from the extremely inattentive reader to the extremely attentive reader, or is the way between the two extremes interrupted by a chasm? Schleiermacher tacitly assumes that the way from the beginning to the end is continuous, whereas, according to Plato, philosophy presupposes a real conversion,<sup>23</sup> i.e. a total break with the attitude of the beginner: the beginner is a man who has not yet for one moment left the cave, whereas the philosopher is the man who has left the cave and who (if he is not compelled to do otherwise) lives outside of the cave, on "the islands of the blessed." The difference between the beginner and the philosopher (for the perfectly trained student of Plato is no one else but the genuine philosopher) is a difference not of degree, but of kind. Now, it is well-known that, according to Plato, virtue is knowledge or science; therefore, the beginner is inferior to the perfectly trained student of Plato not only intellectually, but also morally. That is to say, the morality of the beginners has a basis essentially different from the basis on which the morality of the philosophers rests: their virtue is not genuine virtue, but vulgar or political virtue only, a virtue based not on insight, but on customs or laws.<sup>24</sup> We may say, the morality of the beginners is the morality of the "auxiliaries" of the *Republic*, but not yet the morality of the "guardians." Now, the "auxiliaries," the best among whom are the beginners, must believe "noble lies,"<sup>25</sup> i.e. statements which, while being useful for the political community, are nevertheless lies. And there is a difference not of degree but of kind between truth and lie or untruth. And what holds true of the difference between truth and lies holds equally true of the difference between exoteric and

22. "Das geheime . . . (ist) nur beziehungsweise so . . ." I.1, 12. " . . . die eigentliche Untersuchung wird mit einer anderen, nicht wie mit einem Schleier, sondern wie mit einer angewachsenen Haut überkleidet, welche dem Unaufmerksamen, *aber auch nur diesem*, dasjenige verdeckt, was eigentlich soll beobachtet oder gefunden werden, dem Aufmerksamen aber nur noch den Sinn für den innern Zusammenhang schärft und läutert." *Loc. cit.*, 20 (the italics are mine).

23. *Republic* 518c–e, 521e, and 619c–d. Cf. also *Phaedo* 69a–c.

24. *Republic* 430c3–5 and *Phaedo* 82a10–b8.

25. *Republic* 414b4ff. Cf. *Laws* 663d6ff.

esoteric teaching; for Plato's exoteric teaching is identical with his "noble lies." This connection of considerations, which is more or less familiar to every reader of Plato, if not duly emphasized by all students of Plato, is not even mentioned by Schleiermacher in his refutation of the view that there is a distinction between Plato's exoteric and esoteric teaching. Nor does he, in that context, as much as allude to Lessing's dialogues ("Ernst und Falk" and Lessing's conversation with F. H. Jacobi) which probably come closer to the spirit of Platonic dialogues and their technique than any other modern work in the German language. Therefore Schleiermacher's refutation of the view in question is not convincing. A comparison of his *Philosophic Ethics* with the *Nicomachean Ethics* would bring to light the reason<sup>26</sup> why he failed to pay any attention to the difference between the morality of the beginner and the morality of the philosopher, i.e. to the difference which is at the bottom of the difference between exoteric and esoteric teaching.

I return to Lessing. How was Lessing led to notice,<sup>27</sup> and to understand, the information about the fact that "all the ancient philosophers" had distinguished between their exoteric and their esoteric teaching? If I am not mistaken, he rediscovered the bearing of that distinction by his own exertion after having had undergone his conversion, i.e. after having had the experience of what philosophy is and what sacrifices it requires. For it is that experience which leads in a straight way to the distinction between the two groups of men, the philosophic men and the unphilosophic men, and therewith to the distinction between the two ways of presenting the truth. In a famous letter to a friend,<sup>28</sup> he expresses his fear that "by throwing away certain prejudices, I have thrown away a little too much that I shall have to get back again."<sup>29</sup> That passage has sometimes been understood to indicate that Lessing was about to return from the intransigent rationalism of his earlier period toward a more positive view of the Bible and the Biblical tradition. There is ample evidence to show that this interpretation is wrong.<sup>30</sup> The context of the passage makes it clear that the things which Lessing had "thrown away" before and which, he feels, he ought to "fetch back" were truths which he descried "from afar" in a book by Ferguson, as he believed on the basis of what he had seen in the table of contents of that book. He also descried "from afar" in Ferguson's book "truths in the continual contradiction of which we happen to live and we have to go on living continually in the interest of

26. That reason can be discovered by an analysis of the following statements, e.g.: "Knowledge of the essence of reason is ethics" and "The ordinary distinction between offensive and defensive wars is quite empty" (*loc. cit.*, §§ 60 and 276).

27. Cf. the remarks of the young Lessing on the relevant passage in Gellius (xx.5) in the tenth *Literaturbrief* (*Werke*, IV.38).

28. To Moses Mendelssohn, of January 9, 1771.

29. Another statement about the crisis which Lessing underwent when he was about forty occurs in the *Briefe antiquarischen Inhalts* LIV (*Werke*, xvii.250).

30. See e.g. von Olshausen in his introduction to *Werke*, xxiv.41ff. Compare also Jacobi's letter to Hamann of December 30th 1784. " . . . Als (Lessings) Erziehung des Menschengeschlechts von einigen für eine nicht unchristliche Schrift, beinahe für eine Palinodie angesehen wurde, stieg sein Ärger über die Albernheit des Volkes bis zum Erglimmen" (F. H. Jacobi, *Werke*, I.398).

our quietude.” There may very well be a connection between the two kinds of truth: the truths which Lessing had thrown away formerly, may have been truths contradictory to the truths generally accepted by the philosophy of enlightenment and also accepted by Lessing throughout his life. At any rate, two years later he openly rebuked the more recent philosophers who had evaded the contradiction between wisdom and prudence by becoming much too wise to submit to the rule of prudence which had been observed by Leibniz and all the ancient philosophers. External evidence is in favor of the view that the book referred to by Lessing is Ferguson’s *Essay on the History of Civil Society*.<sup>31</sup> The “truths in the continual contradiction of which we have to live,” which had been discussed by Ferguson and which are indicated to a certain extent in the table of contents of his *Essay*,<sup>32</sup> concerned the ambiguous character of civilization, i.e. the theme of the two famous early writings of Rousseau, which Lessing, as he perhaps felt, had not considered in his youth carefully enough.<sup>33</sup> Lessing expressed his view of the ambiguous character of civilization some years later in these more precise terms: even the absolutely best civil constitution is necessarily imperfect. It seems then to have been the political problem which gave Lessing’s thought a decisive turn away from the philosophy of enlightenment indeed, yet not toward romanticism of any sort—toward what is called a deeper, historical view of government and religion—but toward an older type of philosophy. How near he apparently came to certain romantic views on his way from the philosophy of enlightenment to that older type of philosophy, we may learn from what F. H. Jacobi tells us in an essay of his which is devoted to the explanation of a political remark made by Lessing. According to Jacobi, Lessing once said that the arguments against Papal despotism are either no arguments at all, or else they are two or three times as valid against the despotism of princes.<sup>34</sup> Could Lessing have held the view that ecclesiastical despotism is two or three times better than secular despotism? Jacobi elsewhere says in his own name but certainly in the spirit

31. Cf. von Olshausen, *loc. cit.*, 44ff., who however rejects this conclusion on the basis of “internal reasons.”

32. Cf. e.g. the following headings of sections: “Of the separation of arts and professions” and “Of the corruption incident to polished nations.”

33. The influence of Ferguson’s mitigated Rousseauism on Lessing can be seen from a comparison of the following quotations with what Lessing says in “Ernst und Falk” on the obvious reasons of the necessary imperfection of all civil societies. Ferguson says in Part I, section 3 and 4: “The mighty engine which we suppose to have formed society, only teaches to set its members at variance, or to continue their intercourse after their bonds of affection were broken.” “The titles of fellow-citizens and country men, unopposed to those of alien and foreigner, to which they refer, would fall into disuse, and lose their meaning.” “. . . it is vain to expect that we can give to the multitude of a people a sense of union among themselves, without admitting hostility to those who oppose them.” See also Part IV, section 2: “. . . if the lot of a slave among the ancients was really more wretched than that of the indigent labourer and the mechanic among the moderns, it may be doubted whether the superior orders who are in possession of consideration and honours, do not proportionately fail in the dignity which befits their condition.”

34. Jacobi, *Werke*, II.334 (“Etwas das Lessing gesagt hat”). Jacobi quotes in that article Ferguson’s *Essay* extensively.



of Lessing, that that despotism which is based “exclusively” on superstition, is less bad than secular despotism.<sup>35</sup> Now, secular despotism could easily be allied with the philosophy of enlightenment, and therewith with the rejection of exotericism strictly speaking, as is shown above all by the teaching of the classic of enlightened despotism: the teaching of Hobbes. But “despotism based exclusively on superstition,” i.e. not at all on force, cannot be maintained if the nonsuperstitious minority does not voluntarily refrain from openly exposing and refuting the “superstitious” beliefs. Lessing had then not to wait for the experience of Robespierre’s despotism to realize the relative truth of what the romantics asserted against the principles of J.-J. Rousseau who seems to have believed in a political solution of the problem of civilization: Lessing realized that relative truth one generation earlier, and he rejected it in favor of the way leading to absolute truth, or of philosophy. The experience which he had in that moment enabled him to understand the meaning of Leibniz’ “prudence” in a manner infinitely more adequate than the enlightened Leibnizians among his contemporaries did and could do. Leibniz is then that link in the chain of the tradition of exotericism which is nearest to Lessing. Leibniz, however, was not the only seventeenth-century thinker who was initiated. Not to mention the prudent Descartes, even so bold a writer as Spinoza had admitted the necessity of “pia dogmata, hoc est, talia quae animum ad obedientiam movent” as distinguished from “vera dogmata.”<sup>36</sup> But Lessing did not have to rely on any modern or medieval representatives of the tradition: he was familiar with its sources. It was precisely his intransigent classicism—his considered view that close study of the classics is the only way in which a diligent and thinking man can become a philosopher<sup>37</sup>—which had led him, first, to notice the exotericism of some ancient philosophers, and later on to understand the exotericism of all the ancient philosophers.

35. Jacobi, *Werke*, III.469. G. Lessing’s “Gespräch über die Soldaten und Mönche” (*Werke*, XXIV.159).

36. *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*, Cap. 14, § 20 (Bruder).

37. He writes in the 71st *Literaturbrief* (*Werke*, IV.197), after having quoted a statement of Leibniz in praise of criticism and the study of the classics: “Gewiss, die Kritik von dieser Seite betrachtet, und das Studium der Alten bis zu dieser Bekanntschaft [with Plato, Aristotle, Archimedes and Apollonius] getrieben, ist keine Pedanterei, sondern vielmehr das Mittel, wodurch Leibniz der geworden ist, der er war, und *der einzige Weg*, durch welchen sich ein fleissiger und denkender Mann ihm nähern kann.” (The italics are mine.) Ten years later (1769) he says in his *Briefe antiquarischen Inhalts* XLV (*Werke*, XVII.218): “Wir sehen mehr als die Alten; und doch dürften vielleicht unsere Augen schlechter sein als die Augen der Alten: die Alten sahen weniger als wir; aber ihre Augen, überhaupt zu reden, möchten leicht schärfer gewesen sein als unsere. — Ich fürchte, dass die ganze Vergleichung der Alten und Neuern hierauf hinauslaufen dürfte.”