HAMANN'S PROPHETIC MISSION

A GENETIC STUDY OF THREE LATE WORKS AGAINST THE ENLIGHTENMENT

TIMOTHY BEECH

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Timothy Beech

Wolfson College

Trinity Term 2005 [i.e 2006]

Abstract of D.Phil. Thesis

Johann Georg Hamann has often been seen as a rhapsodic precursor of Sturm und Drang, but more recent work by theologians has shown that his obscure style is a deliberately constructed tissue of detailed allusions. This genetic study begins with a reconstruction, based on the letters, of the circumstances that first led him to write such texts. An analysis of three late works, *K*onxompax, the *M*etakritik *ü*ber den *P*urismum der *V*ernunft, and Golgatha und Scheblimini, then demonstrates Hamann's blanket application of aspects of Lutheran theology in his anti-Enlightenment polemic. *P*lacing Hamann's targets in their wider context, both as he himself understood it (on the basis of his contemporary correspondence) and also through independent discussion of the aims of Lessing, *K*ant, and *M*endelssohn, reveals the nature of his engagement with them: rather than responding to his opponents' arguments on their own terms, he uses intertextuality to suggest a completely di(erent, Christian, framework which it is their collective error, in Hamann's view, to reject. The substance of Hamann's work thus lies not in intellectual penetration of specific opposing arguments, but in the elaboration of conservative theological ideas and their radical application to the contemporary scene. To an extraordinary degree, Hamann's style compels the reader to unfold the implications of obscure hints and allusions, but this makes it important to establish which ideas are actually present in his writing. Close reading of the texts chosen as illustrations, drawing on existing commentaries, but aiming at a larger overview, shows how Hamann uses the same concepts and method against a wide variety of targets. The richness and complexity of the resulting polemics reveals more about Hamann's own attitudes to the Enlightenment in general than about the specific debates in each case.

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The first impression created by Hamann's striking style is of a colourful abundance of impenetrable allusions that do not produce a clear cumulative sense. A natural reaction is that such obscurity is a pseudo-learned encrustation, an exotic and pretentious texture, merely decorative; also that it is free association without underlying coherence, spontaneously strung together around a cluster of core themes. This fits in with the reception of Hamann as a precursor of Sturm und Drang. The consensus of more recent work on Hamann, backed up by his own remarks on his style and by the texts themselves, is that there is a thread leading out of the labyrinth.

It is my contention that the thread is a theological one: the substance of Hamann's thought is not discursive, but lies in the radical application of a complex of conservative Lutheran ideas to Enlightened debates about religion. Hamann's critique does not rest on arguments – except for a small stock of anti-intellectual ploys used indifferently against any elaborate system or terminology – but on a sophisticated appeal to Christian faith. To the extent that a given Enlightenment text challenges or threatens Christianity, for Hamann it is thereby already unquestionably in the wrong, and his entire attack sets out to establish the absoluteness of the division between the two outlooks.

*M*ost of Hamann's works are polemical reactions to current intellectual events, commonly a recent publication. Though this background, as well as the education of an eighteenth-century intellectual – for instance in classics and theology – are presumed in the reader, even Hamann's contemporaries found his writing impenetrable. Some of the difficulty arises from Hamann's intensive dependence on contexts which are now more obscure than they were when he wrote, but he wrote texts which were already difficult in themselves. He often seems to read his targets at cross purposes. *P*ersonal, political, intellectual and religious elements are intimately intertwined in the genesis of his works and in his understanding of what they stood for. This means that a biographical and genetic approach to reading them is particularly

appropriate and productive: not only does this help in identifying specific allusions and relevant contexts, but it reveals the unity of Hamann's work, and its roots as a whole in his life and circumstances.

Hamann generally offers a critique of his opponent rather than an explicit discursive statement of his own position, and this is connected both with his hostility to the public sphere and with his message; indeed his quarrel with the public sphere in a nutshell is that it insists on transparency, but his message can only be approached indirectly, both for rhetorical reasons and for reasons of substance – because his difference with the Enlightenment is not ultimately a matter of arguments, so not suited to discursive presentation.

A more serious difficulty that arises from and compounds the first two is the complexity in detail of Hamann's writing. Anyone who simply picks up one of his books and attempts to read a page is likely to be immediately baffled. The text is thick with allusions, but the structure they are meant to support is not signposted. It is difficult to distinguish assertions in the author's own voice from irony, parody, quotation – or misquotation. The texture is tangled and impenetrable, the reader utterly dependent on his own resources to find a way in, through or out.

There is no substantial disagreement as to the broad outlines of Hamann's theological position, but this open-ended style matters more when it comes to assessing his view of those he attacked. The literature, by theologians not philosophers, is all but unanimous in ascribing to him a profound understanding of *K*ant. But when the supposed insight must be painstakingly reconstructed from obscure hints, it is all the more important to guard against the hermeneutic circle. I have tried to do so by attending to the wider context of the works Hamann attacked. I seek to provide a critical assessment of Hamann's response to the contemporary scene, and an explanation of it, rather than to excavate theological insights for modern times. I have shown that Hamann's response to the individual authors he targeted is undifferentiated, and that the roots of the complex of ideas and attitudes he draws on each time lie in Lutheran theology, not in fresh intellectual engagement. That is, after all, unsurprising, because the claims of faith, at any rate in the radical form that Hamann advanced them, do not pretend to rest on argument.

This study is an investigation of three late works, *K*onxompax (1779), the *M*etakritik *ü*ber den *P*urismum der *V*ernunft (c. 1784), and Golgatha und Scheblimini! (1784). The last two are intimately linked genetically, and they have their roots in the concerns of *K*onxompax and before. Though all three texts are given equal weight, Hamann's attack on *K*ant has a central place because *K*ant's stature as a thinker makes this a good test case both for appreciating Hamann's answering strengths and for the usefulness for that purpose of the approach taken here. As it turns out, the attitude of all three works is remarkably similar, given the variety of

their targets; by and large, the elements Hamann picks out to attack are generic Enlightenment traits rather than views specific to each author.

Hamann's hostility to the *K*ritik der reinen *V*ernunft is already explained by his general attitude to Enlightenment thought, of which *K*ant's book was a monumental and decisive example. In order to understand why Hamann attacked it in the way that he did, or perhaps, better, why he applied his now established method to this text and not another – he often enough chooses minor targets – it is helpful to establish a broader context and *K*ant's place within it. That boils down to two questions: what were Hamann's own concerns as reflected in his other polemical works, particularly recent ones, and what links *K*ant's book, in Hamann's eyes, to those concerns? In other words, a genetic approach is called for. The *M*etakritik shows continuities of thought further before and after, but a convenient cut-off point for establishing its context is 1778, when Hamann's muse stirred again after several unproductive years.

*K*onxompax, which was a response to the Fragmentenstreit, deals in broad terms with the same issues as the *M*etakritik. This connection between works with quite different immediate topics illuminates the latter text, but *K*onxompax can therefore also serve as an example of Hamann's approach in its own right, parallel to the polemic of both the *M*etakritik and Golgatha, a reply to *M*endelssohn's *J*erusalem (1783).

Chapter I prepares the ground for these studies of individual works by describing the circumstances that first led Hamann to become a Christian author. His unique way of reading and writing was derived from a piece of Augustinian hermeneutics meant for the Bible alone, combined with the typological view of history that justified Hamann, he felt, in stepping forward in print. He did so after a personal quarrel, transferring his animus from his friends to the Enlightement as a whole.

The three works examined in the subsequent chapters attack very different opponents, but Hamann's response is fundamentally the same – not in detail, but in its structure. It is from a typological perspective that Hamann's disparate targets belong closely enough together to merit such similar treatment. In allowing reason to be in some measure the arbiter of religious questions, they reflected and furthered one part of the Zeitgeist that helped them each advance their individual arguments; but Hamann's principal interest was in the status in general of reason in the Enlightenment as that touched on theology. The important thing to Hamann was the larger tendency his opponents represented. For Hamann, all forms of idolatry, and the secular structures that support them, the 'powers that be', are fighting in one and the same cause, with true Christianity in the other camp; it is neither permitted nor possible to sit on the fence; it is not reason itself that is reprehensible, only the fact that it is put at the service of the enemy, used as a rallying-cry for secession and as a *P*romethean

weapon. So in *K*onxompax Starck is as important as Lessing, and in the *M*etakritik it is not *K*ant's arguments that matter, but the secular intention they reveal.

St. *P*aul's talk of 'Greeks and Jews' was a useful starting-point for Hamann in making some of these connections that seem so bizarre to modern ears, and which must also have puzzled eighteenth-century readers. Cut loose from its historical context in the early church, but employed by Hamann in the same rhetorical spirit, it was a precedent for defining diverse opponents by their opposition to one's own cause, reducing them to that foreign lowest common denominator at the expense of the specific qualities and arguments on which alone they might be judged and appreciated for themselves, substituting without argument the values of that cause as the only criterion. If the error of the 'Greeks' was akin to that of the 'Jews', because they both departed from the same – Christian – truth, setting up standards of their own devising in place of faith, then, similarly, it could make sense to lump together freemasonry, pagan mystery religions, and rational theology. *M*endelssohn's *J*erusalem, which picked up the theme of tolerance from the Fragmentenstreit, with which it has substantial continuities, fitted in perfectly with Hamann's use of the *P*auline schema, because of *M*endelssohn's attempt to reconcile his political plea with the theology of the Old Testament.

These three polemics attack a phenomenon that Hamann saw as wider than their immediate targets, chosen just because they were representative, and also prominent or otherwise convenient. Hamann's output of the later 1770s, after the *H*erderschriften, deals, among other things, with the mystery religions of antiquity and with freemasonry. The mysteries had attracted interest partly in the way of comparative religion: for scholars like *M*einers, the continuities with and differences from Christianity might shed light on the special character of Christian revelation. For Hamann, the danger was that this might undermine revealed religion and support a deist agenda; the pagan mysteries themselves were hardly a threat in eighteenth-century Germany, though they did provide a loose inspiration for masonic hocus-pocus.

In common with many intellectuals of his day – Lessing, Lichtenberg, *K*ant, *M*endelssohn – Hamann, whose uncle was an author but whose father was a barber-surgeon, had achieved upward social mobility through education. As with many others, his first step was then a job as a *H*ofmeister; but his subsequent advance into the guild of international merchants was not sustained, and his attempt to ally himself to the House of Berens by marriage failed. He ended up as a minor functionary of the *P*russian state, financially insecure, underemployed, badly housed and resentful. In a provincial town, this made him feel an intellectual outsider, and his inaccessible style made his participation in the Republic of Letters more marginal still. What could be more natural than for Hamann to write as an advocate of the underdog, Christianity? Of course, every author is more than the sum of his social and historical circumstances, but they are among the ingredients that he combines.

Hamann's rejection of the Enlightenment has theological grounds, but it also makes sense in political terms: rather than seeing the Enlightenment as a progressive force that sought to right the ills he suffered, he thought it was an ally of the oppressor, the prince of Augustine's 'earthly city'.

Given the personal roots and the theological context of Hamann's attitude to the Enlightenment as it unfolded throughout his life, we should be cautious in estimating the intellectual substance of his response to particular works he attacked. *K*ant sought to establish the bounds of knowledge, excluding the kind of speculation that Hamann too opposed while still accounting for common-sense generalities such as causation, which unadulterated empiricism could not. Hamann accuses *K*ant of ignoring the preconditions – philosophical, existential and linguistic – of his reasonings. It is far from clear that this is a coherent objection. Of course philosophy has a tradition, but it should still aim to think thoughts that are valid in themselves, not because of the authority of that tradition. *K*ant tried very hard to do just that, and the case against him is not proved by Hamann's mere assertion that he failed. Again, Hamann objects that thought is rooted in language, and for him that means we imbibe a sense of the social order and, beyond it, the divine with our mother's milk. That may be so, but it still need not prevent us from thinking critically about that framework. Language itself is an imperfect instrument, but we can both recognise its deficiencies and try to overcome them. Hamann accuses *K*ant of reification, creating empty 'entia rationis' within the critical system. Though the casual reader of the *Critique* could be forgiven for thinking there might be something in this, it is a crude misrepresentation; abstraction is not reification, and if it were, no discursive thought of any sort would be possible.

Above all, the central accusation not only of the *M*etakritik, but also of *K*onxompax and Golgatha, is that by according reason such ultimate importance, the Enlightenment is worshipping a false idol: *K*ant is just one more example of the growing tendency to put one's faith in reason. This is not a coherent objection to *K*ant's thought or anybody else's. You cannot not have faith in reason, because without it it would be impossible to think at all; but that does not mean believing unquestioningly in the truth of any given conclusion based on rational argument, because the argument is always open to reexamination and debate. Nobody disputed the fallibility of reason in practice. What was at issue was, and remains, how we ought to think. Hamann and *K*ant are in entire agreement that there are certain regions into which reason should not stray, but *K*ant circumscribed the bounds of reason the better to employ it within them to cultivate human ends, and not truly to 'make room for faith'.

Hamann's writing is indeed intricately deliberate, 'rhapsodic' only in his own sense of being a colourful patchwork; but this playful complexity, for all its serious intent, is a matter of wit rather than analytical penetration. Hamann's polemical focus on his opponents leads the reader to expect specific engagement with their ideas, but the substance of his thought lies after all in his own theological system.

Hamann's prophetic mission: a genetic study of three late works against the Enlightenment

For after that in the wisdom of God the world
by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the
foolishness of preaching to save them that believe.

I Cor. 1:21

By Timothy Beech

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Preface

Hamann's writing is uniquely dense, with the result that it cannot really be read in the ordinary way. A good way to read one of his works is to write a commentary on it, and this has been the form of much recent Hamann scholarship. I have attempted to write at one remove of generality from this, but still with a firm textual basis. For these reasons, I have assumed that the reader has Hamann's text to hand; otherwise it would have been necessary to quote nearly every sentence, making my detailed discussions irretrievably congested.

All three works covered can be found in the third volume of the Nadler edition. There are also commentaries on each to which reference is given in the corresponding chapters; except for Oswald Bayer's on the *Metakritik*, these give the pagination and lineation as in Nadler. Variations in the text, all minor, are noted as needed. Following general practice, I have cited letters and works in the editions respectively of Ziesemer and Henkel, and Nadler, as 'B' and 'W'. This is a break with the convention of recent Hamann scholarship, which tends to use 'ZH' or 'H' for the letters, and 'N' for Nadler's *Werke*. But this usage arose while the editions were appearing and in use alongside the older editions of Roth and Gildemeister; now that they are complete, 'B' and 'W' can refer unambiguously to the standard editions of letters and works.

Throughout I have used epigraphs, mostly from the Bible, to emphasise aspects of Hamann's attitudes – not to express my own. This light-hearted device also means to contribute to the serious purpose of giving the reader an orientation in what may be unfamiliar territory, as it certainly was for me.

Many people have helped me while I wrote this study, in various ways, and I would like to thank them all. Professor Oswald Bayer of Tübingen enabled me to spend a fruitful and agreeable year there while I tried to acquire some theological background. I have approached Hamann along rather different lines from his, as may conveniently be indicated by the fact that at one stage

I planned this work as a comparative study of Hamann and Nietzsche – two uncompromising and fiery polemicists on opposite sides of the same Christian fence – but that introduction was indispensable. While I was there, Ingrid and Peter Hellmich made me feel at home in their 'Höhlenwohnung' on the banks of the Neckar. The AHRB funded my research for three years, and before that John McBride gave me decisive financial help while I was reading for the degree of Master of Studies. The committed teaching of the German Department at Birkbeck College helped me get the undergraduate degree that made it all possible in the first place, and Gwen Griffith-Dickson afforded me my first taste of Hamann by including him, unusually, in an undergraduate course there. Wolfson College and its helpful staff provided a congenial environment in which to study. Alec Edgington's creative typesetting has lent my work the visual style of a book within the requirements for the presentation of theses, no mean feat. Friends and family, including Barbara Oster, Paul Webb, Priscilla McBride, Dorothy Edgington and Anne Beech, have given me much-needed personal encouragement and allowed me to bend their ears. John Walker and Kevin Hilliard kindly agreed to be my examiners. Ray Ockenden, Kevin Hilliard, Tony Phelan and Katrin Kohl read early drafts of two chapters for internal assessments. Kevin Hilliard was also a conscientious Faculty Advisor, and Julie Curtis a welcoming College Advisor. Paul Joyce, a theologian, made useful comments on a section of Chapter I on prophecy. Jill Hughes of the Taylorian has been an unfailing support. Last not least, my thanks are due to my supervisor, Jim Reed, who gave me both a completely free hand and plenty of sharp-eyed sympathetic attention, in the best tradition of maieutic pedagogy.

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Introduction

> Sokrates war, meine Herren, kein gemeiner Kunstrichter. Er unterschied in den Schriften des Heraklitus, dasjenige, was er nicht verstand, von dem, was er darin verstand, und that eine sehr billige und bescheidene Vermuthung von dem Verständlichen auf das Unverständliche. Bey dieser Gelegenheit redete Sokrates von *Lesern*, welche *schwimmen* könnten.
>
> *Sokratische Denkwürdigkeiten*, W II 61

The first impression created by Hamann's striking style is of a colourful abundance of impenetrable allusions that do not produce a clear cumulative sense. Hamann seems to refuse the contract between reader and author that demands relevance, directness, clarity. This obscurity is different in kind from that of other demanding authors, though some may make few concessions. They must be read closely if they are to be read at all; nonetheless, the attentive and persistent reader hopes to be rewarded by things falling into place. Hamann baffles this expectation and unsettles the reader without offering even presumptive inclusion to 'them that are without' (Mark 4:11).

A natural reaction is that such obscurity is a pseudo-learned encrustation, an exotic and pretentious texture, merely decorative – within Hamann's peculiar aesthetic; also that it is free association without underlying coherence, spontaneously strung together around a cluster of core themes. This fits in with the reception, going back to 1775,[1] of Hamann as a precursor of Sturm und Drang; in Sven-Aage Jørgensen's neat summary: 'Über den Anreger, den man zum Vorläufer machte, hat man den eigentlichen Hamann vernachlässigt'.[2] The consensus of more recent work on Hamann, backed up by his own remarks on his style and by the texts themselves, is that there is a thread leading out of the labyrinth (cf. B I 311:11, 'Faden').

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[1] See B III 162f, to Hartknoch, 27 Feb 1775. Hamann reports that the *Teutscher Mercur* 'mich zum Oberhaupt einer sehr ansehnlichen Secte und Schule unter den schönen Geistern des deutschen Parnasses creirt und proclamirt hatte', lumping him together with, among others, Klopstock and Herder. *Johann Georg Hamann: Briefwechsel*, vols. I–VII, eds. Walther Ziesemer and Arthur Henkel (from vol. IV Henkel alone), 1955–1979, cited as 'B'.

[2] Johann Georg Hamann: *Sokratische Denkwürdigkeiten: Aesthetica in nuce: Mit einem Kommentar herausgegeben von Sven-Aage Jørgensen*. Stuttgart, Reclam 1998 (1968), p. 191. This volume contains an excellent, clear and brief introduction to Hamann's work as a whole.

It is my contention that the thread is a theological one. That is, the substance of Hamann's thought is not discursive, but lies in the radical application of a complex of conservative Lutheran ideas, firmly founded in the Bible, to Enlightened debates about religion. His critique does not rest on arguments – except for a small stock of anti-intellectual ploys used indifferently against any elaborate system or terminology – but on a sophisticated appeal to Christian faith. To the extent that a given Enlightenment text challenges or threatens Christianity, for Hamann it is thereby already unquestionably in the wrong, and his entire attack sets out to establish the absoluteness of the division between the two, because 'He that is not with me is against me'. Hamann saw, perhaps more clearly than anyone except Kant, that compromise opened the way to secularisation, and he believed that the answer was a return to Christian fundamentals.

Most of Hamann's works are polemical reactions to current intellectual events, commonly a recent publication. Though this background, as well as the education of an eighteenth-century intellectual – for instance in classics and theology – are presumed in the reader, even Hamann's contemporaries found his writing impenetrable; and he explicitly distances himself from the norms of the emerging public sphere.

Some of the difficulty arises from Hamann's intensive dependence on contexts which are now more obscure than they were when he wrote, but he wrote texts which were already difficult in themselves. He often seems to read his targets at cross purposes. Personal, political, intellectual and religious elements are intimately intertwined in the genesis of his works and in his understanding of what they stood for; this means that a biographical and genetic approach to reading them is particularly appropriate and productive; not only does this help in identifying specific allusions and relevant contexts, but it reveals the unity of Hamann's work, and its roots as a whole in his life and circumstances.

Secondly, Hamann generally offers a critique of his opponent rather than an explicit discursive statement of his own position, and this is connected both with his hostility to the public sphere and with his message; indeed his quarrel with the public sphere in a nutshell is that it insists on transparency, but his message can only be approached indirectly, *im Krebsgang* as it were, both for

rhetorical reasons and for reasons of substance – because his difference with the Enlightenment is not ultimately a matter of arguments, so not suited to discursive presentation. Some things, Hamann would say, are in themselves not transparent, but can only be seen 'through a glass darkly' – at least for now, until the Kingdom come (Rev. 12:10).

A more serious difficulty that arises from and compounds the first two is the complexity in detail of Hamann's writing. Anyone who simply picks up one of his books and attempts to read a page is likely to be immediately baffled. The text is thick with allusions, but the structure they are meant to support is not signposted. It is difficult to distinguish assertions in the author's own voice from irony, parody, quotation – or misquotation. The texture is tangled and impenetrable, the reader utterly dependent on his own resources to find a way in, through or out.

Previous work on Hamann may be divided into two phases, before and after the war. Scholars such as Joseph Nadler, the editor of the standard edition of the works, and Rudolf Unger, the author of *Hamann und die Aufklärung*, attempted to make sense of Hamann as the instigator of Sturm und Drang and, beyond it, romanticism. They saw Hamann as an inspired subjectivist who flung his texts together in a creative frenzy. Instead of 'mikrologischer Detailkommentar' Unger proposes 'eine Analyse des grundsätzlichen Ideengehalts der schwierigen Schrift [i.e. *Aesthetica*]' (p. 241); because he thinks Hamann's work consists of 'Worte sibyllinischer Begeisterung' (p. 264), this means explaining it in terms of *Geistesgeschichte* rather than from the structure of the text. In the same vein, but taking a more negative view of the result, Isaiah Berlin's *The Magus of the North*[3] conveys Hamann's dark richness and passion, but not his coherence.

The subtitle of one of Hamann's better known works, *Aesthetica in nuce*, lent support to such interpretations: 'Rhapsodie in kabbalistischer Prose'. Germanists took a particular interest in this text because its apparent preoccupation with aesthetics suggests it might throw some light on literary developments influenced by Hamann, and that is indeed the case, to the extent that other writers took *Aesthetica* as a programme – but influence may depend on misinterpretation. The most distinguished example is Goethe, who was introduced to Hamann's writing early on by

[3] Isaiah Berlin, *The Magus of the North. J.G. Hamann and the origins of modern irrationalism*. London, Murray 1993. This book was based on a draft of thirty years earlier.

Herder.[4] In fact the book's topic was biblical hermeneutics; it is a polemic against Johann David Michaelis's edition of Lowth's lectures on Hebrew poetry. That debate is certainly relevant to questions of style in contemporary literature, but Hamann's interest lies in what it means for reading the Bible.[5]

The subtitle is informative, but not in the way one might first assume. To modern ears, the word 'rhapsody' suggests the Dionysian abandonment of orderly structure in favour of spontaneous creative expression. Perhaps this meaning, in German at least, owes something to Hamann's use of the word here. But the Greek word simply means a recital of epic poetry, and is derived from a verb 'to stitch together' – other men's words. Hamann's epigraph at the bottom of the title page picks out this sense: 'colourful sewn clothes as booty, worked colourful cloths around my neck as booty' (Judges 5:30). This is an indication of his method, to string together fragments of his opponents' words – triumphantly, having defeated them. At the same time, confusingly (the confusion is typical) it is a criticism of their own piecemeal method when it comes to the Bible, as is shown by the context of the quotation, itself a prime example of the parallelism discovered by Lowth: Sisera's mother thinks the riders come bearing spoil after victory in battle, but in fact Sisera has been killed. Hamann is announcing his intention to beat Michaelis at his own game.

This complexity is an indicative illustration of how difficult it can be to read Hamann without getting bogged down in the details. Earlier scholars, before the war, nonetheless attempted to do so using the usual methods, which at the time also meant an emphasis on literary movements and intellectual trends within them. There was thus a tendency to shoehorn Hamann into his role as a

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[4] He found the experience confusing, as he records in *Dichtung und Wahrheit*, Hamburger Ausgabe IX 409. The influence on his style in *Von deutscher Baukunst* was pernicious, he later felt: 'so aber verhüllte ich, durch Hamanns und Herders Beispiel verführt, diese ganz einfachen Gedanken und Betrachtungen in eine Staubwolke von seltsamen Worten und Phrasen, und verfinsterte das Licht, das mir aufgegangen war, für mich und andere', IX 508. The following from his general assessment of Hamann's works on p. 514f seems especially worth quoting: 'Schlägt man sie auf, so gibt es abermals ein zweideutiges Doppellicht, das uns höchst angenehm erscheint, nur muß man durchaus auf das Verzicht tun, was man gewöhnlich Verstehen nennt. ... Jedesmal, wenn man sie aufschlägt, glaubt man etwas Neues zu finden, weil der einer jeden Seite innewohnende Sinn uns auf eine vielfache Weise berührt und aufregt.' IX 515.

[5] For a helpful introduction to the hermeneutic tradition on which Hamann draws, see Jørgensen's article 'Hamanns hermeneutische Grundsätze' in Wolfenbütteler Studien zur Aufklärung, vol. 6. Heidelberg, Verlag Lambert Schneider 1980, pp. 219–231.

percursor of later developments, and even to see him as representative of his period, combining, albeit idiosyncratically, elements that were nonetheless common property of the Zeitgeist.[6]

It was only when theologians discovered Hamann that the deliberate intricacy of his writing began to be appreciated and systematically studied.[7] But Hamann announced it at the inception of his Christian authorship; for example, in the second preface of *Sokratische Denkwürdigkeiten* Hamann says how he hopes his intended readers will understand him: 'Wo ein gemeiner Leser nichts als *Schimmel* sehen möchte, wird der Affect der Freundschaft Ihnen, Meine Herren, in diesen Blättern vielleicht ein mikroskopisch Wäldchen entdecken' (W II 61). He later expanded on this image:

> Hier ist der Verfasser in seinem Elemente und der Schimmel seiner Einfälle ist in der That nichts anders als ein mikroskopisches Wäldchen von satyrischen Erdschwämmen, witzigen Pfifferlingen, blühenden Isop, der an der Wand wächst, aufgedunsenen Melonen, kritischen Nüssen ...[8]

This shows that Hamann's complexity was a deliberately cultivated strategy. The title page of *Aesthetica* is a case in point: the more you look, the more you see. I have just argued that the connotations of Hamann's use of the word 'Rhapsodie' do not include enthusiastic inspiration; but the quotation from Plato on the first page of the text introduces that very resonance, present in the classical conception of poetic inspiration by the Muses. The quotation at the head of the page of the opening lines of Horace's first Roman ode, with its religious language ('Musarum sacerdos', priest of the Muses) reinforces this. However, the real point for Hamann is that Hebrew scripture

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[6]The weakness of this approach is exemplified in the following sentence taken from a discussion by Unger of the various components of Hamann's intellectual makeup, including his 'Sinnen- und Triebleben', transfused with religious feeling: 'Auch hier zielte der Grundzug der geistigen Bewegung letzten Endes auf den konkreten und objektiven Idealismus ab, wie die von Hamann zu Herder, der Romantik, Schelling, Hegel und Schleiermacher fortgehende Entwicklungslinie beweist' (Unger p. 234). The argument is circular.

[7] Hamann's style has been analysed both in monographs on the style as such, especially Büchsel 1953, Hoffmann 1972, and in commentaries on individual works or detailed studies, especially the series 'Hamanns Hauptschriften erklärt', Lumpp 1970 on *Aesthetica*, Baur 1991 on Hamann's journalism, and Bayer 2002 on the *Metakritik*, that demonstrate its micrological deliberateness sentence by sentence. Drawing on these detailed conclusions, there are now several more general theological treatments of Hamann, including Gründer 1958, Bayer 1987, and Griffith-Dickson 1995. In addition to the Reclam edition mentioned above, the Germanist Sven-Aage Jørgensen has written a study in the series 'Sammlung Metzler', as well as a number of informative articles. Hegel's 1828 essay on Hamann, a review of Roth's edition of the works, is surprisingly perceptive for its time, and especially useful as a biographical summary. Hegel, 'Hamann's Schriften', in vol. 11 of the Suhrkamp edition of Hegel, pp. 275–352.

[8]W II 272. In 1763 Hamann published a pamphlet containing real and mock reviews of *Kreuzzüge* together with his comments, from which this passage is taken.

is divinely inspired, not in the sense of this mythical topos, but by the Holy Spirit; and so is he, because he speaks in God's cause.

Much recent work on Hamann takes the form of commentaries that tease out the allusions as I have done in part for the title page of *Aesthetica*, and this is so nearly the only way of reading him that more discursive studies – including this one – inevitably slip in and out of the same mode; but there is an apparent problem, which occurs at every turn, about how to take things. Why not understand the Horace and Plato quotations as an invitation to read the word 'Rhapsodie' the other way, as suggesting an exuberant outpouring? The epigraph from Judges could be sufficiently explained as being exuberant in itself, and a prominent textual example debated by Lowth and Michaelis; and after all, there had always been a kinship between religious and poetic ecstasy. The specifically religious resonance Hamann attaches to the idea of 'enthusiasm' – the German 'Begeisterung' captures the etymology of the Greek word, except that there it is a god, 'theos', at its heart rather than a spirit – could be taken as merely programmatic, not substantive. But as the reader begins to sense Hamann's position and its contraries, above all his religious allegiance and his suspicion of the Enlightenment, and once certain recurrent clusters of associations become familiar (for instance, Enlightenment–Lucifer–Babel–Berlin) a sense of understanding gradually emerges. With other authors, this process is smoother even if it may be far from perfunctory; but though familiarity makes Hamann's texts a little easier to disentangle (though still always knotty) there is a particular danger, because he gives the reader so little help, that the pattern in which they begin to make sense is of the reader's own making.

It was indeed Hamann's intention that the reader should give the essential core of truth 'einen Leib wie er will'[9] provided he accept it, so this would not matter to him as long as his fundamental evangelical purpose was served; moreover, he can hardly have expected his contemporaries to read him with quite the concentrated and sustained philological attention normally reserved for scripture, so the confusion must be part of the intended effect. But just as the scholarship he attacked in *Aesthetica* treats scripture as a set of human documents, 'a book like any other',

[9] B I 335; see the discussion in Chapter I of Hamann on Chladenius and Augustine's hermeneutics.

rather than a vehicle for religious truth, the Germanist must try to read Hamann himself disinterestedly – something it was his whole purpose to prevent.

That certainly means recognising his religious and philosophical outlook. The compass that Hamann held more firmly than the bulk of his contemporaries, and with an assurance that few even among theologians can today probably equal, was scripture, with which he was intimately familiar in an age that in any case remained suffused with it in school and church, Enlightenment notwithstanding. His texts are bursting at the seams with scriptural allusions that carry with them associations of theological argument which on examination prove largely to structure his thought. Whereas quotations from Hamann's targets may be ironic in unstable ways, the Bible is for him the rock of ages, the touchstone of truth, a stumbling-block for the ungodly. For this reason, his writing lends itself particularly well to exegesis of just the kind that theologians employ on the Bible, itself a tissue of allusions, echoes and ambiguities. But systematic and dogmatic theologians do not read the Bible 'wie gute alte Philologen ihren Horaz lasen' (Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*, 'Warum ich so gute Bücher schreibe' §6),[10] but as a doctrinal authority against which to measure their own theological concepts, and a basic framework within which to accommodate their positions. This is one intelligible way to read a sacred text, and within the context of belief, perhaps it is the most important one. What, for example, does the Bible say about marriage or homosexuality in modern circumstances rather than in the Ancient Near East? What is the Koran's view of relations between Muslim and infidel? Anyone who looks to scripture with the eye of faith must expect it to have something meaningful to contribute in the present, and it is part of the job of theology to articulate and discipline this hermeneutics.

Because Hamann took it upon himself to be a spokesman for the Word, a 'Prediger in der Wüsten' (W III 291), he can be read in something of the same way, as indeed he wished to be. Even if done with philological tact, this presents several dangers.

Given the degree of imaginative engagement Hamann's texts require if the reader is to follow his leaps and twists, it is easy to read more sense into a given passage, word or resonance than is

[10] Kritische Studienausgabe, 2nd ed. by Colli and Montinari, Munich, De Gruyter 1988, p. 305.

actually there; the author did not necessarily decide on or intend a specific interpretation, and the very difficulty was meant to open the way in for readers with differing starting-points, seeing 'fruit concealed in them, to which to which they fly in delight, chirping as they seek for it and pluck it.'[11]

There is no substantial disagreement as to the broad outlines of Hamann's theological position, but this open-ended style matters more when it comes to assessing his view of those he attacked. The literature, by theologians not philosophers, is all but unanimous in ascribing to him a profound understanding of Kant, accepting uncritically Hamann's claim to have seen through the sophistry of pure reason. But when the supposed insight must be painstakingly reconstructed from obscure hints, it is all the more important to guard against the hermeneutic circle. I have tried to do so by attending to the wider context of the works Hamann attacked. I seek to provide a critical assessment of Hamann's response to the contemporary scene, and an explanation of it, rather than to excavate theological insights for modern times. For this reason, I have little to say about much of the more general work on Hamann by theologians. My disagreement with them does not rest on points of detail, but arises from the different aims of the disciplines of intellectual history and theology, and is everywhere the same: I believe I have shown that Hamann's response to the individual authors he targeted is undifferentiated, and that the roots of the complex of ideas and attitudes he draws on each time lie in Lutheran theology, not in fresh intellectual engagement. That is, after all, unsurprising, because the claims of faith, at any rate in the radical form that Hamann advanced them, do not pretend to rest on argument.

This study is an investigation of three late works, *Konxompax* (1779), the *Metakritik über den Purismum der Vernunft* (c. 1784), and *Golgatha und Scheblimini!* (1784). The last two are intimately linked genetically, and they have their roots in the concerns of *Konxompax* and before. Though all three texts are given equal weight, Hamann's attack on Kant has a central place because Kant's stature as a thinker makes this a good test case both for appreciating Hamann's answering strengths and for the usefulness for that purpose of the approach taken here. As it turns out, the attitude of

[11] Augustine, *Confessions*, XII 28/38; see Chapter I for Hamann's conversion of this hermeneutic principle into a maxim of style.

all three works is remarkably similar, given the variety of their targets; by and large, the elements Hamann picks out to attack are generic Enlightenment traits rather than views specific to each author.

Hamann's hostility to the *Kritik der reinen Vernunft* is already explained by his general attitude to Enlightenment thought, of which Kant's book was a monumental and decisive example. In order to understand why Hamann attacked it in the way that he did, or perhaps, better, why he applied his now established method to this text and not another – he often enough chooses minor targets – it will help to establish a broader context and Kant's place within it. That boils down to two questions: what were Hamann's own concerns as reflected in his other polemical works, particularly recent ones; and what links Kant's book, in Hamann's eyes, to those concerns? In other words, a genetic approach is called for. The *Metakritik* shows continuities of thought further before and after, but a convenient cut-off point for establishing its context is 1778, when Hamann's muse stirred again after several unproductive years. I propose to answer the first question on the basis of Hamann's letters and the major work of the preceding years, *Konxompax*.

Konxompax, which was a response (not quite a contribution)[12] to the Fragmentenstreit, deals in broad terms with the same issues as the *Metakritik*. This connection between works with quite different immediate topics will illuminate the latter text, but it then also means that *Konxompax* can serve as an example of Hamann's approach in its own right, parallel to the polemic of both the *Metakritik* and *Golgatha*, a reply to Mendelssohn's *Jerusalem*.

Chapter I prepares the ground for these studies of individual works by describing the circumstances that first led Hamann to take up his pen in the cause of Christ. Tracing the development of his sense of prophetic mission will illuminate both his unique way of reading and writing, derived from a piece of Augustinian hermeneutics meant for the Bible alone, after all not 'a book like any other', and also the typological view of history that justified Hamann, he felt, in stepping forward. The light in which he saw his world and within it the texts he attacked is also the light in which his own work makes sense.

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[12]Though Hamann, pleased at the speedy publication of his book, wrote to Herder: 'Ich meynte doch etwas zur Sache und für den gegenwärtigen Augenblick gesagt zu haben.' B IV 80:10f, 17.5.1779.

'Moses brauchte nicht seinethalben, sondern des Volkes wegen, eine Decke': the origins and aims of Hamann's style and *Autorschaft*

Ihr Mund ist glatter als Butter
und haben doch Krieg im Sinn;
ihre Worte sind linder als Öl
und sind doch gezückte Schwerter

Psalm 55:22

Cease ye from man, whose breath is in his nostrils:
for wherein is he to be accounted of?

Isaiah 2:22

In this chapter I will show how Hamann's purposes and preoccupations first led him to write such striking texts through a sketch of the circumstances leading up to the writing of *Sokratische Denkwürdigkeiten*, the first product of Hamann's 'Autorschaft', as he called it.[1] This will involve delving into private matters which are primarily interesting because of their impact on Hamann the writer, not as an accidental first impulse but as the germ of the style and the substance, Hamann *in nuce*. Specifically, I hope to explain the factors which led Hamann to turn from letter-writing to writing for publication, resolving the tensions of his life hitherto through the decision to become an author. Just because these ingredients become harder to recognise as they develop and unfold, they repay close examination at the beginning.

[1] Hamann regularly wrote reviews, articles and translations as well as texts not meant for publication, like *Biblische Betrachtungen*. Sharply distinguished from these, not least stylistically, were the works of his 'Autorschaft' – serious statements to the world as opposed to private jottings, ephemera or hackwork.

From *Hofmeister* to Author

After studying in Königsberg, where he jointly produced a student magazine, *Daphne*,[2] Hamann spent several years working as a *Hofmeister* at Grünhof, near Riga. He then went to London on business for the international firm of Berens; this was arranged by his student friend Johann Christoph Berens. Hamann's commercial mission did not bear fruit, but he spent nearly a year in London, isolated and in financial difficulties. While there, he experienced a religious conversion. On his return he proposed to Berens's sister, but was rejected. His new faith brought him into conflict with the cultural and commercial values of his friend, and Berens tried to talk him round. This led to a quarrel and to the composition of *Sokratische Denkwürdigkeiten*, marking Hamann's definitive commitment to his new vocation as a Christian author.

From the start Hamann had shown an interest in writing and discussed intellectual interests in letters; he was also not irreligious – see e.g. B I 130, to his parents and brother, 28.12.55. The frustrations of working as a *Hofmeister* mark the beginning of a lifelong pattern of employment beneath his talents, and found expression in print in the 'Beylage zu Dangeuil', an appendix to Hamann's translation of a work on trade.[3]

This project, undertaken for Berens, seems to have been a first step towards Hamann's commission to travel to London on behalf of the firm. In the summer of 1755[4] he spent a few months away from his job at Grünhof, staying in nearby Riga with his friend Johann Gotthelf Lindner. When he returned to Grünhof on improved terms in December (B III 124), he began working in earnest on the translation (B I 125:31).

The *Beylage* is unusual in its personal character, which Hamann defends in a letter to his brother: 'Du wirst übrigens einer gewißen Art allgemeine Wahrheiten individuel vorzutragen um

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[2] *Daphne: Nachdruck der von Johann Georg Hamann, Johann Gotthelf Lindner u.a. herausgegebenen Königsberger Zeitschrift (1749–1750)*, ed. Joseph Kohnen. Frankfurt am Main, Peter Lang 1991. The attribution of particular pieces to Hamann is disputed, and the magazine was in any case a joint effort.

[3] *Remarques sur les avantages et les désavantages de la France et de la Grande Bretagne par rapport au commerce et aux autres sources de la puissance des États.* Traduction de l'Anglois du Chevalier John Nickolls. Seconde Édition à Leyde, 1754. Louis Joseph Plumard de Dangeul. 'Nickolls' is an invention; 'Dangeuil' is a mistake. This was Hamann's first substantial independent publication; W IV 225:242.

[4] From July, B III 118. It seems to have been absence without leave.

sie desto sinnlicher v[nd] lebhafter zu machen nicht ungewohnt seyn' (B I 195:2). Unsurprisingly, the essay as a whole is about the benefits of trade. However, Hamann begins with the praise of friendship. It is to friendship, to the 'Vereinigung vertraulicher Seelen', that he owes the ideas he is about to set down. He then describes the difficulties of his job as a pedagogue, which he sees as primarily a moral task (W IV 227:43, 228:6). Though the transition is not clearly explained ('Meine Denkungsart hat mich in die Fremde getrieben'), given Hamann's recent absence the implied contrast is between interesting conversations in Riga with Berens, the merchant ('dem Umgange des besten Freundes' (227:12), and the isolation and humiliation of a position in the country in the service of aristocrats – 'Wie kann man seinen Stand der Schöpfung und Gesellschaft erniedrigt sehen, ohne sich und andere unerträglich zu finden?' (228:35). This would explain the relevance of this material to the discussion making up the bulk of the *Beylage*, in which Hamann argues that the benefits brought by merchants should be rewarded with higher status, an 'Adel der Kaufleute' (234:12, cf. :39), as the military achievements had been on which the security of the state depended in the past; such recognition would also encourage merchants to behave morally and not just out of self-interest (231, 235f). In addition, it would mark a shift of relative status in favour of merchants. The connection between this and the discontents of tutoring would have been clear enough to Hamann's friends, but not to the general reader interested in trade; so it looks as if the *Beylage* was partly intended as a private communication, perhaps with a view to firming up a tentative job offer from Berens.[5] It is certainly a strong statement of Hamann's personal commitment to the ideology of commerce, and to improving the social status of the bourgeoisie.

The essay is also indignant, and apart from its favourable view of merchants has much in common with Hamann's later political thought.[6] His criticism of arbitrary power, for instance, seems to be aimed at feudalism:

> Damals wurde der Fürst bald ein bewaffneter Hobbes, bald ein Urbild des Macchiavell, bald ein Vespasian, der durch Zöllner und Vampyren regierte, bald ein Pfaffendiener. Seine Neigungen, sein Hof und gewisse Stände setzen sich an die Stelle des gemeinen Wesens. Man ahmte jenen Weltweisen nach, welche die Erde zum Mittelpunkt des ganzen Weltgebäudes aufnahmen. (229:38)

[5] By 20th May this decision seems to have been taken, B I 200:33; even if this refers only to the decision to visit his parents, the discussion which follows mentions becoming a merchant, 201:31.

[6] Hamann defends his 'Härte' and 'Empfindlichkeit': 'Des Nächsten Unrecht ist für keinen eine fremde Sache.' B I 175f, to his brother, 10.4.1756.

Geocentrism stands for both intellectual backwardness and secular, materialist priorities, managed by the sinister 'gewisse Stände'. This resembles the tone of Hamann's later criticism of Frederick the Great (though here he also praises the latter's policy of encouraging industrial production and childbirth, 232:9–15), and the next paragraph describes present ills, which suggests the present is the true subject throughout:

> Wie mancher entschließt sich des täglichen Brods wegen und aus Menschenfurcht knechtisch zu kriechen und meineidisch zu werden? Opfert eure Gesundheit, eure Gaben, eure Zeit, euer Gewissen auf; der Thor von Geburt wird euren Verlust weit unter die Hoffnung einer Spielkarte setzen. Begnügt euch großmüthig daran, daß man sich eure Dienste gefallen läßt. (229f)

Hamann brings together his personal experience, of high-handed loose-living aristocrats who did not adequately support him in his pedagogical task, with the political views to which that experience contributed.[7] The positive side of those views – for instance, that inequality of resources is a providential stimulus to productive activity (230:28–49) – is less distinctive and less impassioned in tone than the criticism of existing abuses.

The essay foreshadows Hamann's later work not so much in its themes, though there are continuities, as in the way the themes arise out of personal circumstances and in the way they are presented; rather than addressing himself to the generalised notional audience, the potential readership, Hamann has the specific individuals in mind who provided his intellectual stimulus. Later that might mean a public figure whom Hamann only knew through his printed works, for instance Johann David Michaelis, but the habit of personal, very often indignant response remained.

In London, Hamann recorded his intensive self-examination and Bible reading in the wake of his conversion in texts which were not intended for publication. They are stylistically straightforward in the sense that author and reader, being one and the same person, cannot second-guess each other.[8] Hamann records his thoughts without polemic, show of erudition, staging, or intertextuality, except as overt commentary, particularly in *Biblische Betrachtungen*.

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[7] For Hamann's frustrations as a *Hofmeister*, cf. B I 29, 46ff (on Hamann's departure from his first post), 75, 80f, 90, 118, 138f, 153, 166f, 176:5ff; W II 23–25 (*Gedanken über meinen Lebenslauf*). Though his remarks on his employers at Grünhof are on balance favourable, he still found the job itself limiting.

[8] 'Mein Lebenslauf läßt sich nicht durchblättern – und mit Eckel lesen.' B I 308:27; Berens is simply not equipped to understand it. In contrast to *Sokratische Denkwürdigkeiten*, it was not written with him, or anyone, in mind as a reader.

On his return, Hamann spent the last few months of 1758 in Riga before going back to Königsberg in January (B I 289f). His letters document three ongoing disagreements with their roots in this period. Hamann undertook a pedagogical correspondence with his former Grünhof pupils, using his successor Gottlob Immanuel Lindner as intermediary. This led to misunderstandings. Hamann's brother Johann Christoph took up a teaching post at the Riga school run by Johann Gotthelf Lindner, Hamann's student friend, but his professional performance did not live up to Lindner's expectations. Finally, Hamann quarrelled with Berens, leaving traces in his correspondence with Lindner, who tried to mediate, apparently at the request of Berens (B I 306:5). These letters will be the main focus of this chapter. Hamann's break with Berens represented the abandonment of his professional ambitions as a merchant, and it was perhaps sealed by the rejection of his proposal of marriage to Berens's sister Katharina. It also symbolised Hamann's change of ideological allegiance, so that it is no accident that these bitternesses were the catalyst of Hamann's *Autorschaft*.

Between private correspondence and pastoral epistles: content, procedure and style in Hamann's letters of 1759

Hamann's correspondence with Berens himself is lost, but it is discussed in the letters to Lindner, with whom Hamann then also came into conflict. Berens tried to convince Hamann of the error of his ways, Hamann resisted; given the nature of the dispute, there was nothing for it but for them to agree to differ. The initial disagreement raised procedural questions that led Hamann to reflect on his style. These three elements cannot be neatly separated, but they lead conveniently into each other in that order. The content is important because of its thematic continuity with Hamann's published work, and especially because it brings out political and social factors which are not always later apparent. The procedural questions provide the template for Hamann's disagreement with the mainstream Enlightenment. The stylistic reflections and experiments of these letters

are the basis of Hamann's characteristic style as an author, and the interdependence of style, procedure and content appears most clearly at its inception.

Content

A central point of contention was the charge that Hamann, after all an employee of the Berens firm, rejected productive hard work in favour of 'Schwärmerey'[9]. His reply was that 'Bibellesen und Beten ist die Arbeit eines Christen' (B I 309:9f), that caring for his sick father was now his 'Beruf' (307:37), and that it was none of Berens's business: 'Ich gönne ihm seine Geschäfte; und Er soll mir meine Muße gönnen' (304:1f; cf. 306:22f). In any case, the *vita contemplativa* is 'work': 'Wahrheiten sind Metalle die unter der Erde wachsen. Graben mag er nicht – das allein heißt arbeiten, ... ohngeachtet diese Arbeit in nichts besteht als Wegräumen der Erde und Schwitzen des Antlitzes' (304:19ff). He appeals to the classical ideal of *otium* as the prerequisite for creative achievement,[10] as well as to the 'Eins ist Not' of the story of Mary and Martha.[11]

Berens seems to have suggested 'useful' literary activities (305:25f), a line pursued later when Kant became involved,[12] but Hamann felt he could not serve two masters. The secular power, and the secular culture, were the modern-day mammon: 'Wie lange ist Rom Babel gescholten worden und besteht noch – die starke Stadt! Sie hieß zu alten Zeiten Valentia und die Troianer nannten sie in ihrer Sprache Roma. Publicum, Commercium, Familie!'[13] Hamann appeals, via Luther's anti-catholic rhetoric, to Augustine's opposition between the City of God and the secular authorities, but his ideological summary shows that the target is contemporary, in keeping with the history of the topos. The inclusion of the public sphere in this political list is a key feature of Hamann's thought.

The immediate reason for Hamann's rejection of commercial and wordly ideals was his involvement with the firm and family of Berens, a professional failure which had developed into

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[9] B I 307:14, to Lindner, 21st March 1759. Most of the letter deals with this point.

[10] B I 311:23, to Lindner, 31st March 1759.

[11] B I 305:27f, cf. Luke 10:38–42.

[12] See the undated letters to Kant, B I 444ff, where a 'Kinderphysik' is discussed as a joint project.

[13] B I 305:32ff. The Greek ῥώμη was the word both for the city and for 'strength', occasioning puns and etymological speculation. Militarism should thus be added to the list of false idols, supporting the contemporary Prussian reference. Hamann often later refers to Berlin as 'Babel'.

the personal disaster of his rejected marriage proposal. Possibly Hamann's conversion itself entails such views, but the occasion of their development was his relationship with the Berenses and his reflection on it. In retrospect he sees the break as an escape, not a lucky escape but evidence of divine protection: 'Bin ich nicht mitten unter ihnen und in ihrer Gewalt gewesen; warum hat mich keiner beißen können' (301:2ff). The Berenses were Hamann's exemplar of godlessness:

> Wenn Gottes Gerichte Länder treffen, so gehen sie auch Häuser, Familien und die Glieder derselben an. Es heißt im Gesetz: Der Herr wird Dich schlagen mit Wahnsinn, Blindheit und Rasen des Herzens; und wirst tappen im Mittage wie ein Blinder im Dunkeln und wirst auf Deinem Wege kein Glück haben – und man kann die Worte dieses Fluches hören und dennoch sich selbst in seinen Herzen seegnen und sprechen: es gehet mir wohl, weil ich wandle wie es mein Herz lüstet – weil die Trunkenheit den Durst vermehrt. (301:21ff, to Hamann's brother, 14.3.59)

That is, satisfaction with the course of one's life could always be mistaken, like a drunk's confidence. It is possible to get things completely wrong and not know it. As in the case of Job's suffering, this can be not so much divine punishment as a test (cf. 301:13, 'prüfen und läutern'). Hamann thus sees in his friend his own dilemma and his own past:

> Er bleibt immer bey seinem Gesichtspunkt und fürchtet sich so bald er denselben verliert, daß alles dabey mit verschwindet, weil er Sich selbst darinn nicht mehr zurückgeworfen findet. Ich kenne seine Lage so genau, weil ich selbst darinn gewesen bin, ich kenne die Befremdungen, die Wüste, worinn wir gerathen, wenn wir aus der Sclaverey uns[erer] Leidenschafften ausgehen, und durch wie viel Fratzengesichter wir eingeschreckt werden[14]

This seems to conflate the 'Höllenfahrt der Selbsterkenntnis' with the self-satisfied state preceding it, but Hamann had always been subject to episodes of self-doubt. Theologically, it corresponds to the *usus elenchticus legis*: sin calls down purifying judgement, but perhaps not in an orderly temporal sequence. Whether he knows and feels it or not, the sinner is always and by definition turned away from God and grace. His very difficulty is to recognise this lack.

Reason, for Hamann, is not a reliable guide on the road to God, not a sufficient criterion of religious truth:

> Gott hat sie an einen Ort gesetzt, den ihr in ihrer Rhetoric nicht findet, auch nicht in eurer Philosophie noch Politic[.] derselbe Ort

[14] B I 306:7ff, to Lindner, 21st March 1759; cf. 307:14f: 'so laß er meine Schwärmerey nicht als ein alienum quid ansehen, das ihn nicht befallen könne.'

> heißt Glaube, in welchem alle Dinge stehen, die wir weder sehen noch begreifen können. Wer dieselbe will sichtbar, scheinlich und begreiflich machen, wie ihr thut, der hat das Herzeleid und Heulen zu Lohn[15]

Hamann's point is the unreliability of any merely human faculty. He goes on to describe the parallel insufficiency of emotion: 'Freylich, geliebtester Freund, ist unser Herz der gröste Betrüger, und wehe dem, der sich auf selbiges verläßt. Diesem gebornen Lügner zum Trotz bleibt aber Gott doch treu.'[16] But Hamann's suspicion does include reason, and the method which he rejects is reliance on reason alone.[17] This stance distanced him from the intellectual programme of the Enlightenment as he understood it, beginning with the person of Berens, and was to remain a preoccupation of his work. Hamann's reading of Hume's *Essays* furnished him, in the form of Hume's radical scepticism, with a persistent motif suggested by Hume's ironic remarks at the end of the essay on miracles. Since reason alone is insufficient to convince us of the truth of Christianity, faith must depend on a continual miracle. Hamann suggests, as an updating of Pauline theology for the eighteenth century, that the function of reason is to convince us of its insufficiency, just as in Christianity the Law, far from making us just, serves to bring home our incapacity to fulfil it, and the need for grace.[18]

Berens made reasoned, perhaps sophistical objections, whereas Hamann's position could not in his view be defended by reason alone, but only on the basis of personal experience which, being an individual matter and with no claim to general validity, is not an objective argument: 'der Glaube ist nicht jedermanns Ding, sondern *Gottes Werk*' (B I 306:4), meaning not so much that it is not for everyone as that it is not something everyone has automatic access to, so it is

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[15] B I 296f. This is a quotation from a letter of Luther to Melanchthon, WA BR 5 406:56–62. Luther is talking about his decision to break with Rome. The immediate application ('sie') is Hamann's new religious course. For the 'all too human' defeasibility of reason cf. B I 300:6ff: 'Wenn eine Mutter nicht einmal weiß, was die Natur in ihrem Eingeweide bildet: wie sollte unsere Vernunft etwas davon begreifen können, was Gott in uns würkt ...'

[16] B I 297:11ff, cf. 292:4f, 'bauen Sie nicht auf die Empfindung Ihres Glaubens denn sie ist oft ein Betrug uns. Fleisches und Blutes'. This clearly states Hamann's opposition to subjectivism.

[17] Cf. B I 306f against Descartes and Buffon. Descartes's doubt smuggled in 'einen Chatechismum und sein eigen Selbst als 2 wichtige Wahrheiten'; Hamann sets Buffon's scientific hypothesis of the formation of the planets through the collision of a comet with the sun against the authority of the Mosaic account. Cf. also 243:4ff, describing the name of Christ as 'der Schlüssel der Erkenntniß'. (I Pet. 4:14, 16; James 2:7).

[18] The *usus elenchticus legis*. B I 355f, to Lindner, 3rd July 1759; cf. B I 379f, to Kant, 27th July 1759, also 355f, to Lindner, 3.7.59. '... we may conclude, that the *Christian Religion* not only was at first attended with miracles, but even at this day cannot be believed by any reasonable person without one.' Hume, 'Of miracles', in: *Hume on Miracles*, ed. S. Tweymann. Bristol, Thoemmes Press 1996, p. 20.

misplaced to demand an argued foundation which would convince anyone regardless of individual circumstances; each person must find their own way, God willing. Faith is primarily a matter of revelation, not of reason. According to Hamann's implied account, he therefore felt from early on in the dispute that there was nothing for it but for him and Berens to agree to differ, and it was Berens who insisted on having it out. In any case, their disagreement brought home to Hamann the parallel disagreement between his conception of faith and what he saw as the conflicting claims of Enlightenment thought as exemplified by Berens: the relationship between faith and reason, the manner of their conflict and coexistence, was a central theme of the Enlightenment, culminating in Germany in Kant's proposed resolution in the first *Critique* which Hamann's *Metakritik* was to attack.

Rather, experience, in an existential rather than empirical sense,[19] is the way to discover the truth, Hamann maintains, and only the right experiences would make it possible to understand his religious convictions: 'Ihre Leidenschaften, die ihre Lehrer sind, müßen gestürzt werden über den Fels; so wird man *denn – denn* – hören können, meine Lehre, daß sie lieblich sey' (B I 328:2ff, cf. Psalm 141:6). To find the way to true faith, you have to experience the poverty of the alternative at first hand. So Hamann's *Lebenslauf*, the autobiographical account of his conversion and return to Riga, though outwardly straighforward, must inevitably remain opaque to the wrong readers: 'Herr Berens wird noch Zeit nöthig haben und ganz andere Erfahrungen, als er bisher gehabt oder kennt, ehe er vieles darinn, so wie in meinen Briefen, verstehen kann' (308:30ff). Stylistic clarity does not guarantee transparency of meaning; the background, and attitude, of the reader may still be a stumbling-block.

The substantive issues of the dispute, as far as they are mentioned in Hamann's correspondence with Lindner, are intertwined in a way which was to remain characteristic throughout his work. Bourgeois industriousness, trade, and secular Enlightenment are set against the religious life.[20] For Hamann, the moral poverty of the work ethic was mirrored in the dominant intellectual currents of the time; Enlightenment faith in reason was just the expression

[19] Recalling Luther's *theologia experimentalis* and *vita passiva* – in contrast to the classical opposition contemplativa/ activa.

[20] For the inclusion of trade as well as Enlightenment, cf. B I 306f, where Hamann applies to trade Pauline motifs which he associates elsewhere with rationalism; cf. I Cor. 1:23, 2:12–15.

in the intellectual sphere of a corrupt outlook on life based on human ends alone and measured by human rather than divine criteria. This raised issues of method and procedure within the dispute. Indeed the substance cannot here be sharply divided from the method, and reason for example is both a disputed rhetorical strategy and a topic. Within the sequence of letters under discussion, the argument turned from the concrete points of difference (which did not need repeating) to the procedural difficulties which hindered a resolution; these are essentially the same as Hamann's procedural differences with the Enlightenment. They may loosely be put under the two headings 'neutrality' and 'objectivity'.

Procedure

Hamann's dissatisfaction with the supposedly level playing field of the emerging public sphere was brought home to him by Lindner's failure to mediate effectively between his two friends. He had been chosen for this role by Berens (306:5) and Hamann, conscious of his difficulty in putting his own case across, asked Lindner to explain things better on his behalf, in particular his letter to Berens: 'Weil mein Brief schlecht geschrieben ist ... so ersuche Sie um die große Gefälligkeit denselben ihm vorzulesen, und wo Sie können ein Exeget zu seyn' (310:11ff). Lindner returned the letter with annotations, making further criticisms in his covering letter. Hamann's reply of 27th April (314–330) was followed by the reflections in his next letter to Lindner on Chladenius's remarks on the style of Christian apologetic. These reflections are the first that imply authorship rather than letter-writing, and it seems plausible to regard this as the point when Hamann's frustration in making a private case led him to the thought of publication.

In any case, Hamann was incensed.[21] He felt that Lindner's professed neutrality was betrayed by his toleration of Berens's treatment, unfair in Hamann's view, and by his failure to mediate Hamann's argument, which he admitted was clumsily expressed ('hart und grob', passim). Such neutrality lacked the saving grace of friendship (321:7). This alone might have built a bridge between positions which, according to logic alone, were irreconcilable, and which called for an assurance of good faith that Lindner, the mutual friend, was expected to provide. The issues, which

[21] See below on Hamann's subsequent claim that his anger was an ironic pose, B I 339:21f.

had arisen between friends, could not fittingly be resolved in a private forum,[22] but Hamann now had a case to make, a view to defend. By doing so in the form of a book he could adopt a Christian position without being seen to try to impose it illegitimately, since he was no longer directly addressing his friends. Rather, he would be its apologist and advocate.

The tension between Hamann's *propria persona* and his religious convictions originated in the idea that other people are sent to try us; he then sometimes saw himself as the trier of others, but to say so invited suspicion of the kind of high-handedness he repudiated. Such an interpretation of secular events places them in a framework of divine purposes beyond the authority of any individual, and while it need not seem arrogant to see oneself as the object of divine intervention, the role of divine agent is harder to insulate from hubris, not only in appearance but in fact. It was a danger Hamann largely resisted.[23] His relationships with his brother Johann Christoph and with Lindner's brother Gottlob Immanuel as well as the quarrel with Berens and Lindner show the movement of this line of thought towards authorship, where it belonged – the discovery of a vocation and a mission.

The first impulse in this direction perhaps came from Hamann's pedagogical experiences. He took his responsibilities seriously and saw his primary role as that of a moral educator, often in spite of the parents.[24] He also often felt isolated, and was prone to depression – 'Hypochondrie'. His conversion brought a new conception of such difficulties: without God's grace man is, wittingly or not, the enemy of his neighbour, and can only truly love him out of the strength which comes with faith. Now that he has recognised the healing power of the divine word, Hamann wrote to his brother on his return from London,

> bin ich weder ein Menschenfeind noch hypochondrisch, noch ein Ankläger meiner Brüder, noch ein Ismael der göttlichen Regierung[25] mehr. Das Böse auf der Welt, das mir sonst ein Aergernis war, ist jetzt in meinen Augen ein

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[22] Nor in a public one, B I 376:27.

[23] But see B I 414:16f: 'Was für ein beßer Mittel hätten sich meine Freunde von Gott selbst erbitten können, als mich'; cf. W II 51:30–32: 'Gott hat sich insbesondere des Briefwechsels meines Freundes bedient mich gegen den Sauerteig des Aberglaubens und der Heucheley wachsam zu erhalten'. Hamann is referring to his correspondence with Berens, who was in St. Petersburg, while he was in Riga at the end of 1758.

[24] See e.g. B I 28ff, 49ff, 166f.

[25] I.e. without resentment, cf. Gen. 16/21, and not an adherent of the old covenant, cf. Gal. 4:21–31.

> Meisterstück der Göttl. Weisheit; und der Befehl des Erlösers : Wiedersteht dem Bösen nicht, ein Kleinod der Göttl. und Christlichen Sittenlehre. (B I 243:16–21)

Before, he had felt called upon to intervene, because 'des Nächsten Unrecht ist für keinen eine fremde Sache' (B I 175f, 10.4.56) and true love is critical: 'Man ist mit sich unzufrieden wenn man sich liebt: v[nd] so geht es mit andern auch' (B I 195:35f). Hamann, writing here after a disagreement with the parents of his Grünhof charges about moral education, had found this attitude uncomfortable:

> Es thut mir bisweilen leidt, daß man sich um seinen Nächsten so sauer werden lassen muß um ihm die Liebe aufzudrängen, die man gegen ihn hat. Die ganze Welt kommt mir alsdann als jene Stadt vor, die Jesus mit Thränen ehmals anredte: Wenn Du wüßtest zu dieser deiner Zeit, was zu deinem Besten dient. Wir Menschen wißen es nicht und verlangen es auch leyder! nicht. Wir quälen diejenigen, die uns gut wollen und sehen unsere Feinde für unsere besten Freunde an. Wird dem Teuffel selbst nicht mehr als Gott gedient und jenem größere Opfer als unserem Schöpfer gebracht (B I 167:12–20, to his father, 17.3.56)

These are the insecurities of someone who does not know where he stands with anyone, and the principle 'faith not works' now – after London – helped Hamann resolve them:

> Habe ich Ihnen nicht gesagt, daß wir unsern Nächsten um Gottes Willen dienen müßen v[nd] daß alle Freundschafft die wir von andern genießen, weder eine Würkung noch ein Verdienst unserer ist, sondern von ihm kommt. Wenn wir dies glauben, so haben wir nicht nöthig unzähl. viele Dinge zu wißen, zu vermuthen, zu errathen, zu argwohnen e.g. wie uns[ere] Kleinigkeiten aufgenommen werden, was die Absichten bey anderer Beyfall v[nd] Gunst Bezeigungen sind. (B I 264:2–8, to G.I. Lindner, 5.10.58)

This freedom from the need to justify oneself means that we can take consolation even in defeat, because it reminds us that no human judgement, not even our own, can count against us, 'sondern der Herr ist Richter' (B I 282:4, c. 11.58).

The quarrel with Berens, Hamann's close friend, stretched his new-found equanimity to breaking point, and the old responses and tensions returned in altered form. He was ready, more or less, to let the argument lie, but felt that Berens was not; he holds off making his own criticisms because

> das schickt sich aber nicht für mich davon zu reden, weil ich *nicht Gott bin*, und nach meiner Einsicht oder Gutdünken Dinge einschlagen können; das schickt sich nicht, weil *ich ihm als ein Freund* ... Achtsamkeit schuldig bin (B I 310:25–28)

because, that is, only God is competent not only to judge, but to know, since our self-awareness and even conscience are compromised (305:10–12, 306:2–4). In distinguishing himself from God Hamann is of course criticising Berens by exemplary contrast; 'So reden nicht Freunde unter einander, sondern der Herr mit seinem Sclaven', he complained (B I 306:23f). But when Lindner then conveyed Berens's reaction, Hamann compared the former's supposed neutrality to the impartial administration of justice by Pilate (315:24–31) and the filial obedience of Salome (316:7–25); he himself had only drawn attention to some biblical admonitions, 'und nicht mit [m]einen eigenen Worten' (315:21f, cf. :33f) – implying that he is in fact the more objective one, since he merely cites the universal authority of scripture, whereas they are wilfully attacking the cause of right ('das Herz der Gerechten *fälschlich* betrübt', 315:36), just as the Israelite mob, egged on by their idolatrous priests, plotted to cast the prophet Jeremiah into a pit:

> Sind Sie nicht jetzt ein Priester, der jetzt in den Augen der Leute, im Gesetz nicht irren kann, ein Weiser, der nicht fehlen kann mit Rathen, der nicht Unrecht lehrt. Und ist durch [I]hren Beytritt nicht der Entschluß in ihnen gestärkt worden : kommt her, laßet uns ihn mit der Zunge todschlagen und nichts geben auf alle seine Rede. (B I 316:2–6; cf. Jer. 18:18)

Some issues call not for 'ein Unpartheyischer und neutraler Kunstrichter' (316:31f), but for the taking of a clear stand.[26] Hamann, in taking it, takes on the mantle of the prophets – Jeremiah, Ezekiel (Ezk. 13:19, cf. 316:1) John the Baptist, Jesus himself[27] – who accepted the isolation (317:19–22) of being a voice crying in the wilderness in order to further the cause of right (cf. B I 379:15–17). Lindner, who – Hamann objects – did not so much as comment on Berens's remarks even when they concerned something as basic and fundamental as the catechism (318:26, 319:2), should have questioned the use to which his conscientious neutrality was being put. Instead he has consorted with the ungodly:

> Als die Verführer, sagt der Apostel, und doch wahrhaftig – als die Unbekannten, und doch bekannt – wenn dieser Charakter und Wiederspruch nur Aposteln zukommt : so ist es doch wenigstens *für Sie und mich wahr* : Ziehet nicht am fremden Joch mit den Ungläubigen pp (B I 321:34–37; cf. II Cor. 6:8f, 6:14)

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[26] Cf. B I 396: 32f, I Cor. 6:2f: 'Wenn der Zuschauer nicht Richter seyn will; wer denn? Die Kämpfer?'

[27] Cf. B I 414:3–5, to Lindner, 28.9.59; Hamann has been discussing the quarrel with Berens and compares his situation to Jesus not being understood by the disciples.

St. Paul advised the Corinthian congregation to have nothing to do with non-Christians, and in quoting him Hamann means to imply that what he sees as Lindner's collusion with Berens was beyond the pale; a few verses before (II Cor. 6:4–10) the difficulties of apostleship are described, including an unfriendly reception and lack of recognition. Though Hamann distances himself from association with that role, the fact that he does so, and the train of thought in the immediately preceding lines of his letter, show that it did occur to him. He is responding to Lindner's criticism of his logic:

> Nichts natürliches in ihrer Denkungsart, sagen Sie. Ihre Einbildungskraft macht ein Geschlecht von Geschöpfen zu *Enakim* und *Heuschrecken*. Das war nicht Einbildungskraft, sondern *Unglaube*. Das natürl[iche] Auge sieht freylich an den mikroskopischen Rißen der Insekten, des Schnees pp grobe Lügen, Hyperbeln, die kein Maler und Dichter wagen darf. Was dem Auge Lügen scheint, sind dem Verstande Entdeckungen, medii termini einer höheren als blos sinnlichen Erkenntnis. Moses brauchte nicht seinethalben, sondern des Volkes wegen, eine Decke.

We may reconstruct Lindner's accusation thus: your chain of thought is perverse and you imagine non-existent threats – the Anakim were supposedly fearsome opponents of whom the Israelites then made short work in the Promised Land, cf. Deut. 9:2, Josh. 11:21f; locusts, though biblically menacing, might etymologically suggest in German something puny which makes you jump; Hamann's emphasis here indicates quotation. Not my overactive imagination, Hamann replies, but your lack of faith (as a friend and a Christian) makes it *seem* implausible to see things as I do; but to the eye of faith ('natürlich' recalls Paul's use of the word in opposition to 'geistlich', I Cor. 2:14f, also natural as opposed to revealed religion) the details are telling. But they have to be closely examined, and do not offer up an immediate intuition of the true picture.[28] When Moses descended from Sinai, his face shone from conversation with the Lord, but then he put on a veil (Ex. 34:29–35); Paul (II Cor. 3:12–16) interprets this as an allegory of the old covenant, in which the truth was veiled, as opposed to the new covenant in which we see the glory (Luther: Klarheit) of God directly. There are two thoughts here: things, and texts – Berens's letters – are not necessarily as they immediately appear; and Hamann's own texts, his letters, present the truth

[28] Hamann is thinking of drawings of images revealed by the microscope. Cf. W II 43f, where the same word 'Risse' is used, not of the drawings, but of the imperfections they reveal, for example in skin. In context this suggests that the new vision specifically means the new light in which imperfect human relations are placed by faith, discussed above on B I 243:16–21. Cf. also W II 75:21, where Hamann refers to Leuwenhoek in *Sokratische Denkwürdigkeiten*.

in veiled form, because their audience is not capable of receiving it directly. That would only be possible from a Christian perspective.

A brief interim summary: we can't afford to be neutral, Hamann urges, about the most important things, and a supposedly neutral position is then irresponsible in failing to take a stand. Religious debates, in particular, cannot be polite affairs in which the devil too is allowed a say, and the quarrel with Berens had soon become a religious debate because it called Hamann's convictions into question. By sitting on the fence, Lindner goaded Hamann into taking a stand himself and so propelled him into considering an analogy with prophecy and apostleship and the rhetorical challenge of a hostile audience. Before examining this fruitful and decisive impulse in detail, the issue of objectivity – and how it is different from neutrality – remains.

Just before his response to Lindner's criticism of his logic, Hamann describes his friend's dilemma: '*Du must beyden den Pelz waschen*, weil sie beyde Narren sind – Du mußt Dich aber hüten *keinen naß* zu machen, weil sie beyde so klug sind wie Du. Richten Sie was ich sage?' (B I 321:18–21). In order to be neutral, Lindner must be even-handed, yet that implies being in a position to judge the issues, which as a friend, with the presumption of equality contained in friendship, he is not. Only God, 'der nicht nur Herzen sondern auch Nieren prüft' (305:10f), can make an objective judgement, 'Gott kann uns Narren schelten aber kein Bruder den andern' (344:16). Indeed, no man has the right to judge another, because to do so assumes an authority which the other might equally claim: 'Soll nun meine Vernunft das Licht seyn, darnach sie sich richten sollen. Das wäre gefährlicher als da sie jetzt ihre eigene zur Richtschnur und Bleygewicht Göttlicher Wege machen' (344:7–9, cf. 322:9f).

This does not in itself imply a relativist position, but puts in a Christian framework the equality in principle between individuals *tout court* which motivates the growth of political and judicial roles to deal with conflict; in a private matter, between friends, these really do have no place, yet as the temperature of the dispute rose, Hamann and his friends crossed the line of forebearance. The accusation which Hamann repeatedly quotes is 'Man soll nicht andern Gerichte

zuziehen'. He had been accused, that is, of being high-handed, of laying down the law; some of his remarks about Berens certainly imply being in a position to make unilateral moral judgements. Yet he felt that Berens, and also now through his acquiescence Lindner, were the ones trying to take the moral high ground, e.g. B I 319:12. Hamann's difficulty was that though he stood for the authority of God ('Ich will rühmen des *Herren Wort*', 324:6), he knew he could not claim for himself the authority to impose it on his friends; yet he felt forced to defend himself against Berens's criticism.

In doing so he was reverting to reactions typical of the period before his conversion, when he often worried about justifying himself in the eyes of others, but he also resisted this; attached as he was to his friendships he would accept their loss without seeing it as a slight ('mich vor niemanden als Gott demüthigen'): 'Es ist nicht gut sich auf Menschen verlassen – soll die eine Seite meiner Erfahrung zur Aufschrift haben. Was können [m]ir Menschen thun? wird die andere bekommen'.[29]

When he had received a conciliatory reply from Lindner Hamann claimed not really to have been angry in the letter of 27th April, though its structure suggests otherwise; he closes contentious subjects only to drift back to them.[30] He suggests that he took an angry tone not for the sake of the quarrel, but 'darum, daß eure Neigung, euer Herz gegen uns offenbar würde vor Gott' (:21f). This reversal of his earlier rejection of high-handedness between friends can also be seen in his treatment of his brother and in the aftermath of his involvement with his former pupils at Grünhof. He had exchanged letters with them which the parents, when they found out, thought contained unwelcome criticism of the aristocracy. Lindner felt that the whole business was just unnecessary interference with his brother Gottlob Immanuel, who was Hamann's successor at Grünhof. Hamann's own brother was working for Lindner, who was disappointed in his performance; Hamann wrote a deliberately stern letter which borrows from his 'angry letter' of 27th April the device of an initial formal greeting ('Lieber Herr Rector', 'Mein Herr' leading to a second opening as normal ('Geliebtester Freund', 'Herzlich geliebtester Bruder'). Hamann and Lindner discussed at length strategies for taking Hamann's brother in hand, and Hamann claimed

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[29] B I 324:3–5. Ziesemer's text is 'wir', but I suspect Hamann wrote 'mir'; cf. Psalm 118:6, 8: '... was können mir Menschen tun? ... Es ist gut auf den Herrn vertrauen, und nicht sich verlassen auf Menschen.'

[30] Cf. B I 323f: 'Meine Feder würde nicht so überflüßen können, wenn mein Herz nicht voll wäre'.

that his pedagogical correspondence with Grünhof had really been an elaborate ploy to encourage Lindner's brother, similarly, to do better:

> Wenn Sie dies an ihrem leibl[ichen] Bruder für fremde Händel ansehen,
> wie kann ich Ihnen meinen leibl[ichen] Bruder und Ihren Urtheilen
> und unverholenen und liebreichen Ermahnungen trauen[31]

In the letter of 5th June 1759 Hamann distances himself from his anger by alluding to II Cor. 2, where Paul explains his earlier 'angry letter' as a test, or at least a trial, leading satisfactorily to the Corinthians' repentance;[32] in a private context this implies taking a calculated pose in order to further an aim not made explicit, being manipulative because you know best. It also implies that Hamann, as in the earlier letter, saw himself in an apostolic or prophetic role; he compares himself again to Jeremiah, whose prophecy brought him into ridicule.[33]

Hamann thus moves between conflicting conceptions of the problems brought upon him by the quarrel, often in the same letter, as he casts about for a productive response. Neutrality and what I have labelled 'objectivity' – he does not use the word – are almost opposites: rather than being neutral he thinks Lindner should have taken a stand; but Berens's opposite stand pretends to an objectivity which it cannot claim. Neutrality is sitting on the fence but objectivity is what is falsely claimed by those on the other side of it. Hamann begins by criticising Lindner's attempted neutrality and ends by himself resolving to speak up for what he believes against the false prophets and false idols of the Enlightenment. Their presumption of objectivity calls for a challenge after all. The dispute between the three friends could not be resolved because there was no agreement as to the competent highest authority, but Hamann had no doubt: it was God, who unlike any merely human faculty of heart or head deserved absolute trust. Though Hamann thought he was nobody special in his own right, he now set out to speak on behalf of this higher power.

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[31] B I 389:7–10, to Lindner, 8th August 1759. For these disputes cf. also B I 155, 130, 112, 283f, 244f, 391f, 293, 365f.

[32] Cf. II Cor. 2:9: 'I wrote for this reason: to test you and to know whether you are obedient in everything.'

[33] B I 341:24–27, to Lindner, 5.6.59; cf. 345:20f, 'Moses war der sanftmüthigste Mann und der Apostel der Liebe hieß der Donnersohn', indicating the good will behind Hamann's harsh letter.

Style

Hamann apologised at first for the density of expression in parts of his letters; increasingly he decided that was the only way he could put his case. I Corinthians was an important rhetorical precedent. Like Paul, Hamann sought to be all things to all men, or as we might say, to meet his audience half way; this is also how he understood Socratic ignorance. Like Paul, he maintained that subtle and sophistical arguments ('words of men's wisdom') were a distraction from the unassuming truth; they both also thought it could not be made fully intelligible to the uninitiated. Therefore it needed to be revealed in a form which only allowed access at one remove, through a glass darkly (I Cor. 13) as it were, but which was also suited to all times and all places, esoteric without being exclusive. The tension between the desire to persuade and not wanting to be misunderstood led Hamann to defend his writings well, trying to control the access so that approach was only possible, if at all, from the right direction, out of the right experiences, and was itself sufficiently arduous to engage the reader in more of the right experiences, particularly estrangement from the *idées reçues* of the time.

'Ich schleudere meine Gedanken weg. Von Gebirg zu Gebirg soll der Odenschreiber gehen, aber nicht der Briefsteller', Hamann commented to Lindner after a dense paragraph (B I 304:29f); in the following letter he says,

> es wäre mir ungl[aublich] leichter kürzere und ordentlichere [Briefe] zu schreiben. In allem dem Chaos meiner Gedanken ist ein Faden, den ein Kenner finden kann, und mein Freund [Berens] vor allen erkennen würde, wenn er sie lesen könnte. (311:9–12)

Whether through pithiness or rambling, Hamann recognised that these letters were difficult to read, and apologised (308:34f; 328:25f). He also felt he had been as brief and clear as he could, given the subject-matter (324:22ff). Having done his utmost, he expected the same from the reader: 'Ich habe im Schweiß meines Angesichts an diesem Brief gearbeitet; Sie werden in eben der Ordnung denselben lesen müßen' (345:16f). He asked Lindner to be his interpreter: 'Weil

mein Brief schlecht geschrieben ist ... so ersuche Sie um die *große Gefälligkeit* denselben ihm vorzulesen, und wo Sie können ein Exeget zu sein' (310:11–13).

He had made a similar request to Gottlob Immanuel Lindner to interpret his letters to his former pupils,

> die Lücken meiner Gedanken auszufüllen, die Schwäche meiner Urtheile und Einfälle aufzudecken, und selbst über die Fehler meiner Schreibart Erinnerungen zu machen ... Den jungen Herr[e]n werden Sie ein wenig die Uebersetzung und die Worte meines Briefes in den Mund zu drehen und zu erheben suchen. Es fällt einigen Leuten so schwer Empfindungen zu verstehen als andern Worte ohne Sinn zusammen zu schreiben.[34]

An important element of practical pedagogy difficult to reproduce in a correspondence course is the personal interaction that brings it to life, the mutual comprehension which makes sure understanding has taken place. It should be inspiring and meaningful. Education is not properly a commodity passed down, but a shared learning experience. Hamann asked Lindner to make up for the deficiencies of his letters as a means to realising this ideal, which had a classical precedent:

> Die Fertigkeit zu fragen und zu antworten ertheilt uns das Geschick eines Lehrers und ernährt zugleich die Demuth eines Schülers in uns. Der weiseste Bildhauer und Meister der Griechischen Jugend, der die Stimme des Orakels für sich hatte, frug wie ein unwissendes Kind, und seine Schüler waren dadurch im stande wie Philosophen zu antworten ja Sitten zu predigen, ihm und sich selbst. (249:1–7, to Peter von Witten, 15.9.58)

Socrates showed his wisdom by concealing it, and this encouraged his hearers to reflect for themselves rather than parroting doctrines they did not understand. Like Socrates, the teacher must be a midwife, genuinely prepared to learn from his pupils (cf. 324:6–16, to J.G. Lindner, 27th April 1759); like Socrates, Hamann sees the process as ultimately a moral one, education in its full etymological sense.

Socrates, as Hamann saw him, did not present a body of doctrine in coherent discursive form, because he aimed to stimulate and further a process of realisation which must arise from within if it was to take. Since the Socratic method largely works by bringing out the inconsistencies of an existing position, it must also be different for each interlocutor; so it is not immediately suited to

[34] B I 261:24–26, to Peter von Witten, 4.10.58; 246:10–14, to G.I. Lindner, 9.58. He also asked for written annotations, 'Noten und Kreuzer zu meinen Briefen', 254:26.

written presentation to a notional generalised audience. Letters, offering a personal but not a live reaction, are an intermediate case. Hamann drew on his pedagogical experience with the Socratic ideal to interpret the rhetorical problems posed by the quarrel with Berens, going on to choose the figure of Socrates as his spokesman in *Sokratische Denkwürdigkeiten*. He explains the Socratic method as a response to being surrounded by sophists:

> Um Wahrheit ist mir so wenig als Ihrem Freunde [Berens] zu thun; Ich glaube wie Socrates alles, was der andere glaubt – und geh nur darauf aus, andere in ihrem Glauben zu stören. Dies muste der weise Mann thun, weil er mit Sophisten umgeben war, und Priestern, deren *gesunde Vernunft* und gute Werke in der Einbildung bestanden. (377:25–29, to Kant, 27th July 1759)

Socratic ignorance is an ironic counter to those who string together 'Worte ohne Sinn', whether (like the cardsharps of *Sokratische Denkwürdigkeiten*) they know doing so is an empty trick or whether they are the dupes of their own game ('eingebildete gesunde und ehrliche Leute', ibid.). Hamann identified his campaign against his own contemporaries with the stand of Socrates against the sophists, at least for presentational purposes; his description in this passage, which implies that in taking Socrates as a model he is sinking to their level, indicates reservations. The parallel with Paul, the Christian, was more intimate.

Sophistry is plausibility without substance, slick presentation as opposed to the unassuming 'blos Korn' (I Cor. 15:37) of the truth. 'Wahrheiten kommen uns grob vor, wie die Zeichnungen der Natur ohne es zu seyn; Lügen hingegen sind gedrechselt und polirt für das Auge wie die Werke der Kunst, und sind ungehobelt.'[35] If Berens and Lindner were really concerned with truth, Hamann could speak plainly with them, 'frey heraus reden' (322:18), but as it is he feels personally betrayed by their polite dishonesty, the mere outward form of friendship: 'Alle Schmeicheleyen, die er mir macht, thun mir weher, als seine beißende Einfälle' (307:22f). Lindner's worst offence was not to have asked what his actions on behalf of Berens were really meant to communicate: 'Ich muß ja wissen, was mein Nächster thun will, das verstehen, was er von mir haben will' (317:30f). The full meaning of language includes what the speaker means to do by addressing it to someone in a given context; this is, in a sense, the true substance of language

[35] B I 306:24–26. Hamann is thinking of the monstrous microscopic sketches of snowflakes and insects he later mentions, p. 321, discussed above.

use, its point of action on the world. Berens's arguments are dishonest because they are really 'Sonden', suggesting an aggressive medical examination, but then 'es gehören auch Pflaster und Balsam dazu' (307:22). The sophists were above all *morally* wrong, and that is why it is important to contest their aguments, which are the means to base ends. They are false prophets, wolves in sheep's clothing, and 'By their fruits ye shall know them'.

The first chapters of I Corinthians describe Paul's method of preaching the gospel. He contrasts the foolishness of the Christian message ('Christ crucified') with the worldly wisdom sought and esteemed by the Greeks, which was not sufficient to reach the revealed truth (I Cor. 1:21). This can only be discerned spiritually, with the 'mind of Christ' (2:14,16), that is through faith. In rejecting the Greek rhetorical ideal of 'plausible words of men's wisdom' (2:4), the intellectual form which met with secular esteem, Paul also aligned himself against the socially powerful, since just as human wisdom does not bring us closer to heaven, human achievement, measured in human terms (particularly according to the values of classical antiquity), cannot justify us; only through our allegiance to God may we be saved (1:26–31). Paul's legitimacy, too, does not derive from his personal qualities, but from his message (3:21–4:5). He presents himself as the underdog (I Cor. 4:9–13, II Cor. 6:4–10), a preacher reviled by the world at large. This world is not only the intellectual establishment of the time, but the secular power, Rome and all it signified. God's wisdom is not 'a wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are doomed to perish', it is 'secret and hidden', it is beyond merely human understanding, yet it may be uttered 'among the mature' (2:6ff).

Hamann's identification with Paul's situation, and with an apostolic and prophetic mission in general, may usefully be summarised in the following quotation:

> Ich will rühmen des Herren Wort. Nimm ja nicht von meinem Munde das Wort der Wahrheit ... Die Stolzen haben ihren Spott an mir, dennoch weich ich nicht – – Ihr Pöbel fällt Ihnen zu, und läuft ihnen zu mit Haufen wie Wasser, und sprechen: Was soll Gott nach jenen fragen? Was soll der Höchste ihr achten. Siehe, das sind die Gottlosen, die sind glückseelig in der Welt und werden reich. Wenn der Meister und Herr so oft hat schreyen müßen : *Wer Ohren hat zu hören der höre!* Wenn er gesagt: *Seelig* ist, wer sich nicht an mir *ärgert* : Was sollen

> seine Jünger und Nachfolger von den Urtheilen der Welt und *falschen Brüder* über ihre Stimme und Hände, erwarten. Wenn *er selbst* mitten unter sie wäre, meynst Du, daß er Glauben finden würde? (324:6–16, to J.G. Lindner, 27.4.59)

Hamann sees himself as one of the 'ministers of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God',[36] resisting a tide of mocking unbelievers who, like Jacob covering his smooth hands with the skins of the kids of the goats to impersonate hairy Esau (Gen. 27), trick the world into preferring their voice over the voice of Christ's disciples, so robbing the latter of the world's blessing. The world is deceived by mere externals into not really listening; and because, like Isaac, it is blind, it must listen very hard to hear the word. This difficulty is certainly Paul's, speaking as he is 'as unto babes in Christ', to those converted but not 'mature', but Hamann's sense of facing an especially hostile audience made him seek still more radical solutions to the homiletic problem, for which there were other biblical precedents.

In Mark 4,[37] Jesus reveals that the parable of the sower is about sowing the word. In public his only commentary had been, 'He that hath ears to hear, let him hear', but he then tells the disciples that though it is given to them to know the mystery of the kingdom of God, 'unto them that are without, all these things are done in parables'. In explanation he makes what is at first sight a puzzling quotation from Isaiah 6, with the implication that the purpose of parables is to *prevent* understanding:

> 9 And he said, Go, and tell this people, hear ye indeed, but understand not; and see ye indeed, but perceive not.
> 10 Make the heart of this people fat, and make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and convert, and be healed.
> 11 Then said I, Lord, how long? And he answered, Until the cities be wasted without inhabitant, and the houses without man, and the land be utterly desolate.[38]

Christian interpretations of the Isaiah passage perhaps begin with Romans 11, where Paul argues that Israel's misunderstanding, a sort of living reductio, paved the true way to salvation. This

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[36] I Cor. 4:1; 'Mund' adds a prophetic resonance to the Pauline 'word of truth' (II Cor. 6:7, II Tim. 2:15), recalling the vocation of several prophets, e.g. Is. 6:6f, Jer. 1:9, Ezk. 2:8f.

[37] Cf. Matthew 13:10–17, Luke 8:9f, John 12:37–43, Acts 28:25–28 (where Paul is reported as quoting Isaiah 6), Rom. 11:8. For the topos 'ears to hear' in the Old Testament, cf. Dt. 29:4, Is. 43:8, Jer. 5:21, Ezk. 12:2.

[38] Mark 4:12, abridging Is. 6:9–10. I have also included verse 11 to highlight the radicalism inherent in the very idea of prophecy to which Mark 4:11, and Hamann's quotation of it, also alludes; the striking thing about this specific passage is the actual *exhortation* to obscurity.

is no distortion, given a Christian framework, of the thought that runs through much of Old Testament prophecy, and which indeed could be seen as the defining feature of the prophetic situation: the prophet enjoins a return to the true faith, not a minor correction but a complete change of direction. Society as a whole has been set on the wrong religious, moral and political course – aspects often hardly distinguished in prophetic thought – and changing it calls not for an evolution in consensus but a revolutionary change of mind, a realisation of the hollowness of society's guiding aims and their wholesale replacement. For this to be achieved, the old must perish in its contradictions, the foundering ship of state must sink, so that the survivors can make a new, fresh and better beginning. Such a programme appears seditious, and the prophets' conflicts with the authorities figure prominently in many prophetic and historical books. The sense of preaching misunderstanding and destruction in this situation would be: let them fall so that we, the outsiders, may rise. If they do not hear and repent, then they are on the other side, a lost cause, an obstacle. This presupposes that stands have already been taken one way or another, but in fact the distinction betwen them and us must be presumed before it can be fostered – the focusing of discontent into revolutionary intent, the birth of a movement for change whose essence is conflict because it defines itself against the status quo. There is thus no point trying to convert the unwilling with arguments because their commitment to the other side, their lack of vision and not their lack of understanding, stands in the way. Only the actual failure of their cause, personal and collective catastrophe, would suffice; on the other hand those who are already within the fold, even tentatively, do not need to be persuaded so much as encouraged. Anything which bolsters their commitment to the truth can serve this end: allusions to the experience of faith and solidarity, reminders of the rewards, now and later, to be enjoyed by those within the congregation, and especially attacks on those outside and predictions of their fall.

There is already a range of emphasis within the Old Testament as to how much the arena for this radicalism was political and how much it was religious;[39] the view within modern scholarship that it was simultaneously both may explain the ambiguity, but what is important

[39]This corresponds to the New Testament problem of 'realised eschatology'. Perhaps much Old Testament prophecy was *vaticinium ex eventu*, but we are here concerned with the conception implied by what it purports to be.

for Hamann is the radicalism itself. The very ambivalence of prophetic discourse, taking its historical circumstances as at the same time the embodiment of religious conflict and religious truth – though in many possible senses – offered Hamann a way of understanding the intellectual sphere, the arena in which eighteenth-century religious debates were carried out, both in private, as in Hamann's quarrel with Berens, and in public: radicalism and conflict rather than evolutionary consensus through shared debate were, he felt, the proper approach to mortal questions which were not susceptible to disinterested consideration, an approach which in any case merely unmasked the true nature of the intellectual dispute as the ultimate struggle between good and evil for the soul of man – just as the prophets revealed the religious import of the secular events of their time.

Socrates, also seen as taking a moral stand, showed how such arguments might be conducted in intellectual terrain and yet 'not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of none effect' (I Cor. 1:17). Though the Christian message relies on faith, not mere plausibility – 'Lügen und Romanen müßen wahrscheinlich seyn, Hypothesen und Fabeln[,] aber nicht die Wahrheiten und Grundlehren unseres Glaubens'[40] – irony, 'die erste [Figur in des Paulus] Redekunst',[41] can be used to make the opposition *im*plausible, just as David turned Goliath's own sword against him (I Sam. 17:51). This means allowing it to condemn itself out of its own mouth, showing up its pretensions to good faith by going along with them until they are revealed as a sham, but not actually accepting them or genuinely engaging in debate on the terms of the opposition; the irony of Socrates is what distinguishes his ignorance from naivety. What Hamann borrowed from Socrates bears little resemblance to the dialectical method of Plato's dialogues, as well as going far beyond the Pauline precedents on which he aimed to build, but he sought to apply the Socratic combination of intellectual sophistication and perceived moral integrity to his own situation.

The final stylistic impulse in the transition from Hamann's private quarrel to its public airing in *Sokratische Denkwürdigkeiten* came from J.M. Chladenius's remarks on a passage in Augustine's

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[40] B I 359:3–5, to Hamann's brother, 16/5 July 1759.

[41] B I 339:33, to J.G. Lindner, 5th June 1759, and see over the page. Hamann is comparing his 'angry letter' to Paul's to the Corinthians. 'Redekunst' could also be taken as 'Redekunst eines Christen'.

Confessions about the style a Christian author should use to convey his message.[42] Augustine is expounding Genesis 1:1 and, discussing the variety of possible interpretations, says that in Moses' place as author he would have done the same: that is, written a text which could be understood on many levels[43] rather than insisting on one explicit account.[44] The truth is seen as more accessible veiled than spelled out, because it is open to 'those immature in the faith, who are of good hope' (*Confessions* XII 30/41), while at the same time the 'terse words' of scripture (*Confessions* XII 26/36, cf. B I 335:20) implicitly contain the whole truth from every angle, including matters not yet thought of in Augustine's age.[45]

Hamann takes issue with Chladenius, who had summarised Augustine as simply saying that the style of scripture aims to be as widely understood as possible;[46] Hamann replies:

> Sollte aber nicht ein ehrlicher Mann bisweilen eine Schreibart nöthig haben, die er lieber getadelt als *gemisbraucht* wünschen möchte, und wo er genöthigt ist zu wünschen: ich will lieber gar *nicht* als *unrecht* verstanden werden.
> Die Begriffe die Augustinus annimmt wiedersprechen gewißermaaßen den ersten Grundgesetzen, die wir von einer guten Schreibart anzunehmen gewohnt sind.[47]

Though the topic is biblical hermeneutics, the hermeneutic principles under discussion correspond to stylistic principles which a writer might adopt. Chladenius favours transparency in interpretation as in writing, in keeping with a classical rhetorical ideal.[48] Hamann takes from

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[42] To J.G. Lindner, 1st June 1759, B I p. 333ff. This letter is discussed in Volker Hoffmann, *Johann Georg Hamanns Philologie: Hamanns Philologie zwischen enzyklopädischer Mikrologie und Hermeneutik*, Stuttgart 1972, p. 154ff. Cf. also Jørgensen 1968 (in the Nachwort to his Reclam edition of *Sokratische Denkwürdigkeiten*) and Elfriede Büchsel, *Biblisches Zeugnis und Sprachgestalt bei J.G. Hamann: Untersuchungen zur Struktur von Hamanns Schriften auf dem Hintergrund der Bibel*. Basel 1988 (Göttingen 1953), p. 204ff.

[43] 'hoc in promptis quod in reconditis habens' (containing the same [truth] on the surface and beneath it); quoted in Auerbach, 'Sermo humilis', *Romanische Forschungen* 64. Frankfurt 1952, pp. 304–64.

[44] Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. Henry Chadwick. OUP 1992 (1991), XII 31/42.

[45] *Confessions* XII 28/38; also 18/27; Hamann's passages are from 26/36 and 31/42.

[46] Quoted in Hoffmann, p. 156.

[47] B I 335:5–11.

[48] Hamann alludes to Cicero's *De oratore*. Crassus (who appears in the dialogue) has mentioned the pronouncement of the satrist Lucilius that he wrote for an audience neither unlearned nor over-learned, in accordance wth standard rhetorical theory. But faced with a choice between peasants and the learned friends who want him to discourse on rhetoric, he would take the peasants, because 'malo enim non intellegi orationem meam quam reprehendi', *De oratore* II, 6/25, 'I prefer my oration not to be understood than to be *criticised*'; my italics. Note Hamann's change, both to the wording and the sense: Crassus's remark, just a joke, refers to two different possible audiences, but Hamann has in mind two possible reactions from the same audience. But both Crassus and Hamann suggest that intellectual sophistication is something you can have too much of. Cf. Nietzsche: 'Es dünkt mich besser, mißverstanden als nicht verstanden zu werden.' 'Unveröffentlichtes aus der Umwerthungszeit', Großoktavausgabe XIV §188, p. 92.

Augustine's model of open-ended terseness in the interests of the broadest possible accessibility the idea that because the truth could be worse than useless in the wrong hands, it needs to be protected. The connection is that these are both reasons for departing from the convention of transparency, which runs the risk of spelling the message out too specifically. Hamann's examples are the anecdote of the philosopher whose doctrine of the immortality of the soul precipitated a wave of suicides[49] and the story of Tamar, whose rape by Amnon was eventually avenged by Absalom (II Sam. 13); the point seems to be that she did not seek redress from the king, but bore her shame in silence. In the first case, the truth is dangerous to those not ready for it, and in the second it is voiceless and cannot carry the day without trickery. Hamann also mentions Cato's unpragmatic support of the Republican cause (cf. Cicero to Atticus II 1:8); it is no good sticking to one's principles without also responding pragmatically to hostile circumstances.

Hamann has in mind his own struggle with the Enlightenment; he must accommodate his style to the times and turn to indirect expression so that his truth, the truth of the 'bare grain',[50] is not summarily misunderstood. The open-ended terseness advocated by Augustine would be fitted to a reader from the most unpromising background,

> er möchte ein Cartesianer oder Newtonianer, Burnets oder Buffons[51] Hypothesen aufgenommen haben, ... Die Wahrheit ist also einem Saamenkorn gleich, dem der Mensch einen Leib giebt wie er will; ... Eben so wird ein diplomatischer oder pragmatischer Schriftsteller, der gleichfalls gewißermaaßen *ad culmen auctoritatis*[52] schreibt, sich an die *Worte* der Urkunden und Vollmachten halten, Mönchsschrift und Runische Buchstaben in ihrem Werth laßen, und nicht mit dem Donat sondern mit seinem Kayser *schismam* reden.[53]

Thus, in contrast to the universalism advocated by Augustine, it is necessary to speak the language of the times. Hamann's contemporaries and intended readers are among the outsiders for whom, in Augustine's metaphor, the words of scripture are 'a dark thicket. They see fruit concealed in them, to which they fly in delight, chirping as they seek for it and pluck it' (*Confessions* XII 28/38).

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[49] Cf. W II 73:40ff; for Hamann's sources see *Hamanns Hauptschriften erklärt* II 140.

[50] I Cor. 15:37. Just as for Paul the soul is clothed in the weak and corrupt body, Hamann's true message is to be concealed.

[51] Cf. B I 307:10–12, 'Anstatt daß Moses schreibt: Am Anfang schuff Gott; beweist Büffon: Am Anfang fiel ein Comet auf die Sonne, daß die Stücke davon flogen.'

[52] The phrase with which Augustine puts himself in the place of the author of Genesis, *Confessions* XII 31/42.

[53] B I, 335f. 'Schismam' was a stock solecism (it should be 'schisma'); Donatus was a Roman grammarian.

Augustine was trying in these passages to justify his Platonic reading of a piece of scripture, countering the objection that if that had been the intended meaning it would be stated explicitly with his explanation that scripture may avoid being explicit in order to be universal. This implies a consideration for the situations of different readers and their psychology which motivates Hamann too to avoid being explicit – but in order to promote a sympathetic hearing among one specific hostile audience, the secular Enlightenment.

The quarrel with Berens raised problems which led to the solutions which were to be applied in *Sokratische Denkwürdigkeiten*. The analogy with Paul, the letter-writer, fitted in with Hamann's Christian purposes and resonated with the prophetic background available to them both as spokesmen for Christianity. Hamann's rejection of the Enlightenment ideas which, through Berens, had precipitated the quarrel also fitted Paul's rejection of aspects of Greek thought. The experience of the letters led Hamann to adopt an offensive strategy, undermining the opposition rather than making a direct case. This called for ironic tactics ideally embodied in Socrates, the opponent of the sophists. Finally Augustine offered the highest authority for taking such an approach, if not quite as he had intended.

Conclusion

Hamann's sense of having a prophetic mission arose out of the quarrel. He was personally attacked and felt betrayed by the behaviour of his friends, but their weapons and increasingly his counterattack were representative of a larger pattern and an older struggle. The claim of reason to universal competence, as far as that was meant or seen to conflict with Hamann's Christian faith, provoked a counter-claim from Hamann on the model of Paul's confrontation of faith with reason. Berens's letters are not preserved as confirmation, but what is important is that this is the battle Hamann thought he was joining in the quarrel with his friends. His sense of its supreme importance for Christianity led him to take up the mantle of the prophets – and not in jest – and to take matters out of the private circle of his correpondence and into print.

The decision to do so resulted from a personal challenge to Hamann's new convictions. His experience in London cannot have been easy, but on his return he was forced to defend himself, rejected as a suitor and called to account by the House of Berens. Their criticism of his lack of application provoked in turn his implied criticism of the materialistic aims of their enterprise, which he saw as part of a larger social and political project limited and compromised by its worldliness. Berens was the representative example of the worldly ideal from which Hamann had turned away at his conversion, the smaller stage on which he saw the fate of society as a whole played out, but also the mirror of Hamann's own rejected past. Berens was typical of a wider pattern, but he was intimately familiar. The debate between the two friends naturally involved the intellectual culture which they shared. Berens's appeal to reason provoked Hamann's critical reflection and response. It was a well-worn thought that reason is the complement of revelation, but Hamann – given the circumstances through which he had arrived at such a different position from his friend – focused on revelation through experience, the particularity which stood between him and Berens, as well as between him and the general claims of reason.

The differing histories of individuals are also reasons why they might respond differently to the same text, why for instance someone might not understand Hamann's letters. Berens's alleged insistence changed the situation from a simple disagreement to a failure on Hamann's part to get his point across. In exploring new ways of communicating, Hamann naturally drew on familiar elements. Both his pedagogical experiences and the memory of earlier situations in which he had felt beleaguered may have encouraged him to adopt a high-handed tone, albeit uncomfortably. Just as Berens was seen as representative, Hamann, steeped in the Bible, thought he was defending not only himself but the Christian ideals he stood for, and so the parallel with prophetic and apostolic models, though bold, was natural. In turn this gave Hamann further encouragement to see his private disagreement as representative of wider ills and conflicts. What was called for was not argument which could convince independently of revelation and experience, but taking a stand. That precluded disinterested neutrality and depended on the objective authority of God

rather than any conceivable human criteria. The epistemology of faith relies on the religious experience of the individual, not mere words. Just as the perspective of faith provides a principle for coherently organising experience, according to Hamann it is the right hermeneutic framework for texts which bear witness to religious truth – whether that means the Bible or his own letters and then books. In the hands of an author, such a hermeneutic principle has potential stylistic implications.[54]

Hamann apologised at first for the obscurity which his message seemed to compel, then justified it as inevitable, and finally cultivated it as a strategy. But this was not obscurantism, obscurity simply covering up for incoherence. Hamann maintained he could not reply to reason in its own terms because, as he was later to urge in the *Metakritik*, it begged the question by presuming its own competence, especially in religious matters. To say the least, it is debatable whether that is a viable argument – for a start, it could be turned back on Hamann himself – but it is at any rate more than obfuscation. Having drifted willy-nilly into a density and obscurity of expression for which he apologised in the letters, he then decided to make a virtue out of necessity. The shift occurs in the letter on Chladenius and the following letter in which he claims his earlier anger had been an ironic pose in the manner of St. Paul. Hamann had felt cheated by his friends' reasonable objections without yet being able to put his finger on the flaw in their smooth words, and struggled to express his objection indirectly and allusively. Socrates, who famously bested the sophists, offered a natural parallel for these problems, and so for a response to them. Hamann had already thought about Socrates in a pedagogical context and knew him not from Plato,[55] but as the moral exemplar celebrated by the Enlightenment and by humanism. Not only did the concept 'sophistry' indicate a way of dividing reason according to its intentions and methods, a rallying-cry against its abuse, but Socrates, having taken an honourable stand against it, was a model both in tone – that of a plain and honourable man – and in the tactics suited to intellectual terrain. Rather than stating his own position, which carried no conviction without

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[54] Cf. Büchsel for the metaphor of the 'perspective of faith' – Christ is the 'vanishing point' which lends the larger picture its coherence and structure. She describes Hamann's application of this principle in *Wolken*. Büchsel pp. 54, 161f; cf. also Luther's biblical hermeneutics, e.g. in the prefaces to his translation.

[55] On 10th October 1761 Hamann wrote about his recent reading of Plato, 'Ich hätte den Plato halb ausschreiben können ohne ihn gelesen zu haben.' B II 117:34f, to J.G. Lindner.

faith, Hamann aimed to provoke self-critical reflection in his opponents, going on to the offensive with irony, parody, paradox – in a word, polemic. All this called for a more flexible medium than the letter, as well as a different *Sitz im Leben*. Hamann could not comfortably preach to his friends, but he could preach to the world.

Indeed, it was more than preaching – Hamann saw himself as a prophet, drawing on the model of Old Testament prophecy both directly and through St. Paul. This was no literary pose, not the grand prophetic gesture Rudolf Unger describes it as,[56] but Hamann's earnestly held view of his vocation as an author. Nor was it psychotic grandiosity, though Hamann did have a high-handed streak. The logic of his typological reading of the Bible entailed a view of history that encompassed the story of Israel, the coming of Christ and the events of the present day within a divine economy of salvation, God's plan for the world as the stage of man's moral drama from creation to apocalypse. Auerbach's description of typological thinking vividly conveys its peculiar temporal logic:

> Wenn zum Beispiel ein Vorgang wie das Opfer Isaacs interpretiert wird als Präfiguration des Opfers Christi, ... so wird ein Zusammenhang zwischen zwei Ereignissen hergestellt, die weder zeitlich noch kausal verbunden sind – ein Zusammenhang, der auf vernünftige Weise in dem horizontalen Ablauf, wenn man dies Wort für eine zeitliche Ausdehnung gestattet, gar nicht herzustellen ist. Herzustellen ist er lediglich, wenn man beide Ereignisse vertikal mit der göttlichen Vorsehung verbindet, die allein auf diese Art Geschichte planen und allein den Schlüssel zu ihrem Verständnis liefern kann. Die zeitlich-horizontale und kausale Verbindung der Ereignisse wird gelöst, das Jetzt und Hier ist nicht mehr Glied eines irdischen Ablaufs, sondern es ist zugleich ein schon immer Gewesenes und ein sich in Zukunft Erfüllendes; und eigentlich, vor Gottes Auge, ist es ein Ewiges, Jederzeitliches, im fragmentarischen Erdgeschehen schon Vollendetes.[57]

Typology was first and foremost a way of reading the Old Testament in the new light of the Gospel; but because the divine plan is not yet complete, and will not be until the Kingdom of Heaven is instituted at the apocalypse, it also implies that any moment of history can be seen in relation to the providential vertical dimension, including the present. Gerhard Ebeling sums up Luther's position as follows: 'The holy scriptures and the present day intersect ... at a single point,

[56] Rudolf Unger, *Hamann und die Aufklärung*, 2nd ed. Tübingen, Max Niemeyer Verlag 1963 (1925), p. 511.

[57] Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis*. Bern, Francke Verlag 1946, p. 75.

in the conscience that hears the Word.'[58] This was the ancestor of the principle known in Pietist hermeneutics as 'applicatio ad hominem', the application of what is said in the text to the situation of the reader. Hamann's innovative stroke was to draw the same analogy between the political, social and religious order described in the Old Testament and the present situation of Prussia. Just as prophets in Israel – at least the true ones – were critics of their kings when they erred, and of the spiritual and moral corruption that ensued when they did, Hamann felt called to bear witness to his Christianity by attacking the Enlightenment. So it was natural that his intellectual and religious disagreement with it should also have a political dimension.

[58] Gerhard Ebeling, *Luther. An introduction to his thought*, tr. Wilson. Collins 1970, p. 104.

II *Konxompax*

Hat nicht der Hamb. Oelgötze bey aller seiner Dummheit im Grunde Recht gehabt? Läst sich wol mit dem panischen System im Kopf ein christlich Vaterunser beten?

(Hamann to Jacobi, 1.12.84. B V 274)

Put not your trust in princes

Psalm 126:3

Introduction

In November 1778 Hamann wrote to Herder:

> *Reimarus* vom Zweck Jesu und Hahns N.T. sind fast die einzigen Bücher welche ich mir von der vorigen Messe gekauft. Ich habe den erstern im Fluge gelesen, wie ich gegenwärtig beynahe alles thun muß und blos ein Buch in der Hand genießen kann, so bald ich es weglege, aber aufhöre doctus zu seyn. Daß es mir an Sympathie für die gegenwärtige Crisin in der Theologie nicht fehlt, bester Gevatter! können Sie sich leicht vorstellen; ich muß aber noch hinter dem Berge halten und will den Parthen nicht gern ins Wort fallen. Auch Falk und Ernst sind Wasser für meine Mühle. (Letter to Herder, 25.11.78, B IV 34:27–34)

1777 and 1778 had been the years of the Fragmentenstreit – by this time the identity of the author of the 'Fragmente' was clearly getting round (note Hamann's emphasis of the secret name). These had been published anonymously by Lessing (from 1774) to stimulate open debate[1] on the conflict between deism and orthodoxy. Lessing then separately published a further fragment, *Von dem Zweck Jesu und seiner Jünger*, consolidating the broader public attention the Fragmentenstreit had now attained by adding fuel to the fire.

Though Hamann, after several unproductive years, continued to feel stuck (B IV 42, 43f, 48, 57f), his tone gradually becomes more positive – e.g. 'Er wolle uns beyde zum reinen *Pfeil machen* und in *Seinen Köcher stecken*! Auch Er dachte, *ich arbeitete vergeblich und brächte meine Kraft umsonst und unnützlich zu*', 57f – and by March 1779 he wrote to Herder: 'Ich habe über 14 Tage auch Lust

[1] 'Wahrlich, er soll noch erscheinen, ... der Mann, welcher die Religion so bestreitet, und der, welcher die Religion so verteidiget, als es die Wichtigkeit und Würde des Gegenstandes erfodert. ... Möchte er [der Fragmentist] bald einen Mann erwecken, der dem Ideale eines echten Verteidigers der Religion nur eben so nahe käme [wie er]!' *Gegensätze des Herausgebers*, Lessing W VIII, 314f.

gehabt – und brüte *Fragmente apokalyptischer Sendschreiben* über *apokalyptische Geheimnisse*' (B IV 60). This was soon followed by a first draft of *Konxompax*. Herder saw to the publication, and in May Hamann thanked him for managing everything so quickly (B IV 80). The full title was *Konxompax: Fragmente einer apokryphischen Sibylle über apokalyptische Mysterien*.

The book is not directed only against Lessing, though the subtitle underlines that connection: '[Starck], Meiners, Steinbart und Lessingiana sind das Mark meiner Fragmente' (B IV 122:24), Hamann wrote in October. With a view to pinpointing what was at issue in *Konxompax*, an outline of the immediate relevance of each author to Hamann's book follows.

Johann August Starck had been the target of Hamann's *Hierophantische Briefe* (1775), which argued that Christianity borrowed many doctrines from paganism; but Hamann's target was also Frederick. After the completion of the *Briefe*, Starck's *Hephästion* (1775) was published, a work attempting to show that God had revealed himself to all nations: 'Wie aus einem Füllhorn ist die götliche Warheit allenthalben ausgeschüttet. Hie und da sind schöne Stücke hingefallen.'[2] The book is in two parts, on paganism and Judaism. It argues that much true knowledge is to be found in the pagan mystery religions, while on the other hand Judaism combined religious truth with extraneous elements adapted to the cultural level of the Jews at the time of Moses. Thus the Christian tradition has no monopoly on truth, and moreover 'truth' is understood, however cautiously, as a rational essence obscured by superstition.

In 1778 a second edition of Starck's *Apologie des Ordens der Frey-Mäurer* appeared (the first had come out in 1769). Of course, the author cannot reveal masonic secrets, so part of his defence takes the indirect form of a comparison between freemasonry and the mystery religions of antiquity (Schoonhoven 175f). Because the latter were secret, positive statements about their content largely derive from Christian polemic against them, and are unreliable. The mystery religions sought to improve on paganism, but freemasonry, Starck emphasises, has no parallel ambition to refine Christianity through secret knowledge. Nonetheless, it is in possession of important truths, just as the mystery religions were.

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[2] *Hephästion*. Königsberg 1775, p. 9. Quoted in Evert Jansen Schoonhoven, *Hamanns Hauptschriften erklärt* Bd. V. Gütersloh, Bertelsmann 1962, p. 167; referred to in the following as 'Schoonhoven'.

Christoph Meiners was the author of *Über die Mysterien der Alten* (1776), a philological treatise which was used as a factual source by both Starck and Hamann (Schoonhoven 180ff). Meiners focused particularly on the Eleusinian mysteries.

Gotthelf Samuel Steinbart's *System der reinen Philosophie oder Glückseligkeitslehre des Christenthums* (1778) plays only a small role in Hamann's text,[3] but it had recently appeared when Hamann began writing. Lavater attacked Steinbart's book and may well have drawn Hamann's attention to it. Hamann associates Steinbart with the 'philosophische Schulfüchserey' (B IV 57:16) of Berlin. In 1770, he had attacked Steinbart's *Prüfung der Beweggründe zur Tugend nach dem Grundsatz der Selbstliebe*, a response to Frederick II's *Essai sur l'amour-propre, envisagé comme principe de morale*; Steinbart argued for a continued role for Christianity as a mere support for Frederick's utilitarian ethics.[4] This latest book was thus in Hamann's eyes a current and representative example of the rationalising tendency in religious thought, particularly in Berlin, and its importance lies in its being representative.

The 'Fragmente' had attacked the reliability and the coherence of scripture; particularly for protestants, that was to undermine the whole foundation of Christianity. Reimarus supported deism, which sought to found belief on reason. Lessing's publication was a challenge to the 'Neologen', who held that what revelation revealed *was* rational theology.[5] The increasing body of evidence produced by the emerging 'historisch-kritisch' approach to the Bible called, in Lessing's view, for better answers, and he sought to provoke debate by publishing the troublesome arguments in starkest form. Though the main tranche of fragments, in 1777, was accompanied by a statement of Lessing's own dissent, the position this implied, and which Lessing developed in the Fragmentenstreit, was far from being orthodox and attracted criticism in its own right, quite apart from the criticism Lessing earned just for having published such material.

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[3] See Schoonhoven 174f. Hamann mentions Steinbart at B IV pp. 44, 54, 57, 74.

[4] W IV 358. See Wolfgang-Dieter Baur's discussion of Hamann's review in *Johann Georg Hamann als Publizist: Zum Verhältnis von Verkündigung und Öffentlichkeit*. Berlin, De Gruyter 1991, pp. 172–180.

[5] 'Die Kanzeln, anstatt von der Gefangennehmung der Vernunft unter den Gehorsam des Glaubens zu ertönen, ertönen nun von nichts, als von dem innigen Bande zwischen Vernunft und Glauben. Glaube ist durch Wunder und Zeichen bekräftigte Vernunft, und Vernunft raisonnierender Glaube geworden. Die ganze geoffenbarte Religion ist nichts, als eine erneuerte Sanction der Religion der Vernunft.' Lessing, 'Gegensätze des Herausgebers', W VIII 315f. For the 'Neologen', see Karl Aner, *Die Theologie der Lessingzeit*. Halle, Max Niemeyer Verlag 1929.

Ernst und Falk, Lessing's dialogues on freemasonry, offered Hamann an important link between this theological material and Starck's interests. The link was more than accidental: freemasonry may cherish esoteric secrets, just like the mystery religions of antiquity, but more importantly it embodies in Lessing's account a doctrine which is exemplary and progressive, a spirit of social responsibility which transcends the letter of arcane ceremonial practices. The relation between 'Geist' and 'Buchstabe' was central to the development of Christianity from the outset, and the Enlightenment's reconsideration of the balance between reason and revelation can be seen – as Hamann saw it – as a modern-dress episode in the long tradition of permanent tension between dogma and scripture going back, through Luther, to the church fathers and, ultimately, to the early church's reception of its Jewish scriptural heritage. *Ernst und Falk* explores this theological issue by applying it to the subject-matter of freemasonry, albeit with an explicit invitation to the reader in the preface to draw the parallel with Christianity. The question of 'Geist' and 'Buchstabe' is common to all these texts. Hamann's disagreement with them is over the understanding of 'Geist' – does it amount to some rational essence, as they imply, or is it an ineffable divine emanation?

As a preliminary orientation, it should be borne in mind that Hamann's interest in the ancient mystery religions is secondary. What he disputes is the view raised by the 'Fragmente' and in the ensuing polemics: that a rational core can be abstracted from the salvation history embodied – not just symbolised – by the resurrection as Hamann understood it. To be sure, the interest of Starck and others in the mysteries was already more than antiquarian. To suggest that a core of religious truth can be abstracted from them implies that there can be such abstract religious truths, independent of Christian revelation, and invites an application to Christianity. Nonetheless, the weight given to this material is striking. Why did Hamann not approach the real topic directly, as Lessing's other opponents did?

Hamann's text entertains comparisons between four terms: the ancient mystery religions, freemasonry, Enlightenment philosophy, and Christianity. According to Hamann, the latter differs from the others in that it is founded in the historical fact of 'Christ crucified'.

That foundation was undermined by the 'Fragmente'. If their arguments could not be refuted, scripture could no longer be regarded as reliable documentary evidence, and Lessing proposed as an alternative foundation the 'spirit' of Christianity embodied in the earliest church and then preserved as a practical tradition, the 'regula fidei'.[6] Similarly, Starck had sought to extract an essence of truth from the pagan mysteries. Such an essence would be true independently of the vehicle which transmitted it, and could conceivably be attained by reason alone – by philosophy. Steinbart had accepted this approach in his adaptation of Frederick's ethics of amour-propre to include Christianity in an ancillary and merely propaedeutic role. Freemasonry, which had its secrets but was rational, was a parallel case – for Starck, parallel to mystery religions, for Lessing, to Christianity.

Konxompax

What follows summarises the argument of *Konxompax* itself, initially in the form of an account which follows the order of the text. Given its obscurity, that is a necessary foundation for broader interpretation. *Konxompax* contains many particularly obscure passages and I depend throughout the following account on Evert Jansen Schoonhoven's line-by-line commentary in *Hamanns Hauptschriften erklärt*. It is impossible for the modern reader to get very far with this text without such help, by simply picking it up and reading it – if anyone ever was able to do that.

The text begins by stating Hamann's view of these relationships as he finds them in Starck's book. 'Das heilige Feuer einer natürlich seeligmachenden Religion', hidden under the bushel of Ceres and the couch of Bacchus, has been revived by the freemasons.[7] For Hamann, 'natürlich

[6] Lessing's understanding of the regula is hard to pin down. The whole drift of the Fragmentenstreit means he surely saw it as something different from a creed, in spite of what he says in *Nöthige Antwort*; in my view, his position shifts for tactical reasons only, so the identification of the regula with 'Geist' rather than 'Buchstabe' is justified. See below for further discussion.

[7] Ceres and Bacchus, the deities of crops and wine, could refer to the bread and wine of the eucharist, alluding both to the extraction of the tenets of rational theology from Christianity itself (the constitutive historical core symbolised in the sacraments), and to Hamann's own view of the mystery religions as a *typological* prefiguration of the latter.

seeligmachende Religion' is virtually an oxymoron; natural religion, which man can arrive at without the aid of revelation, is not sufficient to secure salvation. This position is drawn from the Pauline corpus, with its different but, for Hamann, parallel concerns. The implication is that natural religion is all there is to be found in either freemasonry or its pagan antecedents. Starck does not actually make the claims Hamann attacks, but by doing so Hamann suggests that they were what he really thought, even if he did not say so.[8] This exaggeration is parody, with the aim of unmasking Starck's intentions and sympathies.

The quotation which opens the first sentence lays out the programme of Hamann's work. Starck's interest in the mysteries was their secret doctrines; but he said their origin, 'ob es gleich nur ein historischer Umstand ist', was also among the secrets in the sense that it had not been discovered by scholars. Hamann applies Starck's quoted words not to the origin of the mysteries, but to Starck's own discovery – a historical event – of natural religion within them; given Hamann's differences with Starck, this must be ironic. Yet the result is that *Konxompax* begins with the statement that a historical circumstance is after all ('doch', not in Starck) among the ultimate secrets. That goes against Starck's focus on the rational religious truth he detects in the mysteries, but it also suggests Hamann's estimation, against Reimarus and Lessing, of the central place of historical truth in Christianity (W III 217:1–8).

The next paragraph, apart from pointing out some inaccuracies on Starck's part, makes the link with philosophy more explicit, as well as referring tangentially to the Fragmentenstreit:

> Was die neuesten der [Kirchenväter] theils an baarem Genuß geselligen Vergnügens, theils an Aussichten beßrer Hoffnungen zu verdanken haben, ließe sich ohne Zeugniß des Hörensagens durch manchen Sorites aus dem Atticismo ihrer Apo- und Prologen deduciren.[9]

This is overtly an attack on intellectuals in the orbit of Berlin, whose sophistic prefaces (Hamann has in mind Steinbart's, on which more below) reveal their collusion with Frederick's secular power. Instead of thinking about the hereafter, they are lining their pockets. Leaving this political

[8] Indeed, Starck explicitly denies that freemasonry has religious aims; in this respect it differs from the mysteries, see Schoonhoven 178f. However, there really was a great deal of hocus-pocus of a superstitious character in freemasonry. See the discussion of Starck and the masonic background in Ingemarie Manegold, *Johann Georg Hamann's Schrift 'Konxompax'*. Heidelberg, Carl Winter 1963, esp. pp. 80–86, 102–104.

[9] W III 217:18–22. Hamann quotes from Reimarus, lines 9–11, cf. Lessing W VIII 250.

aspect aside, the phrase 'Zeugniß des Hörensagens' alludes to the unreliability of the gospels asserted by Reimarus;[10] 'Sorites' suggests by contrast a philosophical approach;[11] 'Prologen' refers to Steinbart.[12]

The following page (218:4–31) establishes a link between philosophy and the 'Fragmente', and briefly states a contrasting Christian position. Attempts to discover the secret tenets of the Eleusinian mysteries have produced nothing better than either 'ein reines Nichts oder ein zweideutiges Etwas'. 'Nichts' and 'Etwas' in Hamann's usage are disparaging references to philosophical abstractions.[13] So the content of the mysteries, at least in contemporary reconstructions, is just philosophical hot air. Through a parody of philosophical discourse, he then makes reason out to be the object of a 'mystery religion' for which the contemporary interest in the ancient mysteries is a cover; Reimarus, he says, is among its devotees. As evidence Hamann gives Mendelssohn's phrase: 'Die heilige Vernunft, die [den Weltweisen] die Stelle einer Offenbarung vertritt'.[14] But these idolaters will not be saved. To explain why, Hamann quotes Lessing's famous sentence: 'Zufällige Geschichtswahrheiten können der Beweis von notwendigen Vernunftwahrheiten nie werden' (Lessing W VIII 441). That, says Hamann with his tongue in his cheek, is a reason why the resurrection did not take place; so the 'Vernunftwahrheiten' are in effect powerless – if Lessing is right – because they do not guarantee the resurrection. This

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[10] It is also a quotation from Starck, *Apologie* p. 167, where he wrongly says Clement only knew about the mysteries from hearsay; cf. Schoonhoven on 223:31.

[11] 'Sorites', or 'heap', was a stock type of sophistic argument, consisting of a chain of syllogisms. Sextus Empiricus illustrates it with several examples, all clearly fallacious, purporting to disprove the existence of gods; *Adversus mathematicos* IX 182f. Lessing applied the term in the 'Gegensätze des Herausgebers' to fallacious arguments for the 'Göttlichkeit der Bibel', Lessing W 8, 331.

[12] Schoonhoven gives no argument for this (see his note 10 ad loc.); but a few pages later (W III 222:27ff) Hamann quotes a passage from Steinbart's preface which fits both the accusation of sophistry ('Atticismo', smooth-talking rhetoric; cf. B V 274:30 on Mendelssohn) and the materialist political philosophy criticised here along with the self-interest of Steinbart and his ilk. The reference Schoonhoven detects to freemasonry presumably depends on the echo of Cicero, who is describing his initiation into the mysteries ('Vergnügen ... Hoffnung', cf. note 3 on 'locus communis', Schoonhoven 217).

[13] This usage goes back to Hamann's review in 1764 of Robinet's *De la nature*, W IV 271f (as confirmation, see also 'Näschereyen', W II 185ff, for 'gut und böse' in Robinet's book, here line 10), and is also found in the *Metakritik*, W III 284:2f, cf. 'Etwas=X'. In the third *Hierophantischer Brief* 'Etwas' is positive (in contrast to 'Nichts', see W III 142) but here it is termed 'zweideutig', 218:7, and both seem to be meant negatively. Hamann here alters a quotation from Meiners; see Schoonhoven ad loc.

[14] In the fifteenth and final letter *Ueber die Empfindungen*, Jubiläumsausgabe vol. 1, Akademie-Verlag. Berlin 1929, p. 106. The preceding sentence reads: 'Sie können nichts für eine Kleinigkeit achten, was ihnen die Vernunft gebietet.'

illogical twist presumes what is stated at the end of the paragraph: the true path to salvation, as it is realised in the eucharist, must depend not on 'Vernunftwahrheiten', but on the resurrection.

Needless to say, Hamann here rides roughshod over his material; Lessing's 'garstiger breiter Graben', from events to truths, is not the reason given by Reimarus for doubting the historicity of the resurrection, an event; and Lessing's question is whether the resurrection can guarantee the truths, not vice versa. Lessing's point is that even if the documentary value of the Bible were not in question, its merely historical testimony could not underwrite the absolute truth claimed by religion. Hamann objects that true Christianity presumes not only historical faith, but the sufficiency and centrality of Christ's death and resurrection for salvation. Reason really was being proposed as an alternative to this authority, and Hamann seeks, by telescoping the arguments, to emphasise the radicalism which Lessing, claiming still to speak for Christianity ('der Orthodox tritt auf meine Seite'),[15] played down in his texts. For Hamann, what comes first is indeed faith in the resurrection, not 'Vernunftwahrheiten', and that is the point he is making.

The next paragraph (up to the middle of p. 219) summarises Hamann's view of the material presented so far. Starck had regretted the lack of evidence for the tenets of the ancient mystery religions, but in fact Hamann thinks we need look no further than their continuation or revival in freemasonry and the cult of reason to find out what they were. However, this will unmask them as philosophical hot air, with no more power than any other contingent product of this world – and thus no claim to trump the historical event of the resurrection. Only at the apocalypse will the true 'mystery' be illuminated. 'Notwendige Vernunftwahreiten' are thus not a superior order of knowledge.

Hamann proceeds to make the link between pagan mysteries and eighteenth-century philosophy in three stages, extending to p. 224. He calls this an 'Induktion', and it is a counterargument to Starck's attempt to extract a worthwhile core from pagan religion; that in fact revealed only heresy and philosophical hot air, Hamann argues, but what is solid after all is the true gospel. The three stages examine the rites of the mysteries, their doctrines, and Christian

[15] *Eine Duplik*, Lessing W VIII 514; cf. Lessing's explanation of the title 'Duplik' on p. 585: 'Denn die Evangelisten und mich, halte ich für den angeklagten Teil.'

mysticism. The second stage, unsurprisingly, takes up most space. Throughout, comparisons which purport to illuminate the pagan past are actually used to show it still at work in the present day. Hamann draws a negative parallel in opposition to Starck's positive one.[16]

First, Hamann puts the rites of the mysteries on a par with the indecencies of a Voltaire, that icon of Enlightenment; even though – not because – Christianity was tainted by the mysteries in the middle ages, it survived. Secondly, if the value of the mysteries is supposed to lie in their secret doctrines, then the ones which are credited to it, mixed as they were with contradictory elements such as the belief in demons, were in any case nothing special and already present in paganism at large: the divine attributes of omnipotence and ultimate goodness, the immortality of the soul, and rewards and punishment in the afterlife. These are the tenets of deism. Thirdly, a comparison of the mysteries with Christianity does not in fact reveal fundamental rational doctrines common to both; the closest parallel on the Christian side, Hamann asserts, to pagan mysteries – and so to philosophy – is mysticism, which is heretical. In particular, both use sexuality for religious purposes – still a reprehensible preoccupation, even in the negative form of asceticism – and both show what Hamann calls a theistic streak, meaning 'deist', which he characterises as the 'mystischen, magischen und logischen Circul *menschlicher Vergöttung und göttlicher Incarnation*'. That is, man is made divine and God remade in man's image when the blasphemous and fruitless attempt is made to grasp God with the human mind, whether it is through mystical practices, in the pagan mysteries or through speculative reason.[17]

The second stage, on doctrines, contains several subsidiary sections, including references to Lessing, Reimarus and Steinbart. These make up the bulk of the section, and will now be considered in detail – turning back a few pages.

Given that the philosophical tenets supposed to be their 'secrets' were in fact common currency, the true attraction of the mysteries must have lain in their secret books, 'welche Uneingeweihte umsonst zu lesen versucht, weil ihre Verfasser sie Uneingeweihten nicht geschrieben hatten'. These documents are lost, but that should not be cause for regret, because

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[16]The stages are enumerated: 219:18, 220:1, 223:23.

[17]W III 219:18–35; 220:1–15; 223:23–224:12.

we have quite enough books today which we cannot read. That is – Hamann now explains his heavy irony – the Bible is unreadable, given the dominance of Descartes, Leclerc (a pioneer of 'historisch-kritisch' biblical hermeneutics), Wolff, and '*Machiavellismus* in Schafskleidern', namely Frederick's political philosophy. 'Elementarbuch' and 'Pädagogus' recall the portion of *Erziehung des Menschengeschlechts* Lessing included in the 'Gegensätze des Herausgebers';[18] there they claim to have a Christian reference, but here Hamann pointedly applies them to Descartes et al. These allusions are given an apocalyptic colouring – they are all 'signs of the times'. The implication is that we should be trying to read the Bible, not studying ancient mysteries, or their new avatars among the Enlightenment philosophers, who usurp the place of Christ (W III 220:16–221:14).

Cicero famously reported on the Eleusinian mysteries: 'Die Einweihung zu denselben haben wir wirklich als den Anfang zum Leben erkannt, und wir haben darin nicht allein dieses erhalten, daß wir mit Vergnügen leben, sondern auch, daß wir mit einer bessern Hoffnung sterben können'.[19] But really they were just superstition, as Paul said of the religious observance of the Athenians (Acts 17:22). Hamann's implication is that the same goes for Enlightenment interest in them.[20]

Reimarus had argued in *Von dem Zwecke Jesu und seiner Jünger* that the disciples simply invented the theology surrounding the resurrection, attributing to Jesus a goal he never professed, therefore that St. Paul's message of 'Christ crucified' was not authentic. Hamann emphasises the central place of this – historical – doctrine in liturgy and scripture; it is the latter which serves to inspire our 'Thaten', an allusion to the good deeds which Falk presents as the true expression of the masonic secret.[21] The vision of Christianity which Lessing's analogy with freemasonry in *Ernst und Falk* suggests contains nothing corresponding to the resurrection, Hamann implies, but that would be essential to make the analogy meaningful. Starck and his ilk misjudge the true positive

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[18] §52: 'Ein beßrer Pädagog muß kommen, und dem Kinde das erschöpfte Elementarbuch aus den Händen reißen. – Christus kam.' This was the final paragraph of the extract from *Erziehung* in the 'Gegensätze'.

[19] *De legibus* II 14, in Starck's translation; cf. Schoonhoven ad loc.

[20] W III 221:15–23. The Greek word could be translated differently – pious not superstitious – and usually is, but then it must be taken ironically; the final sense is the same, and Hamann pointedly gives it. This is typical of his handling of non-biblical texts.

[21] 'Thaten' is gesperrt as well as being in inverted commas, a deliberately clear indication of quotation because it might not be immediately obvious where from. W III 222:18, cf. Lessing W X 17ff.

significance of the mysteries when they read Christian doctrines into them; they are in fact typological prefigurations of Christianity, in particular of those historical aspects of Christianity which Reimarus denied. But such a link makes the value of the mysteries entirely dependent on the truth of Christianity, with no independent substance.[22]

Steinbart had proposed Christianity as an ancillary support for the realisation of Frederick's morality of amour-propre.[23] For Hamann, this has as its aim 'dem *Zeus gleich zu seyn*', the usurpation of God's power (Gen. 3:5), which of course was supposed to be achieved by eating of the tree of knowledge. Alternatively, Hamann ironically suggests, Christianity might just as well be dispensed with altogether, leaving full scope to the 'einem einzigen Antrieb', amour-propre, 'der alle andere Antriebe verkleinert, verdächtig macht! *Sich selbst für den stärksten und besten ausgiebt!*' But the 'Antrieb', which places itself above everything else, is also the 'neuer Bund' of reason, which through the Trojan horse of toleration is set, under Frederick, to become a new stifling orthodoxy, very much a superstitious faith and not an increase of freedom. Such is the consequence if the kind of ideas some detect in the mysteries gain a hold, Hamann implies, proving their true distance from Christianity – the same ideas that are at work in Lessing and Reimarus, and are preached by Frederick's high priests, the philosophers, in their 'Cellen und Bordellen'.[24]

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[22]W III 222:1–26. Schoonhoven takes '*National-Weinlese-* und *Erndefeste*' (line 9f) as a reference to Christ's apocalyptic 'harvest'; I would also suggest that Bacchus and Ceres recall the bread and wine of the eucharist, cf. Hamann's first paragraph on p. 217.

[23] Hamann quotes part of an extract from a letter of Frederick's which barely concedes to Christianity even what Steinbart had claimed for it – 'soutenu, si vous le voulez, par votre principe'. W III 222:37–41.

[24]W III 222:27–223:11. This paragraph of *Konxompax* is a good example of how the sense arises from the juxtaposition of overtly disparate material – for instance, Hamann moves from amour-propre to reason at the dashes in line 4, yet the (typographically emphasised) criticism that amour-propre grants itself too important a place fits reason as well. I would defend this reading as follows. Hamann's 'Antrieb' is a quote from *Ernst und Falk*, Lessing W X 18, where the 'Antrieb' is first Christianity, from which freemasonry could only be a distraction, then freemasonry – the extra 'Antrieb' that threatens to supplant Christianity. In Hamann's context it is natural to read 'Antrieb' as referring to amour-propre, but someone very familiar with the text of *Ernst und Falk* will also pick up Hamann's subsidiary message that it is best to support Christianity and have no truck with its rivals. The latter part of the paragraph goes on to talk about reason, traeting it as continuous with amour-propre. The substantive link, smoothing the transition, is that Frederick's ethics is an example of blind faith in reason. That reason is meant after the dashes, no longer just amour-propre, is confirmed by the parallel with 218:17f, where the 'enge Pforte' (also here at line 5) admits the 'Licht der Vernunft' at the urging of 'unsere heutigen Apostel in ihren Opusculis profligatis'. 'Palladium' then makes sense as a reference to Athena, goddess of reason; this is compatible with Schoonhoven's interpretation that the 'Palladium' is 'Gottesgleichheit', because that is precisely what Hamann thought the Enlightenment, repeating the hubris of the Fall, laid claim to – through reason. Cf. also the parallel Schoonhoven mentions from *Golgatha*, 313:9,

Rounding off the topic of the doctrine of the mysteries, Hamann stresses the distance between the true Christian message and on the other hand philosophical abstraction, masonic activities and the ideas of Reimarus ('den *ewigen Regeln, Operibus supererogatis und Opusculis profligatis*'). The theologians of the Enlightenment imagine the essence of Christianity is an 'erhabene Philosophie', like the one they think they detect traces of in the pagan mysteries, but really it is a 'mystery' with genuinely esoteric content, revealed through the 'Predigt von Jesus Christus' (Rom. 16:25).[25]

After the paragraph on mysticism, W III 223f, discussed above, Hamann expands on the theme of the Fall introduced at the bottom of p. 222 ('dem Zeus gleich zu seyn'). The serpent persuaded Adam and Eve to encroach on God's prerogative by acquiring – independent – knowledge. Yet its deceitful promise that they would be 'wie Gott' concealed a truth, if taken in the context of the NT promise of salvation: the faithful will sit with Christ on his throne (Rev. 3:21), they will be 'teilhaftig der göttlichen Natur' (II Pet. 1:4). Hamann reads the serpent's words against the

where reason seems to be meant. Nonetheless, the apparently irrelevant reference to p. 142 of Steinbart's book, taken with 'Gottes Gnade' (W III 223:9), underlines the link to Frederick throughout the paragraph; but that is consistent with reason, not just amour-propre, being meant. Steinbart, comparing the necessary imperfections of human justice with the divine variety, free from impediments, writes tolerantly: '... welche obrigkeitliche Personen haben nicht ihre Favoriten ...', and: 'Gern möchte der König allen für das Vaterland blessirten Officiren und Soldaten einen gemächlichen Unterhalt zur Belohnung anweisen: allein die Einkünfte des Staats reichen nicht hin: er muß aus Unvermögen partheiisch seyn, weil er nicht allen sondern nur einigen helfen kann.' Gotthelf Samuel Steinbart, *System der reinen Philosophie oder Glückseligkeitslehre des Christenthums, für die Bedürfnisse seiner aufgeklärten Landesleute und andrer, die nach Weisheit fragen, eingerichtet*. Züllichau, 1778, p. 142. Hamann's 'Toleranz', line 4, recalls the title of the first fragment of Reimarus, 'Von Duldung der Deisten'; 'Köhlerglaube', line 7, had been Reimarus's negative description of uncritical faith based on the authority of the chatechism, especially in the Catholic church (v. Lessing W VIII 222, 'Zweites Fragment') – Hamann applies it ironically to the new orthodoxy of reason. The origin of the term was a – positively meant – Lutheran anecdote of unquestioning Christian faith; cf. Schoonhoven's note ad loc. The 'neuer Bund der Vernunft' recalls *Erziehung des Menschengechlechts*, though when Hamann wrote *Konxompax* he can only have seen the first half of it, which Lessing included in his 'Gegensätze' to the fragments. These allusions, and that above to *Ernst und Falk*, implicitly extend Hamann's criticism to include Reimarus and Lessing. Note that the reader is left guessing, and must assume a context to orient himself among Hamann's assertions and establish which way round they are pointed; but it often doesn't really matter – here, freemasonry, amour-propre and reason are clearly meant to be bad and Christianity good, whether that last point is a recondite implication or a more or less plain statement – but still alluding to Lessing's or Falk's masonic alternative. I have included this lengthy footnote as an example of how unrewarding it can be to unravel the details, deliberately and intricately though they are constructed, if the aim is to understand Hamann's thought, which here sets up what may fairly be called a crude equivalence between various things he is opposed to without articulating an argument in support, for all the intricacy of intertextual reference – not the same thing as an argument.

[25]W III 223:12–22. The passage Hamann refers to in Meiners underlines (in Hamann's context!) the basis of Christianity in scriptural revelation ('durch Ueberlieferungen, oder in heiligen Schriften aufbewahrt'), as well as implying that Enlightenment thought is a (false) 'öffentliche Volksreligion'. Christoph Meiners, 'Über die Mysterien der Alten, besonders über die eleusinischen Mysterien', in *Vermischte Philosophische Schriften*, III. Theil. Leipzig 1776, p. 205f. For 'opus supererogatum' see *Ernst und Falk* II, Lessing W X 32; 'opuscula profligata' are fragments.

grain, just as he frequently did those of other texts; here, that is standard typological practice. This presumption of divine knowledge and concomitant power is common to paganism and the mysteries (cf. 'Einweihung', line 18). The latter include philosophy, which twists the divine helpmeets, reason and scripture, against their sacred intention, that is to serve the redemptive purpose of Christ, which is also that of the apostles, the 'Zweck Jesu und seiner Jünger'. Instead, it attempts to encompass God in the all-too-human nets of reason. This amounts to 'Selbstabgötterey', because the philosophical notion of God proposes as an object of veneration what is in fact merely a human construct.[26]

Hamann now turns to the specific example of reason as it is employed by the *Fragmentist*. Far from being certain and secure (which are properly divine attributes), it serves merely to demonstrate its own insufficiency, like the Law in Pauline theology.[27] Because of the Fall, and like human nature in general, it is inherently sinful when it attempts to be self-sufficient. The church is right to attack it as a false idol, in spite of the protest of *Von Verschreiung der Vernunft auf den Kanzeln*.[28]

A series of suggested personae for philosophy, followed by Hamann's comment, closes the topic of 'fallen reason'. In general, philosophy possesses a 'Jakobsleiter im Traum nach verjüngtem Maasstabe', that is it communicates between heaven and earth, but improperly, because it makes man the measure of all things ('Maasstabe'). The first suggestion, the 'Madonna', is obscure; Schoonhoven thinks it could refer to Neoplatonism, but it is difficult to see what relevance

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[26]W III 224:13–225:2. Hamann plays on different senses of the Greek word πρόληψις which can mean 'notion' or 'preconception' (that is, for Hamann here, the pagan and philosophical misconception of God as 'ens entium', cf. 'Ding', W III 224:15), but also 'anticipation' or just 'taking something in advance', which here means both the legitimate reward of those who will sit with Christ (it is anticipated) and its usurpation by the Promethean ambition of reason as practised by philosophers and deists. As a technical term from Epicureanism, πρόληψις is absolutely the *mot juste* for a merely human notion of God because it is part of an empiricist account of universals as generalisations from experience rather than Platonic ideas. Hamann's first sentence suggests that this was paganism's route from polytheism inspired by nature to philosophical monotheism. Liddell & Scott cite Iamblichus, *De mysteriis* 3:26 for the sense 'anticipation' (some animals show advance knowledge of earthquakes and storms); this text is very probably one of Hamann's indirect sources, in which case Liddell & Scott's passage would add the apocalyptic resonance that the second coming, though desired, is also to be feared, a *mysterium tremendum*, quite different in feel from the secular optimism of the Enlightenment and Lessing's progressive social vision in *Ernst und Falk*.

[27]The *usus elenchticus legis*. The parallel (for which see Chapter I) is not exact, because the law exposes human incapacity to fulfil it, whereas reason, itself a human faculty, exposes its own limitations. Cf. Rom. 3:20.

[28]The first fragment of the main 1777 tranche. W III 225:3–23. A small correction to Schoonhoven's commentary: 'Nostrum' at line 10 surely looks forward to 'Arzney' 12 lines below.

this would have to the other material. The second conflates Wolffianism with Reimarus, whom Hamann knew to be the author of the 'Fragmente', referring to a published work of his and possibly to the ten contradictions of the fragment on the resurrection. The third and fourth are Voltaire and, possibly, a midwife – this would be a metaphorical allusion to Socratic practice. Finally, philosophy might be 'jene verschleierte Isis', the freemasonry of *Ernst und Falk*, which is a disguised mystery religion; but its true character is obscene (W III 225:24–226:8).

The concluding comment sets the masonic ideal of *Ernst und Falk* against Hamann's Christian ideal, with its emphasis on the person of Christ. The freemasonry of Lessing's dialogue really embodies a social and even political ideal which Hamann, by suggestive juxtaposition, links with Enlightenment theology. Both Jew and gentile look for God in the wrong place, but their differences are reconciled and superseded in Christ. The theological error of Judaism, with its reverence for the divine name, is parallel to the philosophical error which makes of God a reified abstraction; both are 'mysteries'. Instead, we should look to Christ for enlightenment.[29]

The last three paragraphs of Hamann's text constitute a peroration, stating his own position rather than attacking others for differing from it, and a coda which steps outside the whole, rather like the 'Apostille' of *Aesthetica in nuce*.

The Christ of revelation is the key to history, the incarnation the great event which makes sense of everything else. History, not reason, can penetrate the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven. At the apocalypse man will be freed from the limitations of the fallen state, acquiring true title to the *Mündigkeit* which reason, ignoring its all-too-human nature, now arrogantly presumes. The agent of this coming salvation is Christ. However, very importantly, 'Fleisch und Buch ohne Geist ist kein Nütze' (John 6:63) – not human 'Geist', of course, but the mediating agency of the

[29] Schoonhoven places this paragraph with the following material, but I see it as rounding off what precedes. Hamann then expounds his own view, which is adumbrated here. Such links are a common device in Hamann. The schema of 'Jew and gentile' is borrowed from Pauline theology, where it originally addressed the practical problem of reconciling converts of different origins. It was to be important in Hamann's *Golgatha und Scheblimini*, which offers support for my summary reading here. For the latter work, see Chapter IV. The final word 'Christ' is omitted from Hamann's Greek quotation, Col. 3:11.

Holy Ghost is needed to lend effective significance in the life of the individual Christian to the events of salvation history and their record in scripture.[30]

The following paragraph expands on this point, setting out the essence of Hamann's disagreement with Reimarus and Lessing and his own answer to the hermeneutic problem raised by the 'Fragmente'. One might have expected him to insist on the independent efficacy of 'Fleisch und Buch' – though that would have been theologically eccentric – against Lessing and Reimarus who, because of the deficiencies of 'Fleisch und Buch', that is, respectively, 'zufällige Geschichtswahrheiten' and their record in scripture, see a need for something further to support or replace them. Instead, Hamann suggests they are looking in the wrong place for the 'Siegel [und] Schlüssel des Geistes'. What is needed is the grace of the Holy Ghost, without which the letter of the Bible cannot produce faith.

The forces of Enlightenment work against the divine cause, with no more effect, Hamann asserts, than to show up the deficiencies of their dependence on reason. Lessing had resisted Goeze's demand for a statement of Christian doctrine as he saw it because that would be too rigid (cf. *Das Testament Johannis*); Hamann points out that scripture, properly interpreted, is ultimately flexible. Taken in the right spirit, it is unaffected by the critique of Reimarus.[31]

The last paragraph returns to *Ernst und Falk*. Ernst was hunting a butterfly, a metaphor for truth, and ants entered into the dialogue's discussion of social order. But what was caught was 'Gottes Finger', a reference both to the mysteries – and their Enlightened counterparts – and to

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[30]W III 226:20–227:10. 'Poetic licence' is the licence of the creator, Greek ποιητής. Cf. Bayer, *Schöpfung als Anrede* for this theme in Hamann.

[31]W III 227:11–22. 'Geist' is taken first as a subjective then as an objective genitive, indicating respectively the agency of the Holy Ghost, and the sense of scripture, in opposition to 'Buchstabe' – Hamann's 'Geist', and Lessing's, which is insufficient to unlock the holy book. 'Engel des Lichts' means the Enlightenment, cf. 'Lucifer', the bearer of light. For the flexibility of the Bible, see below on 'regula Lesbia'; in a word, the Bible is 'all things to all men' as a bald statement of doctrine cannot be. For Hamann's biblical hermeneutics, see my Chapter I on the origins of his own style, particularly the section on Augustine. The two key hermeneutic strategies are typology and 'applicatio' hermeneutics, applying the text to the reader's situation. Cf. Bengel's aphorism: 'te totum applica ad textum, rem totam applica ad te'. That is, the text as a whole needs to be taken into account – it is not a kind of 'sortes biblicae'. This approach can be seen at work in Hamann's *Biblische Betrachtungen*, written in London in the aftermath of his conversion.

their being wrong; their very inefficacy is an indication of the power and reality of the one true god.[32]

That, then, is a suggested reading of the argument of *Konxompax*. But in being reduced in this way to an argument, the true character of Hamann's text is disguised. It would be clear enough to any reader, taking *Konxompax* in isolation and as a whole, that an unflattering comparison between 'philosophy' and the mystery religions, to the advantage of Christianity, was intended; but the argument can only be reconstructed in detail, or even seen as an argument rather than an attitude, with reference to the complex of texts present in the background. The degree of this intertextuality is apparent in the very difficulty of presenting Hamann's argument without being seduced by the details back into the method of a commentary. Indeed the word 'argument' is almost misleading, because it conceals the level of active engagement with the text needed to make any kind of overview possible. But the purpose of a commentary – in this case the one on which I have relied – is to facilitate the drawing of larger conclusions. To have expounded the argument, which is often entirely between the lines, by teasing out all the implicatures and intertextual resonances would have defeated the object of providing a clear overview; nonetheless I hope what underlies my summary remains in each case specifically identifiable there, at least in conjunction with Schoonhoven's detailed commentary.[33] After an outline of the argument, the second step, in order to be true to the character of the text and understand its true effect, is to provide what is missing in the outline, the detail which was removed so that the outline could be seen. An account on a larger scale – the opposite of Hamann's micrological approach – of the texts to which he alludes, the relations between them and their broad context should make the larger picture appear more clearly. The third step, looking some way ahead, will be to relate the context to the text again, with a view to showing why Hamann's selection and treatment of material makes sense given his aims, how everything fits together. That will provide a robust interpretative

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[32] W III 227:23–228:11. For 'Gottes Finger', cf. 219:3, and Schoonhoven's note, Schoonhoven p. 204. In Exodus 8, the magicians of Egypt are unable to replicate the third plague, and this is 'Gottes Finger', the indication that the god of Israel trumps their powers.

[33] See also Ingemarie Manegold's book on *Konxompax*, which contains much material on the background, and includes a commentary on pp. 123–165. She gives a good account of Hamann's troublesome reference to the dedication on W III 216; in the edition of Phaedrus that he used, his quotation did go with the fable 'scurra et rusticus' from book V. However, I am still inclined to agree with Schoonhoven that the dedication is to Starck.

framework for this and other related texts and a clear picture of Hamann's programme as a response to this context. This whole process is analogous to Kant's model of scientific method, which he then applies to reason – first analysis, then synthesis.

But first, I would like to go some way towards redressing the balance between wood and trees in the first part of the analysis by dissecting one sample paragraph step by step before moving on to the wider context. Doing so will in any case begin to open up this perspective, while also being the easier for having surveyed Hamann's text as a whole, revealing some clear general preoccupations within it.

Pages 219–24, we recall, drew comparisons between pagan mysteries and Enlightened philosophy, overtly to undermine the link others wanted to make between the mysteries and Christianity, albeit Christianity with a 'philosophical' flavour; Hamann's real aim, combating the programme he thinks he detects in Starck and beyond, above all in Lessing, is to distance Christianity from philosophy or 'vernünftiges Christentum'. The difficult paragraph on amour-propre also makes a good example – see my footnote there for some indications – but the one which follows it (223:12–22) is easier to disentangle:

> Wie stimmt Christus mit Lucifer? Was hat der Tempel Gottes für eine Gleiche mit den Idolen? die göttliche Kraft und göttliche Weisheit des Evengelii mit den *ewigen Regeln, Operibus supererogatis* und *Opusculis profligatis* eines irrdischen, thierischen, Gespenst-ähnlichen Instincts? Erkennen unsre Obersten und Archonten [Joh. VII 26] nun gewiß, daß der Aberglaube dieser Sekte jene '*erhabne Philosophie*' [Meiners S. 191] sey – durch einen: *Salamalec dem Judenkönig!* oder ist nicht vielmehr der Titel und Widerspruch am Schandpfahl des Kreuzes ein *Mysterium der zweyten Ordnung* [S. 205f], der wahre Idiotismus und das Schiboleth paulinischer Hypothesen *κατα αποκαλυψιν μυστηριου* – –[34]

This can be seen as a summary of the section it concludes, on mysteries as bodies of doctrine. The opening sentences recall Tertullian's famous question 'What has Athens to do with Jerusalem?' Tertullian, writing for the early church, was advocating a clear separation between faith and reason. Hamann's words echo Paul urging the Corinthians to have nothing to do with pagans:

[34] 223:12–22; I have included Hamann's footnotes in square brackets. However, it should be noted that they derive from handwritten additions by Hamann to copies of the first edition, which did not contain them; it also had just 'Philosophie' for 'jene erhabene Philosophie'. The addition makes the quotation clearer. Hamann's Greek is unaccented.

> Wie stimmt Christus mit Belial? Oder was für ein Teil hat der Gläubige mit dem Ungläubigen? Was hat der Tempel Gottes für eine Gleiche mit dem Götzen? (II Cor. 6:15f)

A phrase from the previous verse – 'Ziehet nicht am fremden Joch mit dem Ungläubigen' – had figured prominently in Hamann's quarrel with Berens over his faith. The link with Enlightenment is made explicit by replacing 'Belial' with 'Lucifer' (bearer of light); the following allusion to I Cor. 1:24 comes from a context, also important to Hamann, warning against philosophy:

> Sintemal die Juden Zeichen fordern und die Griechen nach Weishait fragen. Wir aber predigen den gekreuzigten Christ, den Juden ein Ärgernis und den Griechen eine Torheit. Denen aber berufen sind, beide Juden und Griechen, predigen wir Christum, göttliche Kraft und göttliche Weisheit. Denn die göttliche Torheit ist weiser denn die Menschen sind und die göttliche Schwachheit ist stärker denn die Menschen sind. (I Cor. 1:22–25; see also 1:17–21, 27)

But the 'göttliche Kraft und göttliche Weisheit' of the gospel is here opposed to 'ewige Regeln' – perhaps the rules of logic – to the good deeds of freemasons, referred to in *Ernst und Falk* as 'opera supererogata', and to the 'Fragmente'; the expression 'opera profligata' for fragments is chosen for its similarity to 'opera supererogata' and also sounds disreputable ('profligatus', degraded, abandoned). Lessing's use of the theological term 'opus supererogatum' drew an implicit parallel with Christianity, but in Lutheranism the principle 'faith not works' made the distinction between required good deeds and those above and beyond the call of duty superfluous and suspect. The overall effect of these two sentences is to suggest an equivalence between early Christianity's quarrel with philosophy and the one which had come to a head with Lessing's publication of the 'Fragmente'; the inclusion of *Ernst und Falk* will be discussed below. The 'Instinct' is the faculty of reason,[35] worldly and belonging to man's lower animal self, yet ghostlike in its lack of substance; the powers of ghosts are ascribed to them by superstition.

So far so straightforward, assuming, as Hamann could, familiarity with the biblical passages he alludes to. The references to logic and reason are somewhat opaque, but the general drift is already clear from the Pauline context. The shift in thought from 'irrdischen, thierischen', which say what

[35] Schoonhoven takes it as picking up the 'Antrieb' of the previous paragraph, amour-propre; but I have argued that there 'Antrieb' also means reason, which is Hamann's main target. A passage in the *Metakritik* argues that if apodeictic certainty is to be the criterion of excellence, then human reason would be inferior to the 'untrüglichen *Instinct* der Insekten'. While this denies that reason is an 'Instinct', it does so in order to criticise a – philosophical – conception of reason which, in Hamann's view, would make it little better than an instinct, indeed actually worse; and it is that conception that Hamann is also attacking in *Konxompax* as a whole. Frederick's ethics, and Steinbart's elaboration of it, are merely one example of what can happen when the false conception of reason is given free rein.

Hamann thinks reason is, to 'Gespenst-ähnlichen', which amounts to a compressed parody of the view of it he is attacking – or rather the view he presumes in order to attack it, what might be called a metaphysical view[36] – is awkward and typical; without a general idea of Hamann's line it would make no sense, but the seasoned reader can unpack it with fair confidence of accuracy.

What follows is harder to penetrate. Meiners distinguished between mysteries which were just hocus-pocus and those ('die zwote Art') which centered on actual religious doctrines, 'Kenntnisse ... die mit der öffentlichen Volksreligion ... nicht übereinstimmen'. But esoteric teachings would be unnecessary 'wo die Grundsätze der Religion mit den Grundsätzen der Weltweisheit übereinstimmen', as for instance in the case of Christianity itself, 'deren Lehren erhabene Philosophie sind, und nichts verlieren, wenn sie am allgemeinsten verbreitet werden' (Meiners 188). So under paganism true religion, rational and philosophical, had to be kept secret, but with Christianity the plain truth had come into the open.

Hamann disagrees with this conception of Christianity as an 'erhabene Philosophie'; in his view it is an esoteric religion opposed to the prevailing orthodoxy. To express this he conflates several biblical references and two echoes of Meiners. When Jesus was teaching at the temple, some of his audience asked why the authorities did not object; perhaps they actually did recognise him as the Messiah: 'Erkennen unsere Obersten nun gewiß, daß er gewiß Christus sei?' (John 7:26). In fact, they did not recognise him. Instead of the second clause, Hamann has 'daß der Aberglaube dieser Sekte jene "erhabene Philosophie" sey'. 'Diese Sekte' is Christianity.[37] So, rather than possibly recognising the importance of Christ, the authorities – the religious leaders of Hamann's time, blind to the truth – think they recognise that 'this sect', Christianity, really does possess what they esteem as serious philosophical substance.

They do so 'durch einen Salamalec dem Judenkönig', with a polite nod to Christ.[38] But this is to mistake the true nature of Christian belief. Christ's title 'Judenkönig' is an esoteric mystery, 'der zweyten Ordnung', a true private language ('Idiotismus') and the touchstone of Paul's

[36] In brief, the view that seeing reason as absolute and precise rightly entails a quasi-Platonist reification of its rules; Chapter III on the *Metakritik* will argue that this is a main plank of Hamann's attack on Kant, where the idea is developed further.

[37] In Acts, it is referred to thus by its enemies; cf. Acts 24:5, 14; 28:22, and Schoonhoven's note ad loc.

[38] For 'Salamalec', see Schoonhoven 228 n. 9.

theology.[39] The Greek phrase at the end of the paragraph means 'according to the revelation of the mystery', taken from the prayer which concludes Romans:

> Now to God who is able to strengthen you according to my gospel and the proclamation of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery that was kept secret for long ages but is now disclosed ... (Rom. 16:25f, in the NRSV)

Apart from underlining that Christianity is a revealed religion, calling for the right interpretation, Hamann here alludes specifically to the argument of *Von dem Zwecke Jesu und seiner Jünger*. According to Reimarus, Jesus's project to renew Israel in this world was twisted by early Christianity, starting with Paul, into a doctrine of transcendent salvation. This is the project suggested by the title 'King of the Jews'. But read typologically, this messianic language points towards the new covenant of Christianity in which the mantle of the special status of Israel passes to the church and the ambitions of Judaism for this world are superseded by Christian apocalyptic eschatology – the 'Zweck Jesu *und* seiner Jünger'.[40]

So the message of the paragraph as a whole is that Christianity has nothing to do with natural religion. More than that, it is that the proponents of rational theology are indeed reducing Christianity to natural religion, though they may not all shout it from the rooftops like Reimarus. By using a patchwork of biblical verses to say so – the 'cento' – Hamann simultaneously demonstrates and lends authority to his claim that to subtract revelation from Christianity is a heretical travesty of it. Just as he lets the Bible speak for itself, he allows his opponents to condemn themselves out of their own mouths: in this case, the expression 'erhabene Philosophie' suggests that Meiners did indeed think on deist lines, though he probably would not have said so if his topic had been Christianity. While close familiarity with the Bible could be assumed, detailed

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[39] 'Hypothesen' is not the language a Christian would use; in doing so, Hamann is satirising Steinbart, who did, though of Augustine not of Paul; cf. Schoonhoven ad loc, and on 223:9. This strategy of suggestive exaggeration or distortion is at home in satire, which Hamann – in common with many of his contemporaries – read and enjoyed in Latin, particularly Persius, who also served as a precedent for other features of Hamann's style such as allusive language compressed to the limits of understanding, and crudeness.

[40] 222:6. This interpretation is supported by the fact that Hamann has just discussed *Von dem Zwecke Jesu und seiner Jünger*, 222:1–26. Otherwise, it is difficult to know what to make of 'Judenkönig'. But in any case, such indirect references abound in the text; and the point of the allusions to Meiners is clear. Note that 'revelation' is Greek ἀποκάλυψις, suggesting 'apocalypse' and reminding us that, etymologically, the final cataclysm of the apocalypse will reveal as well as restore the true order of the world.

knowledge of a book like Meiners's may have been less widespread, and the reader does need it to get the point, certainly of 'Mysterium der zweyten Ordnung'.

Hamann's parallel between the leaders of the temple and Enlightenment theology, though entirely serious, is rather pointed. The state religion of Prussia was after all Christianity, and to suggest that true Christianity had been driven underground by an unholy alliance between Enlightenment and the secular authorities was a provocative criticism. The religious issue was also political, and this may be part of the reason for some of Hamann's obscurity as well as for his affinity with satire, which even if it lacks a specifically political edge generally combines moral outrage with social criticism from the perspective of the underdog or outsider. *Konxompax* was published in Weimar, but that did not mean there was no need for Hamann to be circumspect.

The effect of the paragraph is not just to express a theological opinion – that Christianity cannot be reduced to rational doctrines – but to accuse others of thinking it can, though they might not say so themselves. Hamann's intertextuality is polemical in intent. He means to redraw a boundary that others are trying to talk their way round, and catch them in the act. To do so, he must focus on what they say rather than what he thinks; but rather than accepting his opponents' words at face value he tries to put them in a different, and revealing, light by teasing out unspoken implications. That might mean quoting out of context, suggesting guilt by association, juxtaposing one telling phrase with another, reinforcing a point cumulatively throughout the text – the whole battery of rhetorical strategies was at Hamann's command. The Bible quotations set his battle in a Christian framework, with the 'Aufklärer' cast in all seriousness as the forces of darkness. To do so on such a large scale is probably a new rhetorical departure. But consequently it is only possible to read Hamann's books as they were written, with his target in the other hand. Having done so, one may extract a position from his works – though only with due caution – but for him the importance, value and substance of that position lay in opposing what it opposed, without being shy of breathtaking distortion; as a positive statement of his general views, the Bible could probably not be improved on. The value of Hamann's polemic as a critical appreciation

of his opponents' texts does not follow from the complexity of his allusions to them, and his spectacularly rough tactics diminish it.

The nature of the target of *Konxompax*

Hamann's text as a whole equates three targets: the pagan mysteries, freemasonry, and the contemporary application of reason to religious matters, particularly as exemplified in the 'Fragmente' and by Lessing. On one level this was obviously just an analogy which suggested a certain way of viewing the theological material, a rhetorical convenience, not a serious theory. But the mysteries, and the philosophical schools of stoicism and Epicureanism, had once competed with Christianity, and the suggestion that the contemporary theological crisis offered a similar challenge, as well as putting that challenge in a certain light, was also an appeal to the tradition of Christian apologetic and the church fathers. In Hamann's eyes, taking the long view, recent developments really were an episode in the ongoing struggle between Christianity and the forces of darkness, a station on the way to the apocalypse.

The analogy was one which the texts had invited, which was also why Hamann chose to juxtapose these texts – 'das Mark meiner Fragmente'. Starck used the mysteries as an indirect way of talking about freemasonry. Previously, he had suggested formative links between paganism and Christianity, provoking Hamann's *Hierophantische Briefe*. The implication was that there were common, and natural, elements of true religious value which were not exclusive to Christian revelation, and which might even be found in the decidedly *bürgerlich* context of freemasonry. Any such claim was dangerous to a faith built on revelation like Hamann's – arguably, to any Christian faith worth the name. Meiners, similarly, was ready to distinguish the notion of religious truth from revelation, even if only by implication, and his topic was pagan mystery religions. *Ernst und Falk* is about the essence of freemasonry, a butterfly which it proves impossible to impale; Lessing's preface to the dialogues prominently draws the analogy with Christianity, as being just as hard to pin down. The impossibility of abstracting a list of constitutive dogmas from the Christian

religion was one of Lessing's main arguments in the Fragmentenstreit. Steinbart, associated with Frederick, was an actual example of where Hamann thought it was all leading: Steinbart's theology, which had little to say about revelation, was an accommodation with the secular Enlightenment. Thus there is a genuine coherence among this set of texts, in spite of the violence Hamann does to them in bringing them together.

Though Hamann's theological position is plain enough – orthodox and radically conservative – an investigation of Lessing's own stance will illuminate the points of contention, many of which he states more directly than Hamann, and it will illuminate what Hamann's reaction sought to achieve, and why it was different in form from that of Goeze and others. Though the focus remains on Hamann, I hope some light will be reflected on Lessing.
Both Hamann and Lessing – who demonstrated his knowledge of patristics in the Fragmentenstreit – were well aware that the problem of the status of scripture was as old as Christianity itself. This hermeneutic problem is the key to the relationship between revelation and reason because it has always been the context within which those who emphasised reason could advance their case, possibly quite sincerely, as a legitimate Christian position; an attack on Christianity was outside the terms of the debate. Indeed, it is important not to read covert hostile agendas into earlier views without definite evidence, even if they seem to prefigure those agendas.

This is familiar ground, but a brief exposition will set the scene. Hermann Samuel Reimarus (1694–1768) had left his *Apologie oder Schutzschrift für die vernünftigen Verehrer Gottes* unpublished at his death; Lessing published fragments from a draft of the work anonymously, starting in 1774 with 'Von Duldung der Deisten' which argued for greater tolerance for deists. Lessing's accompanying comments target the Neologen, the theological proponents of a 'vernünftiges Christentum', neither fish nor fowl, for whom there is no tension between reason and revelation, but who oppose deism (Lessing W VIII 115–134; for the Neologen, see 133f).

In 1777 Lessing published five more fragments from the manuscript, together with his response to them in the 'Gegensätze des Herausgebers'.

1. 'Von Verschreiung der Vernunft auf den Kanzeln' argues on philological grounds against the orthodox subjugation of reason to revelation on the basis of Pauline passages, especially I Cor. 2:14, 'Der natürliche Mensch fasset die Dinge nicht, die des Geistes Gottes sind, dann sie sind ihm eine Torheit und er kann sie nicht erkennen; dann sie werden geistlich geurteilet'. Hamann was strongly influenced by this aspect of Paul's thought. Secondly, Reimarus criticises the attribution of reason's incompetence in spiritual matters to the Fall.[41] Lessing's response to this fragment is that whatever Paul meant, orthodox hostility to reason has been superseded by the confusion of the Neologen; his own stated position is that reason must decide what, if anything, is to be regarded as revelation, but once it has, elements beyond the scope of reason are by definition included, and it is wrong to expect them to be derived from reason.[42] As far as the Fall is concerned, Lessing says it is certainly the case that human weaknesses can overcome human reason, and that that is surely the real point, however you take the narrative in Genesis.

2. The fragment 'Unmöglichkeit einer Offenbarung, die alle Menschen auf eine gegründete Art glauben könnten' offers a wide-ranging critique of the idea of revelation as a channel between God and man, raising philosophical and practical objections. Towards the end, Reimarus argues that even among protestants, faith is commonly a matter of rote learning based on the catechism and not on scripture. This is an important point, both methodologically and substantively, with implications for the whole of the Fragmentenstreit. It leads to Lessing's question: what is the central component of faith as expressed in the lives of the faithful – 'articles of faith', or an attitude, for example as described in *Das Testament Johannis* or portrayed in *Nathan*?

[41] Cf. *Erziehung* §74, which sees this weakness as one which can be overcome.

[42] That expectation is implied in Reimarus's question-begging criticism of the catechism at the beginning of the fragment for not following this order, discussed by Lessing at the end of the corresponding section of the 'Gegensätze'.

Catechisms and creeds vary from confession to confession, while the Bible for which they claim to speak is the same, minor variations aside. The differences must therefore lie in the catechisms themselves, but if so, they reflect the institutions which produced them, not the content of scripture. Quite apart from the question of what the doctrines should actually be, the habit of reading the Bible through a filter of already established dogma, if at all, hindered true critical engagement with it. One might still maintain that one's own church was the one that had got it right, that it had 'den echten Ring'. For Catholics, this belief was justified by the doctrine, going back to Tertullian, that the church was in unbroken possession of a tradition of interpretation of the scriptures which lent it sole authority.[43] But for protestants the foundation had to be scripture itself. The only logical alternatives were mysticism, relying on a supposed direct link to God, or the criterion of reason, both heretical, both bypassing ecclesiastical authority, both privileging the judgement of the individual.

For Reimarus, these insecure foundations were reflected in the poor quality of religious experience among the church's members – 'Köhlerglaube' – which was far removed from its own ideal. Hypocrisy, lip-service and demagogic manipulation were, according to Reimarus, the norm. These were politically dangerous insinuations, because the church's (as it were) secular justification was supposedly its value as a pillar of civil society, or to put it another way, in support of the status quo and *Obrigkeit*.

Lessing's response to the fragment does not go into the question of the foundations of dogma, though that was to be central. He accepts Reimarus's overall argument that universal revelation is impossible, but rejects the conclusion that a partial and gradual revelation can have no place in God's scheme. This shift entails a new picture of the divine order and the nature of history, to which Lessing returns in his discussion of the fourth fragment.

[43] See Grant and Tracy, *A Short History of the Interpretation of the Bible*, p. 75f.

3. The third fragment demonstrates the implausibility of the narrative in Exodus of the crossing of the Red Sea. Lessing responds that since it was supposed to be a miracle, the criterion of plausibility need not apply.

4. 'Daß die Bücher A.T. nicht geschrieben worden, eine Religion zu offenbaren' argues that the doctrine of the immortality of the soul, regarded by Reimarus as essential to any proper religion, is not to be found in the Old Testament, except perhaps in some post-exilic texts. In reply, Lessing suggests that revelation is cumulative and progress towards the truth gradual; perhaps the religion contained in the Old Testament best fitted the level Israel had attained at the time. There follows the text of the first half of *Die Erziehung des Menschengeschlechts*, up to the appearance of Jesus. The idea that revelation provides a speedier route to insights which man would eventually have reached through the power of reason alone indeed seemed, as Lessing put it, 'heterodox'.

5. The final fragment, extracted from the context that Lessing was subsequently to publish as *Von dem Zwecke Jesu und seiner Jünger*, applies the same philological treatment to the account of the resurrection in the gospels that the third fragment had to the Red Sea story in Exodus. Not only are the gospels internally incoherent in places, but they contradict one another. Apart from further undermining the reliability of scripture in general, this was an attack on perhaps the central dogma of Christianity, and so highly provocative. Lessing's reply is that such inconsistencies are just what you would expect, given that the gospels were written some years after the events they recollect (Lessing W VIII 171–350).

The general remarks which open the 'Gegensätze' suggest that Christianity ought not to be afraid even of these radical objections, but should confidently expect them to be either false or harmless. Lessing advocates an open debate about the foundations apparently undermined by Reimarus, but his own overt position is that Christianity should be judged not on its foundations but on its substance: 'der Buchstabe ist nicht der Geist, und die Bibel ist nicht die Religion'.[44]

[44] Lessing W VIII 312; this argument is made at greater length in *Eine Duplik* II, pp. 510–19, and in *Eine Parabel*, IX 41–44.

He accepts Reimarus's critique, but not the negative conclusion ('Ich gab den Vordersatz zu, und leugnete die Folge', *Eine Duplik* II, p. 511).

This means detaching Christianity from the Bible, and therefore from the history recorded in the Bible.[45] Without question that was a radical step. For all its deficiencies, Neologie had prepared the way by purporting to build a bridge between revelation and reason; now if the bridge could not actually hold, putting revelation in question need no longer necessarily seem tantamount to rejecting Christianity outright.

The hostile reaction to Lessing's publication of the fragments was therefore quite natural. His accompanying comments already imply most of the positions which were to populate the dispute, or equally controversial ones. Though Lessing invited refutations of Reimarus, and got them, it is plain that he put his hope for Christianity – at least overtly – in a strategic withdrawal to terrain with substantial affinities to deism and far removed from orthodoxy. Whatever the merits of the arguments, Christianity was a religion of the book and had always reserved a central place, not just of honour, for the Bible. Its natural response to the criticism of Reimarus must be refutation, the difficulty of which put it on the defensive.

This is reflected in the tone of robust outrage adopted by Goeze and others. With hindsight, it is tempting to understand Lessing in terms of the secular outlook which he undoubtedly furthered; but whatever his own true views, it is important to consider his position as he stated it before agreeing with Goeze that the distance Lessing takes from Reimarus was no more than tactical.

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[45] One should here distinguish between evidential dependence, that is relying on scripture as a source of knowledge about religious truths, whether those truths are historical or metaphysical – getting from the evidence to the facts – and dependence of substance, that is taking historical truths, or some authoritative record of them, for instance in scripture, as proof of metaphysical truths – getting from the facts to religion; this is the leap across Lessing's 'garstiger breiter Graben', whereas Reimarus had been concerned with the weakness of scripture as documentary evidence. Arguably, Lessing does not make this distinction, see *Axiomata* – but does anybody else? Goeze's confusions make things too easy for Lessing. Goeze should say, with Schumann, 'Die von Gott freiwillig gegebene Offenbarung aus der Vernunft erweisen wollen, heißt, geschehene und eben deswegen analogisch zufällige Dinge in schlechterdings notwendige umschaffen wollen. Welch ein unsinniges Unternehmen!' Lessing W VIII 364; Arno Schilson draws attention to this passage on p. 968. But if you take this path, then objections to the historical evidence – inconsistency, unreliability, implausibility – become important again. Hamann's reply to this would be that the 'Geist' is the seal of faith; cf. 227:13.

'Was kümmert es mich, ob die Sage falsch oder wahr ist : die Früchte sind trefflich' (*Beweis des Geistes und der Kraft*, VIII 444)

The debate about the proper relation between scripture and doctrine – including tradition, especially its creed-like expression in the 'regula fidei' proposed by Lessing as an alternative authority to scripture – goes back to the origins of the church, when the pagan mysteries formed part of the religious environment which it was important to resist if Christianity was to retain its identity. So did 'philosophy', first as St. Paul encountered it and later in the form of Neoplatonism. This is the context to which Hamann so extensively alludes in *Konxompax*. Both philosophy and mystery religions represented a temptation for Christianity to move away from its scriptural basis and become assimilated into the prevailing atmosphere, gaining easier acceptance at the cost of being diluted. These tensions shaped Christian doctrine in the early centuries. By painting Lessing as a gnostic, Hamann puts him beyond the pale of heresy, and himself on the side of Luther, who had issued the great corrective, the call to return to the authority of scripture. This was the Christian counterpart of the humanist principle 'ad fontes', a return both to textual and, more broadly, cultural origins, to the true original spirit embodied in the texts. Even the metaphor – 'Geist' and 'Buchstabe' – goes back to the very origins of Christianity as it assimilated the scriptural and religious legacy of Judaism, a legacy which it claimed for itself, into new and foreign theological structures. The problems raised by the 'Fragmente' were new, because they resulted from reading the Bible philologically as a historical document, 'a book like any other', but the response to them was formulated, naturally enough, within the hermeneutic tradition which had grown up with the Christian religion. This applies most of all to Lessing, well-versed as he was in patristics; his central claim, whatever we make of it, was to be able to accommodate Reimarus's objections without harm to the essence of Christianity.

As the church became established as a temporal power and the New Testament acquired canonical status, the hermeneutic problem took the form which it has had ever since, namely how to reconcile the church's requirement for coherent doctrine with the scriptures on which

it based its authority, or a large part of it. At first 'the scriptures' meant the Old Testament, which gnosticism rejected because of its content, which seemed to fit Judaism to the exclusion of Christianity. One response was to develop a typological hermeneutics, building on the use made of scripture in the New Testament itself: that is, the actual events of Jewish history were interpreted as pointers towards the new covenant. Another strategy was allegorical exegesis, developed systematically by Origen, who distinguished the literal, moral and spiritual senses of scripture and applied the method to the New Testament as well.[46] This approach made it harder, however, to resolve differences of interpretation by referring back to scripture, and Origen came to be accused of heresy and sowing the seeds of Arianism; literalism was the corrective which reinforced the authority of the written tradition, just as it had within Judaism.[47]

The Reformation brought these matters to a head once more by attacking the doctrinal *auctoritas* of the catholic church, originally asserted by Tertullian against the heretics.[48] Luther denied the legitimacy of the church's tradition of doctrine and of interpreting scripture, which for tactical reasons then meant favouring the *sensus literalis*, and by extension denying that scripture had arisen through a human process historically continuous with that tradition.[49] Luther's concern was to question the doctrinal liberties the Church took with scripture rather than to defend the principle of literalism for its own sake, and when it came to exegesis he adopted christological readings, for instance, without feeling that he was departing from the literal sense: '... wann immer ich einen Text habe, der für mich eine Nuß ist, deren Schale mir zu hart ist, werfe ihn alsbald an den Felsen (Christum) und finde den süßesten Kern.'[50] The point was to return to the

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[46] Cf. Origen, *De principiis* 4, 9f. Origen's hermeneutics prefigures the mediaeval system of the fourfold sense of scripture, including the typological sense emphasised by Hamann and first restricted and then abandoned by eighteenth-century biblical scholars like Michaelis. In *Aesthetica in nuce*, Hamann contrasts Origen with the emerging historisch-kritisch approach to the Bible, W II 208.

[47] See Henry Chadwick, *Early Christian Thought and the Classical Tradition. Studies in Justin, Clement and Origen*. Oxford, Clarendon 1966, and his *The Early Church*. Harmondsworth, Penguin 1967.

[48] *De praescriptione haereticorum* xv. Ironically, Tertullian himself became a heretic.

[49] Hans-Joachim Kraus, *Geschichte der historisch-kritischen Erforschung des Alten Testaments*, 3rd ed. Neukirchen-Vluyn, Neukirchner Verlag 1982, §§1–3.

[50] Quoted in Kraus, §4. Of course, it was always one of the central assertions of Christianity that Christ came as the fulfilment of Old Testament history and prophecy; if that is so, then a typological hermeneutics makes perfect sense once the religious framework of Judaism has been left behind. Tertullian's version of the 'regula fidei' (see below) contains the thought: '...[Christ, the Word] in nomine Dei varie visum a patriarchis, in prophetis semper auditum ... [esse]', 'that he was seen in different aspects under the name of God by the patriarchs, and [his voice] always heard in the prophets', *De praescriptione* xiii.

central message of Christianity, and Luther's emphasis was on scripture as opposed to tradition, not on the letter to the exclusion of the spirit.

For seventeenth-century orthodoxy, the dogma of divine inspiration meant that individual human authors had done nothing to determine the content of scripture, which was therefore infallible down to the tiniest detail; there was even a dispute about whether the signs used in pointing the Hebrew text were inspired.[51] Inevitably, therefore, the tension between scripture and doctrine and with it the distinction between *sensus literalis* and *sensus spiritualis* returned in place of Luther's flexible approach (Kraus §8); yet the very focus on sacred texts tended to reveal their complex history and undermine the authority which the church had sought to maintain by denying this transmitted status.[52] In the inspiration dogma the church, with hindsight, had not chosen its ground wisely. Exegesis increasingly tended to see scripture in historical and anthropological terms, whereas dogma was subject to rational criticism (e.g. by Spinoza and the deists); if revelation was only to be considered authentic when it accorded with reason, then – the final step, advocated by Reimarus – it could be dispensed with altogether as a criterion (Kraus §17).

Like every successful new departure, Lutheranism too had become a tradition which changing times had to accommodate – or revolt against. The accommodation to which both Lessing and Hamann were opposed was Neologie in its various more or less orthodox shades; it was simply inconsistent to graft rationalist doctrines on to a stock of revelation. That way, the divine character of revelation was glossed over, and reason hobbled. Reimarus's position was the natural reaction, though too extreme to be accommodated within a Christian framework, to the literalist excesses of orthodoxy, which Goeze and the other respondents, not academic theologians and so all the more conservative, attempted to defend, largely without movement. But in fact movement had already occurred, in the unsatisfactory form of Neologie. Hamann's pietistically tinged literalism had just the focus on actual religious experience that was missing both in orthodoxy, which was doctrinaire and too rigidly literal, and also in Neologie, which lacked either religious or intellectual substance. Lessing perhaps stood just as far from literalism as the Neologen but

[51] Kraus §7. Similar views were already found in antiquity, deriving ultimately from Judaism.

[52] Particularly the Catholic church, but also protestantism.

maintained a place for revelation by historicising it; according to him the 'Elementarbuch' of *Erziehung* may be dispensable, if not now then one day soon, and for some sooner than others, but we would not in fact have got where we are without it.

The participants in the debate can all be seen as defending Christianity; but what Christianity? In going so far as to reject scripture, Reimarus was taking the same step many gnostics had. Lessing's proposed accommodation of Reimarus implied an unorthodox view of what the essence of the Christian religion was: Goeze and his allies were missing the point, barricading insignificant outbuildings (a narrow literalism) while abandoning the main edifice, the spirit of Christianity summarised in the 'regula fidei' and expressed in the Christian life.

This attitude is clearer earlier in the Fragmentenstreit, particularly in *Das Testament Johannis*, which suggests that all that is really essential is the injunction to love one another, than later when, in *Nötige Antwort auf eine sehr unnötige Frage*, Lessing's position appears to shift; there, the 'regula fidei' seems more creed-like.[53] Leaving aside the question of what Lessing himself really thought, he certainly put forward a view favouring the spirit over the letter, and repeated it in *Nathan*.

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[53]The difficulty is Lessing's apparent confession of allegiance to the 'Glaubenslehren ... [der Symbola] der ersten vier Jahrhunderte der Christlichen Kirche' in *Nötige Antwort* (Lessing W IX 430). There are two reasons, though, to see Lessing's statement in *Nötige Antwort* as consistent with my view of his overall stance. First, he did not say he personally believed the doctrines he refers to, but that they constitute the Christian religion; but in the unpublished fragment *Die Religion Christi* he distinguishes between 'die Religion Christi und die christliche Religion' (Lessing W X 223). That imples potential distance from the latter. Secondly, *Nötige Antwort* proceeds to discuss the 'regula fidei' as the 'Inbegriff jener Glaubensbekenntnisse'. The 'regula fidei' was a statement of core doctrines, including ones at variance with the ideas of *Erziehung*, given by several of the church fathers including Tertullian and Irenaeus. Its expression seems to have been fluid but the general content fixed, the precursor of written creeds with a firm text. Schilson in his *Geschichte* argues that Lessing misunderstood the fluid nature of the 'regula', for Schilson 'eine alle satzhaften Fixierungen übersteigende "Wahrheit Gottes"', which as he observes would better have fitted Lessing's other ideas. My suggestion – which needs support beyond the present scope – is that that was actually just what Lessing was getting at. There were also tactical reasons for him to appeal to the 'regula', which was an alternative authority to scripture, though only as a hermeneutic canon and not as an independent stream of revelation, and which was so understood by Catholics, as Schilson argues. In any case, there is plenty of evidence within the Fragmentensreit as well as beyond it to support the view that Lessing questioned core Christian dogmas, though that is not to say that his qualifications were insincere. Hamann had reason enough to understand *Ernst und Falk* as a revealing expansion of some of the views expressed by Lessing on the 'Fragmente'. *Nathan* and the second part of *Erziehung*, not published when Hamann wrote Konxompax, provide the modern reader with further illumination of the tendency of Lessing's thought in the Fragmentenstreit. 'Die Inanspruchnahme der "regula fidei" fordert nämlich die Anerkennung einer göttlichen Wahrheit, die dem Menschen stets nur geschichtlich und fragmentarisch zugänglich ist und in Raum und Zeit nie ganz erfaßt werden kann; eine solche Haltung ließe sich mit dem sonstigen Denken Lessings mühelos zur Deckung bringen.' Schilson, *Geschichte im Horizont der Vorsehung: G.E. Lessings Beitrag zu einer Theologie der Geschichte*. Mainz, Matthias-Grünewald 1974, p. 179.

In fact, his attack on scripture goes deeper than Reimarus's, because he denies that any historical account, however reliable, can underpin 'Vernunftwahrheiten', since it is not an a priori argument. But that is to assume that the truths of religion are demonstrable truths of reason.

The corollary of Hamann's adherence to scripture and to the *Heilsgeschichte* which can be read in it was his opposition to 'philosophy' in theological matters; though this attitude was a constant preoccupation, that does not immediately reflect hostility to reason, but rather Hamann's constant theological focus. Metaphysical reasoning on religious questions which sought demonstrative certainty and took reason as its starting-point, as exemplified by Steinbart, was the natural competitor of revealed religion and historical faith, even if it offered conclusions perfectly compatible with revelation. This line of thought too goes back through Luther to St. Paul, who was confronted with the Greek philosophical tradition of reasoning about spiritual matters and therefore effectively with a competing monotheism, for all the polymorphous exuberance of official paganism.

Hamann responded within the context of the entire hermeneutic tradition of Christianity, going back to New Testament times, rather than, like Goeze and his allies, simply challenging the assertions of Reimarus and trying to pin Lessing down to orthodoxy or heresy, veering between refutation and indignation, whichever was more opportune.

For Hamann the essence of Chrisitianity is historical faith. This hermeneutics is related to his typological understanding of history: the life of the individual makes sense only as a link in the chain of events recorded in scripture. Without the crucifixion and resurrection there can be no salvation at the apocalypse.[54] The passion of Christ is not the *logical* foundation for anything, but part of an unfolding story. The basis for believing in its reality and efficacy is the Holy Ghost, which brings about the miracle of faith by divine grace. To look for a logical basis is to repeat the sin of Babel, when man tried to get up to heaven under his own power, to recapitulate the Fall itself, the archetype of all sins. The tradition of philosophising about religion, extending from

[54] History is discussed below in Chapter IV, on *Golgatha*.

antiquity to Spinoza – and shortly to be the object of Hume's *Dialogues* and Kant's *Critique* – is for Hamann a hubristic mistake in which he seeks to implicate Lessing.

Synthesis

It remains to examine Hamann's choice of texts to attack in *Konxompax* and how he makes use of them. Whereas Goeze and the other respondents put the orthodox case against Lessing and Reimarus, with variable talent and fairness, Hamann's focus went beyond this immediate object. By mentioning Meiners, Starck and Steinbart, he expanded the target to include paganism, freemasonry and Frederick's philosophical circle. Hamann associated them all with the suggestion that religion could be divorced from specifically Christian revelation, and through the taint of their bad company he situated Lessing within an ancient and continuing struggle far wider than the arguments surrounding the 'Fragmente'. In Meiners the heretical suggestion was a pagan one – inherent in the religious claims made by the mysteries themselves – for which he unwittingly revealed some sympathy. Starck hinted that there might be more to freemasonry than he could allow himself to reveal, and in his earlier works had said that paganism might contain elements of religious value. Steinbart as Hamann presents him reduced Christianity to philosophy and put it in the service of the state.

Hamann's references to these authors may be divided into the programmatic, serving to indicate who or what is being targeted, and more intimate engagement with the material quoted from or alluded to. Both are important, because even a glancing reference can bring to mind an opponent's whole position and, in context, indicate a definite attitude towards it.

The references to Reimarus himself are all of this glancing kind, even the first one (217:9–11, cf. Lessing W VIII 250), which quotes his summary of Warburton's argument that the pagan mysteries referred to the afterlife; Reimarus goes on to say this does not apply to Judaism, but Hamann does not appear to make anything of it. 'Köhlerglaube' at 223:7 also at least suggests close acquaintance on Hamann's part with the text, though it might not be a reference to it at all

since the disparaging use of the word might occur to anyone; apart from that, he could have been depending on second-hand knowledge of the 'Fragmente'. He definitely bought a copy of *Von dem Zwecke Jesu und seiner Jünger*, but *Konxompax* alludes specifically only to the title; the 'Fragmente' in general are referred to several times as 'opera profligata'. The force of these references is that the 'Fragmente' preach reason as an alternative religion (218:15, 225:7) and it is the belief in reason which is unthinking (223:7); that the 'Zweck' of Jesus *and* his disciples was the same, against Reimarus's view (222:6, 225:1); and that the rationalising anti-Christian agenda of the 'Fragmente' is shared by Lessing's *Ernst und Falk* (223:15).

Hamann refers specifically to Lessing's contribution to the Fragmentenstreit only twice. He quotes the famous sentence about 'Zufällige Geschichtswahrheiten' from *Über den Beweis des Geistes und der Kraft*, but inserts the words, 'kein *physisches Factum* noch *politisches Phänomenon*' (218:26–29). This targets Lessing's argument that Christianity should be judged on its success (a 'politisches Phänomenon') rather than its foundations (e.g. *Eine Duplik* I, Lessing W VIII 517–19), which is after all no less a merely historical truth than the 'physisches Factum' of the resurrection is; so Lessing is being inconsistent. 'Elementarbuch' and 'Pädagogus' (221:8,10), taken from the part of *Erziehung* which Lessing included in the 'Gegensätze', are applied respectively to Descartes and Leclerc's hermeneutics (rather than the Bible, the true 'Elementarbuch'), and to 'der *Wolffianismus* und *Machiavellismus* in Schafskleidern'; those, Hamann implies, are the true colours of Lessing's ideal in the extract from *Erziehung*.

Konxompax opens with a programmatic quotation from Starck – discussed above – which immediately highlights the issue of the status of historical facts. The quotation comes from a quite different context which, if it is taken into account in Hamann's text, makes a further point. Starck had written that the origin of the mysteries, though merely a historical circumstance (and so, he implied, less interesting than other matters), was among the secrets 'die den Forschungen der Gelehrten sich entziehen'. But the 'secret' Hamann makes the quotation refer to in his text is why it took so long for the freemasons to discover the doctrines of natural religion in the ancient

mysteries. The implied ironic answer is the deficiencies of their scholarship, which he documents in the following paragraph; Hamann's serious point, elaborated subsequently, is that the mysteries were actually just hocus-pocus – as was natural religion. This is a good example of how Hamann turns texts against themselves, commonly drawing on their contexts as well, yet still ignoring the author's drift there.

Several references aim to undermine Starck's credibility as a scholar, for instance the claims, unimportant in themselves, that the church fathers had no first-hand knowledge of the mysteries,[55] and that even the most sceptical ancient philosophers respected the mysteries.[56] Starck's central argument is also attacked: the rational doctrines he claims to have been mysteries were, Hamann argues, already implicit in public mythology (220:13). Starck speaks of the 'Verfolger' of the mysteries, which implies inappropriate sympathy for them as though they were the true religion, like Christianity (220:28). He refers to freemasonry as an 'erhabene, tugendhafte und nützbare Sozietät', but Hamann applies these quoted words to the mysteries (221:3), suggesting both that Starck had pagan sympathies and that freemasonry was implicated in them.

Meiners had proposed a typology of mysteries, not just from ancient Greece, to which Hamann makes rather complex allusions. They could be divided into 'gottesdienstliche Gebräuche und Feierlichkeiten' and 'gewisse auf die Religion sich beziehende Lehren' (Meiners 168).

> Die letzte Art von Mysterien ... bestanden weder aus heiligen Gaukeleyen und Possenspielen, noch aus theatralischen Vorstellungen von Göttergeschichten ...; sondern ihr Inhalt war eine Sammlung von Kenntnissen, und Raisonnements, die der öffentlichen Volksreligion entgegen gesetzt waren, und entweder durch Ueberlieferungen, oder in heiligen Schriften aufbewahrt, und fortgepflanzt wurden, um [Priestern und Führern des Volks] über viele wichtige Gegenstände Erläuterungen zu geben, die der Pöbel nicht fassen konnte, und von denen die Nationalreligion nichts sagte, und sagen durfte ... (205)
> Diese Kenntnisse nun mußten sie nothwendig geheim halten, weil sie ... durch ihre Verbreitung Staat und Religion umgekehrt, Götter von ihren Sitzen und Altären herabgeworfen hätten. Sie ... behielten [daher] ihre bessern Kenntnisse für sich und einige Auserwählte, fest überzeugt, daß ... der Pöbel doch immer zu sehr Pöbel bleiben werde, um sie begreifen und nutzen zu können. (208)

[55] 217:17; cf. the passage Schoonhoven quotes from Starck in his note on 223:31, 'Zeugniß des Hörensagens'.

[56] 217:23, 225:23; cf. also 221:15 on Pausanias.

Which sort of mysteries a society had, depended on the nature of its public religion; mysteries which have esoteric doctrines did not occur in the absence of a certain type of myth: 'Die erstern fehlen bey allen den Nationen, die keine Götter anbeten, die vom Himmel auf die Erde herab, oder von der Erde in den Himmel hinauf gestiegen sind ... weil es überflüssig wäre, das Volk in dramatisch-symbolischen Vorstellungen mit dem bekannt zu machen, was die Priester öffentlich ... vortragen' (Meiners 189f; cf. W III 222:12, Schoonhoven 221). But nor did they occur 'wo die Grundsätze der Religion mit den Grundsätzen der Weltweisheit übereinstimmen' (Meiners 190) – for instance in the case of Christianity, 'deren Lehren erhabene Philosophie sind, und nichts verlieren, wenn sie am allgemeinsten verbreitet werden' (191).

In the first instance Meiners does not seem to be thinking of Christianity, which of course involves divine descent from heaven and ascension; Hamann says the whole sequence of Christian festivals 'ist darnach eingerichtet' (W III 222:11), drawing attention to the aspects of Christianity that need to be communicated by revelation. In the second case Meiners mentions Christianity explicitly, though only as one among a plurality of such 'philosophical' religions. Hamann turns this round: Christianity is the 'mystery' which has to go underground given the prevailing 'orthodoxy' of rational theology – which is not its core. Here, understanding quite an important point of Hamann's depends on knowledge of the context from which his quotations from Meiners are taken, though Meiners does seem to have been a standard source.

In spite of the importance of Steinbart's book – together with a handful of others, 'das Mark meiner Fragmente' – for the genesis of *Konxompax*, it has a low profile in Hamann's text. Steinbart represented in general all that Hamann thought worst about philosophical theology.

Hamann's references to *Ernst und Falk* make a link between the themes of the Fragmentenstreit with freemasonry and the ideal of reason. This text calls for some general discussion before Hamann's references to it are examined.

The key to *Ernst und Falk* is surely the invitation in Lessing's preface to take what it says about freemasonry as an analogy for Christianity. The dialogues ask what freemasonry is about and why it does not itself just say what it is about; Lessing's analogous question about Christianity in the preface is why it did not produce its 'systematische Lehrbücher' sooner. When it did, he continues, perhaps this was of little profit to faith itself – and if only they hadn't put things so confusingly![57] Given the Fragmentenstreit, it was perhaps hardly even necessary for Lessing to point out the parallel.[58] The reader gradually discovers that freemasonry has beneficent but necessarily hidden aims which transcend differences of rank, nation and religion – all loyalties which demanded strong allegiance in the eighteenth century – and even 'really existing' freemasonry itself.[59] This masonic secret can only be ascertained by independent thinking and trying things for yourself. It is utopian but gradualist, because existing structures must evolve at their own pace and in step with emerging public understanding. It cannot be communicated, on this reading of Lessing's text, because it is not a doctrine or a truth already grasped but an approach and a process, even a cause.

That is Lessing's programme for Christianity in *Erziehung* and *Nathan*, and also in the Fragmentenstreit, though less clearly there. In my view that is why Hamann chose the dialogues to bring out Lessing's position, indeed why they stimulated his work on *Konxompax*. To put that position baldly: Christianity, if it is to be a religion worth the name, must be about an attitude to life which proves itself in action, and not clutch at doctrinaire straws – 'Geist', not 'Buchstabe'. The highest truth, leading to salvation, must surely conform to the canon of the intellectual at the coalface; in Lessing's famous words:

> Nicht die Wahrheit, in deren Besitz irgend ein Mensch ist, oder zu sein vermeinet, sondern die aufrichtige Mühe, die er angewandt hat, hinter die Wahrheit zu kommen, macht den Wert des Menschen. Denn nicht durch den Besitz, sondern durch die Nachforschung der Wahrheit erweitern sich seine Kräfte, worin allein seine immer wachsende Vollkommenheit bestehet. Der Besitz macht ruhig, träge, stolz – (*Eine Duplik* I, Lessing W VIII 510)

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[57] *Ernst und Falk*, Lessing W X 12f.

[58] Schilson and Schmitt indicate in their commentary on *Ernst und Falk* that the roots of the dialogues are earlier than the Fragmentenstreit (though Lessing's part in it had long roots too), but it is likely the preface was written at the time of publication. Even if not, Lessing decided to publish the book then in that form. Lessing W X 706ff.

[59] Ernst reports on his disappointment with actual freemasonry in the fourth dialogue, not yet published when Hamann wrote *Konxompax*; but as Falk says there, he had hinted before that being a mason was about more than being a member of the order, or its public good deeds.

Knowledge is really a process, dynamic, cumulative, progressive; its development calls for an open-minded and undogmatic attitude. Growing enlightenment, in the scheme of *Erziehung*, will reveal that the Christianity of the second covenant also only saw the truth 'through a glass darkly'. The relativism of *Ernst und Falk* regarding rank, custom and religion (variation in which is ascribed to 'Klima', *Ernst und Falk* II, Lessing W X 29) is the foil to a universal ideal – borrowing Kant's careful use of the term 'ideal' to mean a guiding principle rather than a goal – which transcends those differences. In the case of religion, just the same view is expressed in the 'Ringparabel' and in the action and dénouement of *Nathan*.

Hamann's references to *Ernst und Falk* in *Konxompax* focus on this utopian telos and its expression in practice. Luther opposed works done to achieve salvation, which he insisted came through faith alone; Falk speaks of the works of freemasonry, done to make a better world. We might expect Hamann to object on two theological grounds. Firstly, that the proper end of man is an eschaton, not a telos – the goal is the apocalypse, the end of the story and the end of the road.[60] He does not spell this objection out, but it is implicit in the second, which he does: works are not the proper means, but Lessing endorses them. Luther did not reject works as such, only as a means to ultimate ends, but even this rules out Lessing's utopian ideal, which ascribes to works just such an ultimate importance. As we now observe, that ideal was part of a process of secularisation.

Lessing's masonic 'Taten' must be above and beyond the call of duty, because only local ties of nation and creed can command. The term he uses to say so, 'opus supererogatum', might have been calculated to bring the issue of works to mind. In Catholicism works still were commanded, and 'opera supererogata' were additional ones, bringing extra merit but optional (Lessing W X 32, cf. 769). That was an apt metaphor, but unlikely to be palatable to an orthodox Lutheran.

Taking Hamann's specific references in order, Lessing's masonic 'Taten' are opposed to the 'Thaten Seiner Nachfolge'; that is, we should act as followers of Christ and not branch out to pursue other goals (W III 222:18). During a discussion of freemasonry as a spur to good deeds, Ernst objects that it would be better to stick to one 'Antrieb' – presumably he means

[60] Cf. the scholastic metaphor of the 'homo viator', and Dante's 'cammin di nostra vita'.

Christianity – especially as freemasonry puts itself above other 'Antriebe'. Hamann, quoting from this passage, levels the same accusation at Frederick's principle of amour-propre (W III 222f, cf. Lessing W X 18). At 223:14, Hamann associates 'opera supererogata' both with the 'Fragmente' and with reason acting above its station. Falk suggests in the first 'Gespräch' that freemasonry is responsible for all the good in the world, and is working for all the good that is to come; Hamann mockingly attributes this to 'philosophy' and 'jene verschleierte Isis'. That is, freemasonry equals both philosophy and mystery religions, and it sets out to do good. Falk's claim for it is a large one that certainly seems to put it in competition with Christian aims.[61] Explaining that one need not have been admitted to the order to know its aims, but rather could hit on them 'durch eignes Nachdenken', Falk says that freemasonry is 'nichts willkürliches, nichts entbehrliches: sondern etwas notwendiges, das in dem Wesen des Menschen und der bürgerlichen Gesellschaft gegründet ist.' Quoting this, Hamann replaces 'und der bürgerlichen Gesellschaft' with 'und seinen Verhältnissen zum Ens entium'; that is, not society but God is the important thing when deciding on ultimate ends, and even natural religion can tell us that much (it is 'nothwendig'), but Christ is needed to complete the picture. Once again, Hamann refers not just to freemasonry but to mysteries and philosophy as well, 'die ganze Mystagogie' (W III 226:9ff, cf. Lessing W X 16). Finally, the last paragraph of *Konxompax* refers programmatically to Falk, the dialogues' 'ontologische Begriffe über die bürgerliche Gesellschaft', and not catching butterflies, ants and bees.

To sum up, it is plain enough that Hamann in *Konxompax* means to support orthodox Christianity, and Lutheranism specifically, against Lessing's suggested resolution, indeed hardly orthodox, of the problem posed by Reimarus. In contrast to the other respondents, though, he sets out to do so by associating Lessing with a broad tendency both among his contemporaries – roughly, the Enlightenment – and going back to the origins of Christianity. Hamann's only actual rebuttal of Lessing's argument in the Fragmentenstreit is the reminder that Christianity is a historical faith, that it is nothing without the historicity of the resurrection and the saving grace of Christ, and therefore Lessing's readiness to abandon scripture as a foundation is

[61] In a nod to the 'best of all possible worlds', Hamann changes Lessing's 'Welt' to 'beste Welt'. W III 225f; cf. Lessing W X 21.

beyond the pale of heresy. In Hamann's view, any compromise was fatal. The natural way to attack Lessing's would-be orthodoxy in the Fragmentenstreit was to get involved in the nitty-gritty of the specific arguments, as others did, but Hamann sought to convict him of guilt by association in a wider context. Like Nietzsche, he asked 'What is he really after?'

Had they already appeared, *Nathan* and *Erziehung* would have been grist to Hamann's mill – for us, they are confirmation of the tendency of Lessing's thoughts – but *Ernst und Falk* was a start. To put the point theologically, its eschatology was secular: that is, it depicted the masonic striving for a better world as the pursuit of an ultimate end. Comparison with Christianity was invited by Lessing in the preface, and within the dialogues freemasonry was presented as rising above differences between religions. It followed that freemasonry was being proposed as an alternative to Christianity, at least in its existing form. The consequences for Christianity, and the hint of secular political ideals, were of far greater moment to Hamann – and arguably to Lessing – than freemasonry, but that is the preponderant topic of the dialogues, making a link with Starck natural and convenient.

Hamann's earlier interest in Starck, the target of *Hierophantische Briefe*, meant that freemasonry, reason and the pagan mysteries were already established in his mind and work as a coherent complex. Indeed, the association does make sense, given the approach of the Enlightenment to comparative religion and, by those with masonic leanings, to freemasonry. It was a commonplace that paganism had rational elements, a commonplace corresponding to the substantial indebtedness of philosophical theology to pagan ideas going back to Plato and especially Book XIII of Aristotle's *Metaphysics*. For Hamann, these were the great error, not because they were rational but because they elided the specifically Christian element of religious truth, the indispensable revealed and historical fact of 'Christ crucified'. Starck and Meiners gave away their sympathy for rational theology in their assessment of the mystery religions. Meiners, by using Christianity as an example of a religion with no need for mysteries because it states its doctrines openly, suggested that he thought those doctrines were the same as the rational doctrines he attributed to the 'zwote Art' of pagan mysteries which needed to supplement primitive public

religion. But if the essence of Christianity is just doctrines like belief in the afterlife, then it is no more than deism. By associating the valuable element of the mysteries with freemasonry, a modern movement, Starck made it plain that more than antiquarian interest was in play.

Where Starck is silent, Lessing reveals the political dimension freemasonry might have. To Hamann, this suggested the political establishment of Frederick – to which he had already linked Starck in *Hierophantische Briefe*. Not that Hamann seriously believed there was a masonic conspiracy; what was actually disturbing to him was the idea of secular goals judged by rational criteria, not as a secondary object but supplanting the higher aims which Christianity had previously reserved to itself as ultimate ends, beyond this world. But as he saw it this programme really was embodied in Frederick's regime. Its impoverished theological expression was to be found in Steinbart's book, which Hamann mentions without bothering with the substance. Steinbart's particular ideas were not important; what Hamann thought shocking and dangerous was Frederick's neglect of true Christianity in favour of a purely secular agenda, summed up as 'die purpurne Selbstliebe'.

The main book Hamann quotes from in *Konxompax*, indeed far more than any other, is the Bible, which everyone could be expected to know inside out. Here, the method of glancing quotation was established and effective. It was not just a matter of remembering the second half of a verse; whole bodies of theological argument associated with a verse or a chapter could be brought into play with great economy, on the principle of an exegetical sermon. Hamann's application of that method to less well-known texts is one of the main causes of his obscurity. He transfers not just the method but its intention of making the text speak for itself.

This idea comes up in *Konxompax* itself. The dispute triggered by the 'Fragmente' was, in an important sense, about hermeneutics. The 'Fragmente' were above all an attack on scripture: 'Soll eine *scheinheilige* Philosophie und *hypokritische* Philologie das Fleisch kreutzigen und das Buch ausrotten ...? Oder sollen wir außer der Littera scripta noch einer andern Regulae Lesbiae warten?', Hamann asks in his peroration. A footnote, added after publication, mentions 'Lessings nöthige Antwort'. A 'Lesbian rule' is a flexible one, and the word 'regula' recalls the 'regula fidei'

discussed in *Nötige Antwort*. The immediate point is to disagree with Lessing's view of the 'regula fidei' there on the grounds that scripture is sufficient on its own.[62] Secondly, Hamann asserts that scripture is a 'regula Lesbia'; it perhaps goes too far to say he means that is why criticism of it is wrong, but it is certainly an opposing view. It is flexible in the sense that it adapts to circumstances; the Bible is always the same and yet it was written for the present, every present. In hermeneutic terms, that means it should not be read with a historical or critical eye.[63]

When the scriptural text is made to reveal its hidden intentions, intentions which are necessarily hidden in the original form if it is to speak in the foreign context presented by each new age and situation, they are the revealed intentions of God; with the likes of Lessing and Meiners, the same method of quotation in a foreign context aims to illuminate the wider agenda they serve, perhaps unknowingly. If they can be made to give themselves away unwittingly, the effect is far more powerful than a direct accusation could have been, especially when as in this case the agenda was not consciously held or explicitly advocated by any one of Hamann's targets. Just as the modern reader may have a strong hunch that Lessing meant more than he said – even if he privately vacillated – so did Hamann. This approach reads a tendency into overt statements which fall short of it, or even statements of in context obviously quite different positions, or positions contradictory among themselves.

Most texts call for some reading between the lines, not least Lessing's works of this period. For example, *Nathan* speaks for itself, but it is also the summation of the Fragmentenstreit. On a smaller scale, *Ernst und Falk* deliberately withholds explicit conclusions to promote the active engagement of the reader. Lessing in the Fragmentenstreit measures his words and refuses to be pinned down; it is proper to heed his qualifications. However, though Hamann's aggressive hermeneutics is perverse in detail, he was surely right that Christianity was now in danger of unravelling, whether Lessing knew it or not. Lessing may really have thought that his alternative to orthodoxy was true Christianity, but it was not in fact viable as religious belief. The stage was set for Hume's *Dialogues* and Kant's *Critique*.

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[62] Schoonhoven ad loc. thinks Hamann also means to say that the problem with the 'regula fidei' is its lack of flexibility in contrast to scripture; this is an attractive hypothesis, but perhaps goes too far beyond what the text states.

[63] Cf. Chapter I on Hamann's reading of Chladenius on Augustine on scripture.

III The *Metakritik über den Purismum der Vernunft in its* genetic *and intellectual* context

For the Jews require a sign, and the Greeks seek after wisdom; But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumbling-block, unto the Greeks foolishness.

I Cor. 1:22–23

perscrutatis fundamentis
stabilitur veritas

Commemorative medal for
Critique of Pure Reason[1]

In the spring of 1781 Herder, overworked and gloomy, wrote to Hamann after an interval of several months. Lessing was dead and Herder felt out of sympathy with the leading lights of Weimar; Hamann was

> beinah noch der Einzige von Allen ... an den ich mich so klammern möchte ... wie ein Vertriebener, Umherirrender, der ... Jugend, Freund und Vaterland wiederfindet.... Ich werde von Tag zu Tage klärer überzeugt, daß in unsrer Zeit das einzige Mittel zu wirken – leiden ist, wenn man nicht schmeicheln und Tellerlecken will. Die 30 Tyrannen zu Sokrates Zeit sind jetzt in die Millionen gewachsen u. in allen Ständen gehts so kunterbunt her, daß einem, wenn mans sieht, Farbe und Wort fehlet.

The reviled government of the Thirty was imposed on Athens by the Spartans at the end of the Peloponnesian War; they were Athenians who collaborated with an enemy which imposed its political will. Their modern equivalents, numbered in the millions, must be a whole class which stood to gain from cooperation with the corrupt political order – monarchical, absolute, irreligious and stifling. Of course, that is not to say that that class actually existed, or that Herder had a clear conception of its makeup, but the barriers he faced as an intellectual were real enough. Such discontent is akin to Werther's, and Herder could expect it to get a sympathetic hearing from

[1] 'Now the foundations have been thoroughly examined, truth is made stable.' Note the use of the same metaphor by both Lessing (defending the main building against fire rather than unimportant outhouses) and Mendelssohn (Christianity as the upper storey founded on Judaism), in their case still for the edifice of *religious* truth. It was left to Kant to repair the foundations. I am indebted to Jim Reed for drawing this motto to my attention. See H. Vaihinger, 'Die Kant-Medaille mit dem schiefen Turm zu Pisa.' *Kant-Studien* II, 109–115.

Hamann, who was still more restricted by his sociopolitical circumstances. Continuing the letter two months later, he lamented the mistreatment of Friedrich Karl von Moser – 'Er glüht von Haß u. Rache gegen die Fürsten! *solche* Fürsten nehml. u. im Grunde sind sie alle *solche*' – before mentioning a new book attributed to Starck on freemasonry. The freemasons, Herder says, had publicly posed the question 'welches der wahre Zweck des Fr M. Ord. sey':

> die Mögl. u. Existenz der Frage selbst zeigt, was an den Antworten seyn werde. Alchymie u. Magie werden ausgeschloßen in den Antworten; es soll auf Tugend u. Weisheit beruhen etc. Gegen jene soll auch ihr alter Fritz sich neul. stark erklärt haben: denn es ist nicht zu glauben, was in unserem aufgeklärten Jahrhundert die Magie insonderheit für Raum gewinnt. Von Paris bis Berlin ist sie ausgebreitet, u. die Voltärianer sind Hauptsproße derselben ... es ist schreckliches Zeug was ich hie u. da, durch den u. den Fremden höre ... von Calliostro in Strasburg werden Sie gehört haben; ich weiß aber nicht, ob er zur vorigen Sekte gehöret. Das sind die Schwefelblumen der reinen Vernunft, über die Kant das Gesetzbuch schreibet. (B IV 271, 273. Herder to Hamann, March – May 1781)

This combination of feelings of political powerlessness, conspiracy theories and hostility to 'reason' may owe something to the influence of Hamann, but Herder's association of Kant with the devil's party was an independent step – though *Konxompax*, which also linked masonic hocus-pocus with Enlightenment philosophy, would have been brought to mind by the mention of Starck and so could have prepared the ground for Herder's thought. Hamann received an advance copy of the *Critique* in proof, but it had not yet appeared and the most Herder probably knew of the contents was that 'pure reason' was to be the topic. That alone was enough to arouse Herder's suspicion and Hamann's intense interest. Rather than being a private eccentricity of Hamann's, such an attitude was in the air, like the fascination with the red herring of freemasonry.

Hamann's *Metakritik über den Purismum der Vernunft*, abandoned by 1784 but sent to Herder as an incomplete draft, has a complex genesis going back to a project to translate Hume's *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion* and extending to *Golgatha und Scheblimini*, Hamann's published attack of 1784 on Mendelssohn's *Jerusalem*. Though Hamann continued to feel, for all the significance he attached to getting to the bottom of the *Critique*, that he had not done so, it is misleading simply to speak of the *Metakritik* as having been abandoned, because it was just an attempt, which remained

incomplete, at realising a plan that preoccupied him from before the Hume translation right up to *Golgatha* and beyond. *Golgatha* set out to put into effect what had been attempted in the *Metakritik*, but it too was but a part of that unrealised whole. For Hamann, the masonic 'mysteries', Humean scepticism, Kant's critique of reason, and Mendelssohn's plea for religious tolerance were symptomatic of one and the same tendency; tracing the continuity he perceived in them can only illuminate his response to each one. In particular, though the importance of Kant's *Critique* may make Hamann's attack on it seem more significant than his interest in the likes of Starck, all these things are part of a genetic whole. Hamann's concerns were often disconcertingly distant from those of his targets, for instance from Mendelssohn's advocacy of tolerance. Hamann was not opposed to religious tolerance, clarity of thought or even freemasonry: he was in favour of Christianity. Insofar as the reasons put forward by Starck, Kant or Mendelssohn for their – seemingly quite heterogeneous – views conflicted with Hamann's religious outlook, to him they were suspect, and moreover related. In practice, this suspicion was lent greater coherence by a complex of political resentments, vague though they themselves at times were. From this perspective, Hamann's attacks make more sense than if they are seen just as an – often bizarrely distorted – response to whatever the specific target happened to be.

This chapter will offer a reading of the *Metakritik* underpinned by an initial discussion of its genesis. The years between *Konxompax* and the *Metakritik* were difficult ones for Hamann, and financial worries led to prolonged periods of depression which hindered him from writing, quite apart from these practical problems; however, the cause of the situation was a pay cut resulting from a government rationalisation, and this also fuelled Hamann's political animus against Frederick and Berlin, and so motivated him to write. The initial impetus to go back to the concerns of *Konxompax* – and it is one of the aims of this chapter to show the continuity of the *Metakritik* with them – came with the appearance of Hume's *Dialogues*, which Hamann set out to translate. He planned a 'Beylage' to the translation, and this was the germ of the *Metakritik*. The

focus of the project then shifted to Kant's *Critique*, and eventually to *Jerusalem*, which will be the subject of the following chapter.

Hume contra Starck: 'meine Uebersetzung hatte das gröste Augenmerk auf dies Buch'

Hume's *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, together with the nearly contemporaneous *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, are widely seen as having put an end to the idea that the existence of God is rationally demonstrable, so 'making room for faith'. The specific topic of the *Dialogues* is the argument from design, which was not of course the only argument on offer, and, thanks in considerable measure to Hume, it is today beyond serious philosophical consideration; but then it was a bulwark of faith. The absence, before Darwin, of an alternative explanation for the intricate workings of living nature must have made the argument from design seem far more compelling, and Hume's attack all the more devastating. This attack also embraced the cosmological argument, the problem of evil, and the failings of institutional religion, but the main focus is on the argument from design, which, depending as it does on inference, could never be decisive. The *Dialogues* offer not a systematic philosophical treatment of the subject, as Kant did in the Transcendental Dialectic, summed up in his 'Kritik aller spekulativen Theologie', but a calculated campaign against what must in practice have been one of the most effective supports of Christianity among the educated. Hume withheld the book until after his death, though the general tenor of his views was no secret and he had published other works hostile to Christianity. It was an affront, and so perceived for instance by the author of the appendix to the German translation.[2]

That was almost Hamann. In July 1780 he proposed the project to Hartknoch:

> Der Dialog ist voller poetischen Schönheiten, und ich halte das Buch mit HE. Green [Kant's friend], für nicht gar gefährlich, sondern übersetz es vielmehr als ein *fünfzigjähriger Geistl[icher] in Schwaben* zum Besten meiner *freymüthigen Amtsbrüder* und *Landsleute*, welche *Judentum und Christentum* in nichts als *natürl. Religion* verwandeln, und ohne *Kenntnis* noch *Ehrlichkeit* so viel von der Evidenz der letztern ins Gelag hereinreden.

[2] *Gespräche über natürliche Religion nach der 2. Englischen Ausgabe, von David Hume. Nebst einem Gespräch über den Atheismus, von Ernst Platner*. Leipzig, Weygand 1781. A long appendix in dialogue form rebuts Hume's arguments, ending inconclusively with the standard point that scepticism about reason itself is incoherent. Perhaps Platner – an Aufklärer – was sympathetic to Hume, but if so his sympathy was cautious.

This may be regarded as a draft title – indicated by the emphasis – which turns into a tirade; the Swabian cleric had been Hamann's nom de plume for the *Beylage zun Denkwürdigkeiten des seligen Sokrates*,[3] and indeed appears on the title page of the surviving remnant of the Hume translation.[4] The anonymous *Freymüthige Betrachtungen über das Christenthum* (Berlin 1780), Hamann wrote to Hartknoch and to Herder, had been the target of his translation: 'auf die war meine Uebersetzung hauptsächlich gemünzt'; 'meine Uebersetzung hatte das gröste Augenmerk auf dies Buch'.[5] The notion that a translation of one book could be aimed at another becomes more intelligible once we know that Hamann also planned a 'Beylage oder Anhang';[6] however, Hume's *Dialogues*, though not friendly to Christianity, were in Hamann's eyes indeed an answer to ideas like those of the *Betrachtungen* – which he perceived as an immediate threat.

As Herder suspected, the author was Starck, Hamann's opponent in *Konxompax* and in the *Hierophantische Briefe*.[7] The content is of a piece with Starck's earlier works. The book's avowed aim is to promote an 'Universalreligion, die weder Vorzüge eines Lieblingsvolks [Judaism is meant], noch Partheyen [Christianity], noch sonst etwas kennt, ... wodurch Menschen von Menschen abgesondert werden' (p. 59). In the manner of Lessing's appeals to the church fathers, regarded in many Lutheran quarters as suspiciously Catholic, in the Fragmentenstreit, Starck quotes Justin Martyr and Clement in support of unorthodox positions: 'Welche ehemals [i.e. before Christ] nach der Vernunft und dem Worte gelebt haben, sind Christen gewesen'; Clement thought philosophy and the Law were two different approaches to the true God, united by Christianity (60f). Starck explicitly admits his sympathy with deism (67ff) and proposes a minimal conception of God as creator with the traditional philosophical attributes of wisdom, justice, omniscience etc. (136f). He argues that revelation could not contain any propositions so obscure as to lead to unresolvable differences of opinion – such as characterise the warring Christian sects – but only an essential core of doctrine: 'Gott der Vater, von welchem alle Dinge sind, daß Jesus Christus der Sohn Gottes ist, durch den er alles geschaffen, der der Heiland aller Menschen, und dem alles

[3] 1773. W III 111–121.

[4] W III 111, 245. All that remains of Hamann's translation is a paraphrase which includes some translated passages, particularly Part 12.

[5] Letters to Hartknoch, 6.10.1780 and to Herder, 25.10.1780; B IV 225, 229.

[6] B IV 222f. Letter to Hartknoch, 13.9.1780.

[7] B IV 189:10. Herder to Hamann, June 1780.

unterworfen ist ...' (377) This recalls the 'regula fidei', the simple creedal statement unearthed by Lessing in the Fragmentenstreit from the church fathers; Lessing's influence can be seen in the idea that this simple core is the important thing. At the end of his conclusion Starck provocatively quotes St. Paul, like Lessing in *Das Testament Johannis*, urging a focus on the essentials (I Tim. 1:5–7): 'Die Hauptsumme aber des Gebots ist Liebe von reinem Herzen, und von gutem Gewissen, und von ungefärbtem Glauben, welche haben etliche verfehlt und sind umgewandt zu unnützem Geschwätz, wollen der Schrift Meister seyn, und verstehen nicht, was sie sagen und sezzen.'

Hamann's scathing estimate of the book puts it in company familiar from *Konxompax*, though he did not as yet think Starck could be the author:

> Der Verf. hat mir beßer gefallen als Bahrt u Steinbart. Aber im Grunde einerley πρωτον ψευδος wie in der Erziehung des menschl. Geschlechts [Lessing's authorship of which was not known]. Erstl. *natürl. Religion* ist für mich was *natürl. Sprache*, ein wahres Unding, ein ens rationis. Zweytens, das was man natürl. Religion nennt, ist eben so problematisch u polemisch als Offenbarung. Und warum Freymüthigkeit, dasjenige zu widerkäuen u zu verfeinern, was der wahre ton du siecle sub umbra alarum ist. Vernunft ist der *leibhafte Moses* – und unsere heutige Philosophie der *leibhafte Pabst* verklärt – *Judentum*, sein Geist natürl. Religion, ist die allgemeine Losung, nach Jerusalem, Büsching pp. An *Meßias* kaum gedacht. Aus dem Verstande unserer Apologisten vom Judentum läst sich auf ihren Verstand des *[Christ]entums* schließen – u ohne beyde sind *Pabstum* u *Lutherthum* Stückwerk. Dies Viereck ist mein ältestes u jüngstes Thema – und so Gott will das Ey zu meinem Schiblemini.[8]

Note that 'Schiblemini' already stands for the whole project, though it is not yet thought of as a title. πρῶτον ψεῦδος is a technical term from Aristotelian logic, literally 'first lie', the first wrong step in an argument; Hamann made it his own in the sense 'fundamental underlying error', but for him an overtone of deceit is also present. Here, the error lies in the very concept 'natural religion', which in Hamann's eyes was not just theologically wrong on account of its independence of revelation, but – as he thought Hume showed, and as Kant effectively demonstrated in the *Critique* – simply untenable, because religion without revelation evaporated into philosophical contradictions. Hamann's remarks on Judaism here refer not to the religion in its authentic form, past or present, but to its misappropriation by thinkers like Starck with universalist leanings,

[8] 'sub umbra alarum' is 'in the shadow of thy wings', Psalm 63:7. There the image refers to being protected by God in adversity, and it may be intended as some sort of ironic contrast to its context in Hamann's letter; or perhaps he just means 'in theological matters'. B IV 195, cf. 202f, 'Bey der gegenwärtigen Lage ist Freimüthigkeit weder Tugend noch eine Kunst.' Letter to the Herders, 11.6.1780; to Johann Caspar Häfeli, 30.6.80.

who forget that Jews expect a Messiah, and so reveal a parallel misunderstanding of Christianity itself – 'An Messias kaum gedacht'. In their book, reason as the guiding religious principle is as properly 'Jewish', as authentic to true religion, as Moses himself; but that shows how little they understand about either Judaism or Christianity. However, Hamann – with Luther – did criticise Judaism itself, as we shall see in the next chapter. Here, the target is Starck; there, it is Mendelssohn the Aufklärer more than Mendelssohn the Jew. Really – Hamann had been reading Luther – the natural religionists are every bit as bad as the Pope.

The Pauline problematic of 'Greeks and Jews', intertwined with the dual sense of Judaism both as the actual religion and, in sharp contrast, its tendentious travesty by the proponents of 'Vernunftreligion' – unlike Lessing's subtler historicising approach – was to be a central concern of Hamann's in *Golgatha*, as it had been in *Konxompax*: the 'Greeks' run the risk of being too abstract, founding their religion too much on philosophy or speculative flights, not necessarily of reason; and the 'Jews' threaten to pursue or develop a mystical adherence to the outward forms of the Law. What began as a tension between Jews and gentiles in the earliest church went on to determine the contours of heresy and orthodoxy in the succeeding centuries. The twin deviations from the true middle path are the fetishisation, as it were, of dogma, making the letter an end in itself at the expense of the spirit, and straying too far from dogma for it to remain an effective constraint on belief, which might then just dissolve, or merge with prevailing trends; in antiquity, this often resulted in gnosticism. Starck's concluding quotation of Paul is a bold attempt to align himself with the orthodox centre and his potential critics with the excessive traditionalism, presented as inauthentic, opposed by the epistle. Hamann was surely quite right to place him far to the 'gnostic' left. The continuity, at once typological and thematic, that Hamann sees between the debates of early Christianity and those of the Enlightenment is striking, especially since the Enlightenment has indeed largely succeeded in replacing such theological concerns, to become the everyday intellectual furniture of the modern age; because that was just what he feared and already

observed, Hamann held on above all else to the Christian framework, which was the essential object of his defensive zeal.

Writing to Herder that he had completed the Hume translation, Hamann explained:

> Ich denke aber dies ist das beste Argument für meine ehrwürdige
> Landsleute u Amtsbrüder, welche Judentum u [Chri]stentum zur natürl.
> Religion – oder wie St. Luther sagt, die *Sachen fein mit rauhen Worten fremd machen.*[9]

The *Dialogues*, that is, were the best answer to those like Steinbart and Starck who had muddied the waters of Christianity by reducing it and its precursor to natural religion – namely to that part of religious truth man could work out with his unaided faculties, before revelation. Today we may think of 'natural religion' as it was positively depicted precisely by the likes of Starck, namely as the fairly successful result of groping after the truth by well-meaning and highly rational pagans, the thinly disguised Greeks of classical antiquity transposed to an Arcadian setting. At worst, they fall short of true Christianity through the lack of revelation, but at best, they arrive at the essentials. In Starck's version of Justin Martyr's words: 'Welche ehemals nach der Vernunft und dem Worte gelebt haben [i.e. Greeks and Jews respectively], sind Christen gewesen'.

Hume's *Dialogues* were an answer to Starck because they opposed deism. The argument from design, the principal topic, is a typical example of natural religion. Awe at creation was of course a central plank of revealed religion too, and Hamann himself espoused the idea that the book of nature is part of revelation – in his phrase, 'Schöpfung als Anrede'. But this plank on its own could not bear the whole weight of faith. Hamann the theologian here agrees with Hume the philosopher, even though it must have been clear to him that Hume's sympathies in no way coincided with his own. Of Hume's three characters, Philo, the sceptic, Cleanthes, the deist, and Demea, the conservative Christian, it is the last with whom Hamann sympathised; but just as Philo and Demea, though poles apart, are in the dialogue natural allies against Cleanthes, Hamann thought he could make use of Hume against Starck, the common deist enemy. Hume's credentials as a luminary of the Enlightenment made him all the more likely to appeal to the intellectual public of the day, just as the iconic figure of Socrates had once seemed a highly suitable vehicle

[9] B IV 209, 13.8.80. Hamann says he did the translation in just over two weeks from 21st July to 7th August.

for Hamann's authorial debut. What could be more conclusive than a philosophical refutation of 'philosophical' theology, and what more likely to convince even irredeemably speculative readers?

Starck's positive image of natural religion is very different from the orthodox Lutheran one. The nature of Hamann's vehement opposition to Starck is illuminated by Luther's own position, for which the *locus classicus* in the Pauline corpus is Rom. 1:18–23:

> 18 Denn Gottes zorn vom himel wird offenbart uber alles gottloses Wesen und Ungerechtigkeit der menschen, die die Wahrheit in ungerechtigkeit aufhalten.
> 19 Denn das man weis, das Gott sey, ist jnen offenbar. Denn Gott hat es jnen offenbart,
> 20 damit das Gottes unsichtbares wesen, das ist seine ewige Krafft und Gottheit, wird ersehen, so man des warnimpt an den Wercken, nemlich an der schepffung der welt. Also das sie keine entschüldigung haben,
> 21 Die weil sie wusten das ein Gott ist, und haben jn nicht gepreiset als einen Gott noch gedancket, Sondern sind in jrem Tichten eitel worden, und jr unverstendiges Hertz ist verfinstert.
> 22 Da sie sich fur weise hielten, Sind sie zu Narren worden,
> 23 Und haben verwandelt die Herrligkeit des unvergenglichen Gottes in ein Bilde gleich dem vergenglichen Menschen und der Vogel und der vierfüssigen und der kriechenden Thiere.[10]

The passage is difficult to read, whether in Luther's version or in the highly peculiar original Greek, which Hamann had studied closely,[11] so it is worth approaching this representative and well-known text in this form rather than in a modern version which may smooth over the difficulty and *Verfremdung*. In sum, the argument is that the pagans are to blame for their unbelief – in the Christian God, that is – because although He revealed himself to them through his creation, they worshipped anthropomorphic and even animal gods. 'Tichten', v. 21, is 'Dichten' as in 'Dichten und Trachten', used in Gen. 6:5 and 8:21 to refer to the human follies which provoked the Flood. Luther's marginal gloss reads: '(Tichten) Wo nicht glaube ist, da fellet die Vernunfft von einem auffs ander, bis sie gar verblendet wird in jrem tichten. Wie denn allen weisen und spitzigen Köpffen geschicht.' The word in the Greek text is διαλογισμοί, bringing to mind – both for the classically educated eighteenth-century reader and for the early Christian audience – the associations of 'dialectic', namely rational debate and enquiry; Luther's 'spitzige Köpfe' is just right. 'Tichten' conveys a resonance which is there in the original, but picks it

[10] Rogner & Bernhard ed., slightly altered for readability.

[11] Hamann's letters record that he read through the New Testament in Greek several times with his son, whom he largely educated himself. Repeated reading of classical and biblical texts, increasing in precision and depth, was the pedagogical norm.

out as other translations do not;[12] the marginal note lends it still more emphasis as being a key point. The pagans thought about religious matters far too much, Paul continues, but in a spirit of enquiry rather than awe, and so they worshipped their own image. The thought is compressed. It was a standard Jewish objection to paganism that its conception of God was impoverished next to the Jewish God, who by contrast was radically other and sublime. But Paul sees the heart of the problem in thinking too much, and it is by putting faith in empty speculation, the vain circlings of the all-too-human mind, corresponding in the Biblical tradition to the story of Babel, that the Greeks worshipped a human image. In practice they had moved on from polytheism, though leaving it intact, in favour of more metaphysical conceptions, whatever value for life (on a spectrum from Platonism to Epicureanism) they put on the divine. 'God' now had a capital 'g' for the pagans too, as Paul very well knew; the jibe at the Olympian soap opera, which was not nearly as serious a competitor against Christianity as philosophy, is just for effect, ratcheted up another notch by the reference to animals.[13]

Hamann had recently read the whole of Luther in the seven-volume Jena edition.[14] That is not to say he had been unfamiliar with Luther's thought before, but the intensive and systematic immersion must have refreshed and deepened his knowledge as well as establishing the association of certain ideas specifically with Luther, who could serve as a focus for any of Hamann's own existing and developing thoughts he found confirmed there. In short, the exposure was fruitful. Hamann thought the current situation was similar to Luther's: 'Sind wir nicht wider auf eben

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[12] A modern-day official so-called 'Luther-Übersetzung' has simply 'Gedanken'; *Bibeltext in der revidierten Fassung von 1984*. Stuttgart, Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft 1999. The Authorised Version has 'became vain in their *imaginations*', sensibly enough, but very differently. Something like 'intellectual debates' would bring out Luther's emphasis without betraying the Greek. The word can also mean 'reckoning' in the accounting sense.

[13] Rhetorically, it is a repetition of the criticism of philosophy on a cruder level, dragging it down by an association it would not itself admit. Precisely what it sees as its essential characteristic, its rational superiority to 'unphilosophical' religion, is denied. So Paul's caricature brings out the implication a couple of verses back that philosophy 'idolises' reason. Hamann also often reads his opponents against the grain, seemingly missing the point; in fact he consciously denies it. In the literature, this device is referred to as 'metaschematism', picking up on Hamann's remarks on a Pauline passage – I Cor. 4:6; see also below on §18, and in the Conclusion.

[14] Hamann mentions the edition – 'die Jenaische deutsche' – in a letter of 12th April 1780 to Herder, B IV 181:27. Lothar Schreiner identifies it as the seven-part edition of 1555–58. Twelve weeks after he had begun, he was 'Gottlob! im siebenten Theil', B IV 209:9. *Johann Georg Hamann: Golgatha und Scheblimini*, ed. Lothar Schreiner, p. 21. Gütersloh, Bertelsmann 1956. However, he did not have all the volumes, though he may have borrowed another edition by Walch, see B IV 181:28.

de[m] Fleck, von dem er ausgegangen?'[15] That is, the spiritual and intellectual bankruptcy of the Catholic status quo in Luther's time was analogous to the threat posed to true Christianity by the Enlightenment and its philosophical theology.

Luther served to focus and support Hamann's reading of St. Paul. Extensive reading of Luther himself reinforced ideas, and ways of reading the Bible, that were still very much alive in everyday eighteenth-century Lutheranism. In particular, Hamann's irrationalist inclinations were sharpened by Luther's view of reason not just as sophistical, but idolatrous, as seen in his translation of the passage from Romans. This idea is developed more extensively in Luther's exegesis of Jonah, for example.[16] When the storm came, the others in the ship with Jonah 'cried every man unto his god' (Jonah 1:5). That is, they were of various nationalities, and so worshipped various gods, but not the one true God of Israel. Luther comments that 'natürliche Vernunft' tells them that God exists and is omnipotent, but they do not recognise the Lord. Luther continues:

> Also spielt auch die Vernunft der blinden Kuhe mit Gott und tut eitel Feilgriffe [=Fehlgriffe] und schlägt immer nebenhin, daß sie das Gott heißt, das nicht Gott ist ... Darum plumpt sie so herein und gibt den Namen und göttliche Ehre und heißet Gott, was sie dünkt, das Gott sei, und trifft also nimmermehr den rechten Gott, sondern allweg den Teufel oder ihr eigen Dünkel, den der Teufel regiert. ... was oder wer Gott ist ... weiß die Natur und ist in allen Herzen geschrieben, das ander lehret alleine der heilige Geist ... Was ehren [die Papisten und Geistlichen – i.e. Schwärmer] für Gott? Ists nicht wahr: sie ehren ihren eigen falsche Wahn und Dünkel für Gott? Denn es ist in der Wahrheit kein Gott, der also gesinnet sei [to be moved by works], und feilen [sie fehlen] mit solchem Dünkel des rechten Gotts, und bleibt nichts da denn ihr falscher Dünkel, der ist ihr Gott, dem geben sie den Namen und Ehre Gottes. Nu kann unter dem falschen Dünkel niemand sein denn der Teufel, der ihn eingibt und regiert.

The thought, a Lutheran commonplace, underpins Hamann's attitude, first to Starck and then to Kant's *Critique*. By taking its own counsel, reason looks in the wrong place for knowledge of God; that should come from the Holy Ghost. Instead, reason mistakes its own conception for the real thing, starting from the bare fact of the existence of a God and proceeding independently. If

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[15] B IV 181:31; see also the following, which is preceded by an attack on Frederick: 'Das philosophische Antichristentum ist an die Stelle des Päbstischen getreten, und die Philosophie ist der Koran des Lügenpropheten und seines Islamismus.' B IV 260:26, to Herder, 1st January 1781. Islam was a topical example of a heathen religion – see for example Lessing's publication of *Adam Neuser* (the story of a convert to Islam) in the *Beiträge* just before the 'Fragmente'. As with Starck, the idea that there is more than one religion deserving consideration is connected to a view of Christianity itself which downplays revelation.

[16] WA XIX 206f, quoted from Emanuel Hirsch, *Hilfsbuch zum Studium der Dogmatik*, 4. ed. Berlin, De Gruyter 1963, p. 95f.

this is the God anyone worships, then they are guilty of idolatry, because it is not in fact God, but something else. Further, the idol is a figment of the human rational imagination (borrowing from the AV's translation of Rom. 1:21, see note 12) and so a part of man himself. Rational theology idolises a spectre of its own devising, unknowingly prompted all along by the devil. This is the God of the philosophers from Aristotle on, with the standard properties of omnipotence, omniscience, and so on, the prime mover, superlatively abstract – and, as Kant was to show, beyond man's power to know through reason.

A second aspect of the thought of Rom. 18–23 which Hamann agreed with, besides the attitude it conveys to natural religion, depends on its context. The passage introduces a diatribe against the world and the age, given over to sin. That is not a separate complaint, not a change of subject; this poor state of affairs is a consequence of man's idolatry: '*Darumb* hat sie auch Gott dahin gegeben in jrer Hertzen gelüste ... die Gottes wahrheit haben verwandelt in die Lügen ...' (Rom. 1:24f, emphasis added). Indeed, sinful pursuits are in themselves a form of idolatry, because they reflect merely human priorities untempered by the relationship with God. Idle speculation is the other side of the diabolical coin – the coin of the Prussian realm as far as Hamann was concerned – and unbridled philosophy works itself out immediately in human lives at every level. If the relationship with God is broken, man is thereby in a state of sin; but that means he will actually lead a bad life. Turning away from God is turning towards the devil. It is not just a matter of needing to improve on one's abstract principles. They are precisely not abstract. It is like the relationship between the independence of the judiciary and the fates of individuals affected by the courts; there, the true face of corruption is its consequences as they are played out in particular lives. Sin is likewise ugly. For Hamann in Frederick's Prussia, the Enlightenment currents he detested, the ideas of Steinbart and Starck, were so to speak the ideological superstructure of a rotten society. He imagined the gloss and glitter of the hated centre, but it was at first hand that he knew the lower echelons of the provincial administration and the economic consequences of its policies. At the black heart of it all, fostered by the vicious potentate of

Sans-Souci, was the deist travesty of Christian theology – and Hume seemed to provide the definitive answer to it.

'Freymüthige Briefe, die natürliche Religion betreffend'

The Hume translation was to have a 'Beylage';[17] but when the publication of the translation itself was abandoned because of the rival version, Hamann wrote: 'Deswegen [i.e. 'on that account'] wird die Arbeit nicht verloren seyn, sondern vielleicht zu einem kleinen Bändchen von *Briefen die natürl. Religion betreffend* dem 50jährigen Geistl. in Schwaben gedeyen' (B IV 229:18, letter to Herder, 25.10.80). At its origin, then, it may reasonably be supposed that the aim of the project was to draw attention to the links between Hume on the one hand and Starck and all he stood for in Hamann's mind.

However, now that the 'Beylage' was cut loose from this original purpose, it was free to evolve in response to new developments. That evolution spans more than three years, during which Kant's *Kritik der reinen Vernunft* and Mendelssohn's *Jerusalem* appeared. This chapter and the next will seek to explain how Hamann's prevailing concerns, as seen in his view of Starck, and running continuously back to the Socratic-prophetic inception of his 'Autorschaft', determined his seemingly bizarre and wrong-headed reception of Kant and Mendelssohn. This will provide a new orientation for reading the actual texts, the *Metakritik* and *Golgatha*.

In a letter to Hartknoch, who was to have published the translation, Hamann's tentative title alludes more explicitly to Starck: 'Vielleicht verwandelt sich auch der erste Embryon in ein Bändchen *freymüthiger Briefe die natürl. Religion betreffend*' (B IV 229, 6.10.80). Naturally, it also recalls the Literaturbriefe, a familiar Enlightenment institution, and could have been chosen to signal support for rather than opposition to free-thinking; this is a typical piece of Hamannian irony.

The project was soon put off as Hamann's depression returned:

[17] B IV 222. This recalls the – all too personal – 'Beylage' to Hamann's very first project – before his conversion – which was also a translation, of a work on trade by Dangeul; see Chapter I pp. 11–13. Now that Hamann was an established author, he did not actually need a translation as a vehicle for his own work, though having Hume as the main feature might well have helped with sales.

> Zu meinen Briefen werde den Winter über sammeln, aber so
> Gott will erst den Sommer dran arbeiten. Mein Aderlaßen glückl.
> überstanden, ohne gichtigen Anfall. Mein Kopf taugt aber gar nichts,
> wie leider! aus den Früchten u grauen Haaren zu ersehen.[18]

There was also a practical obstacle that was to recur in different guises: before beginning, Hamann wanted to see the rival translation, which was as yet unavailable.[19] By the time he finally received it he had long since been thinking about new elements in the project, but the original link with the Hume book meant that being unable to compare the two German versions was an insurmountable *Hemmschwelle*. It was part of Hamann's polemical working method that he needed a point of entry to a debate, and that had been going to be his platform as the translator of a major work; now the platform was reviewing the version that actually got published, which would be something new to react against, even if only as a pretext for airing views he had already formed.

At the same time, often in the same letters to Hartknoch, Kant's publisher, Hamann began to pursue the *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*; as soon as he got wind of Kant's forthcoming opus he felt it would be relevant to what he had to say about Hume, and set his sights on getting hold of the proofs. The story has been told elsewhere, for instance by Gwen Griffith-Dickson.[20] The important question here is how Kant came to be associated with the Hume project. What did Hamann expect of Kant? Why did Hamann's disappointment lead to the *Critique* becoming its central focus, as evidenced in the title 'Metakritik'? What does Kant have to do with Starck?

Hamann first mentions Kant's new book in the summer of 1780 (B IV 196, 206, 213). In October he asked Hartknoch to make sure he got a copy hot off the press: 'Werden Sie Verleger von Kant; so sorgen Sie, daß ich ein warmes Exemplar bekomme. Vielleicht hilft es zu meinen

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[18] B IV 230:31, to Herder, 25.10.80. Hamann had been depressed in the spring, before taking up Hume: '... so leb ich in einem stetigen Wirbel von Grillen und äußerl. Umständen, die mich fortreißen, zerstreuen und verhindern zu einem Plan zu gelangen und demsleben treu zu bleiben. Bey der grösten Muße, kein Herr von meiner Zeit. Anlagen ohne Zweck, ohne Ziel, ohne Kraft, ohne rechte Bestimmung.' B IV 183, to Herder, April 1780.

[19] B IV 234, 249, 269, all to Hartknoch, from December 1780 to the following February, by which time he had also tried to obtain an advance copy of Kant's *Critique*, which Hartknoch was to publish too. On 10th December 1781 he was still writing to Herder that he could not begin the project without seeing the translation, 356:5; on the 17th he writes that Kant now has it and has promised to lend it to him 'morgen', 359:21; on 8th February 1782, he has nearly finished the comparison, discovering three significant printing errors, 365:16. Hamann submitted this text when asked for a contribution to the new *Berlinische Monatsschrift*, letter to Hartknoch, 8.10.82, B IV 465. In general, Hamann's letters are full of requests for unobtainable books – a fact of intellectual life at the time that was often a real barrier.

[20] Gwen Griffith-Dickson, *Johann Georg Hamann's Relational Metacriticism*. Berlin, De Gruyter 1995, p. 271f.

Briefen in petto.'[21] At this point, Hamann had just learned of the rival translation; this is the same letter in which he said his 'Beylage' could be worked up into a volume of letters on natural religion. In December, while reading Hume's *History of Natural Religion*, he writes to Herder, 'Ich mache mir großen Staat darauf, daß [Kant] mir in einigen Dingen vorgearbeitet haben wird' (B IV 255:2). In mid-January, mentioning his intention to publish a response to the successful Hume translation, he adds: 'Kants Buch schlägt aber auch in meinen Plan, und ich muß selbiges abwarten, ehe ich selbst zu denken anfange' (Letter to Herder, January 1781, B IV 266:2). Hamann expected Kant's book to be a significant help in his natural religion project – enough so to delay starting it.

In any case, to judge from this letter, Hamann's depression was now deeper still: 'Ich bin, bester Herder, so hypochondrisch, daß ich vor Grillen, Feigheit und Unlust beinahe umkomme ... Bey dieser Laune hatte ich mir schon vor vier Wochen vorgenommen keinem Menschen hier zum neuen Jahr zu gratuliren.' His ability to think coherently was affected: 'Für mich giebt es keinen nexum der Dinge mehr und keine Verhältnis der action und reaction.' Concluding with some words of encouragement for Herder's own activities, Hamann quotes II Corinthians 13:9: 'For we rejoice when we are weak and you are strong; this we even pray for' – when thinking of writing projects, he was still putting himself in St. Paul's shoes, just as at the inception of his 'Autorschaft'.[22]

Hamann's first reaction to the *Critique* once it had appeared was bewilderment; it did not bring the expected illumination, and Hamann held out for the Hume translation: 'Ihr Anblick wird meine Arbeit bestimmen und die Einrichtung derselben'. (B IV 283:33). However, he set about reading Hume's *Treatise* and Locke's *Essay*[23] to try and make sense of Kant, and his mood seems to have improved (292:26) as he transferred his attention to this. Gradually, he decided that Kant was thinking on the same lines as Hume; after mentioning the failed translation, Hamann wrote to Herder: 'Vielleicht hab ich blos deswegen aufgehalten werden müßen, um den *engl[ischen]*

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[21] Letter of 6.10.80, B IV 226:7. It is interesting to note that Kant used Hamann's Hume translation during the composition of the *Critique*; Kant borrowed it briefly in September, and then from mid-October to mid-January 1781, B IV 222, 249:33, 262:22.

[22] B IV 258f, 264:17, 266:16. Hamann quotes the verse in Greek.

[23] B IV 285:32, 291:2, 293:5, 303:29; later he read Malebranche and Berkeley, as Hume's sources, B IV 316f.

und preuß[ischen] Hume die wirklich auf ein Horn blasen, zu gleicher Zeit aufführen zu können' (304:22). Providence, in other words, had foiled the original project in order to make a greater one possible. The whole development is neatly summarised in a letter to Johann Friedrich Kleuker, who was not one of Hamann's regular correspondents, in a paragraph which moves smoothly from the Hume translation, still mentioning Starck as the initial impetus behind it, to Kant. This is the conclusion:

> Ich bin eben so sehr vor Hume's und Kant's Meinung als wider beyde. Einer ergänzt den andern; es ist also ein compendium meiner ökonomischen Autorschaft gegen den irrenden Ritter und seinen Schildträger das Speer anzulegen – wenn mir der Kützel nicht vergeht. (22.7.81, B IV 312:21)

A subsequent letter refers to 'des Sancho Pancha Transcendentalphilosophie' (to Herder, 15.9.81, B IV 340:5). 'Ökonomisch' carries the theological overtone of a divinely ordained plan rather than implying terseness; Hamann is thinking of his prophetic mission, within his typological view of history. Writing about the two philosophers will bring everything together. So it seems that the transition from Starck to Kant was not an unconscious drift, but an expansion of what Hamann himself saw as one complex. Hamann's key disagreement with Starck as he presents it here was over natural religion: 'Aus einer blinden Ahndung war ich über das Geschwätz von natürl[ichen] Religionswahrheiten aufgebracht. Hume sollte eine Antwort auf diese Voraussetzung seyn.' This is the issue which led Hamann from Starck to Kant, as Hamann himself understood matters.[24]

Hamann read the *Critique* with care:

> [ich nehme] mir jetzt die Mühe, mir ein Schema von seinem Inhalt auszuziehen und traue keinem Blick des Ganzen, so hitzig auch selbigem nachjage bey jeder ersten Lektür, ohne eine nähere Zergliederung der Theile und des Einzelnen – um vielleicht das Werk recensiren, aber nicht beurtheilen zu können – wenigstens nicht nach philosophischem Schrot und Korn. (Letter to Herder, 10.5.81. B IV 294:16)

[24] Hamann was rereading Starck's *Betrachtungen* 'noch einmal cum grano salis, nicht im Fluge sondern wie ein Buchstabierschütze', B IV 312f, cf. 305:33. See Hamann's letter of 25th August to J.F. Reichardt, which also presents Starck's *Betrachtungen* as the initial impetus, p. 330.

This review was actually written, but not published, and survives as a manuscript.[25] It veers between summary, pastiche, and critique, providing a superficial sense of the central issues of the text and, by stringing together quotations, a fair sample of the bizarre flavour of Kant's terminology; it is hard to distinguish in particular instances between wilful misunderstanding, genuine bafflement and parody, but all three are at work in Hamann's review. He liberally employs the technique of putting quotations in a context – often other quotations – which suggests his own view, against the grain. Though according to Hamann the review was actually written during a single day, this selection of quotations shows that it is the product of long reflective perusal; one should nonetheless be cautious about reading a deliberate meaning into every detail or juxtaposition, not least because the review does not have the dense and pregnant style of Hamann's 'Autorschaft' properly speaking. However, the basic attitude of the *Metakritik* is anticipated.

The review begins by picking out Kant's famous words, tucked away at the end of a footnote in the preface: 'Unser Zeitalter ist das eigentliche Zeitalter der Critic, der sich alles unterwerfen muß ...' (A XI=W III 277:1). The second paragraph, largely based on quotations from Kant's preface and introduction, takes this up, saying that for Kant reason's guiding principles – so in effect, reason itself – are 'heiliger als der Religion, und majestätischer als der Gesetzgebung ihre' – which Kant does not quite say, but does indeed imply.

Hamann goes on to criticise Kant's abstraction, saying that sensibility and understanding naturally go together and it makes no sense to separate them. As in the *Metakritik*, he makes fun of Kant's metaphorical description of sensibility and understanding as 'zwei Stämme der menschlichen Erkenntnis' with one 'gemeinschaftliche ... Wurzel' (A 15); this 'Scheidung', and the parallel distinctions which structure the *Critique*, puts asunder what nature (note the ironic substitution of 'nature' for 'God', cf. Mark 10:9) has joined together.[26]

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[25] Hamann wrote it on 1st July, but withheld it to avoid offending Kant; B IV 317:5, 321:19, to Herder and to Hartknoch, 5.8.81 and 11.8.81. Bayer's new edition of the *Metakritik* contains a number of improved readings for the review. Oswald Bayer, *Vernunft ist Sprache: Hamanns Metakritik Kants*. Stuttgart, Frommann-Holzboog 2002. The new readings are listed on p. 148f. Bayer devotes almost a hundred pages to the review; my aim here is just to convey in outline what it tells us about Hamann's early reception of the *Critique*. Because it has the character and style of a review rather than a fully-fledged work in Hamann's 'Autorschaft', the general drift is clear.

[26] A 15, W III 278:11, 14. The *Metakritik* goes further, making Kant's epistemology into a 'Baum der Erkenntnis'.

Up to this point the review largely draws on Kant's preface and introduction, which of course deal with the book's overall aims. Hamann's fourth paragraph covers the body of the work up to the end of the Transcendental Dialectic, more than four fifths of the whole. In the preface, Kant says it is 'ohne ihre Schuld' (A VIII=W III 279:1) that reason is unable to resolve certain questions – among other things, to do with God; Hamann's quotation of these words leads into a series of allusions to original sin: 'so ist die transcendentale Dialectik eigentlich dazu bestimmt, diesen ebenso unerkannten als unheilbaren Erbschaden, als die wahren Pudenda der reinen Vernunft, zu verklären ...'[27] Hamann mentions the 'vorzüglich con amore ausgearbeitete Critik aller speculativen Theologie', which was to be central to his disgreement with Kant.[28]

The fifth paragraph, on the remainder of the *Critique*, returns to the context of the quotation Hamann began with, concentrating on the final pages on 'die Geschichte der reinen Vernunft', which in Kant's account leads inevitably to the 'kritischer Weg'; the discussion in the preface – no doubt written just afterwards – is here recapitulated. For Kant, the conflict between sceptical and dogmatic approaches produced an 'indifferentist' impasse, leaving the critical method as the only way forward. Hamann sees the critical philosophy as just a new variety of 'indifferentism' – with all the weaknesses Kant ascribes to that – which 'giebt sich zwar für *kritisch* aus', but is in fact '*hypokritisch* oder auch *politisch*'.[29]

In sum, the review questions the legitimacy of the critical project, but without really giving a full sense of what that was. It casts more doubt on the legitimacy of Kant's aims than on his success in achieving them. Critical reason, Hamann objects, sets itself above religion; it makes crucial distinctions which sound as if they are just splitting dry old scholastic hairs; and it tries to address metaphysical and particularly theological questions which are beyond its proper, divinely ordained, scope. Its pretended even-handedness, like Pilate's, is really an 'indifferentist' betrayal of Christianity, which demands full commitment; as Hamann had come to feel during the formative quarrel with Lindner and Berens, anything less is just sitting on the fence, whereas the important

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[27]W III 279:2; Bayer reads 'verklären' for Nadler's 'erklären'.

[28] His page reference to it, 631–704, includes the appendix to the Transcendental Dialectic which follows, W III 279:12.

[29]W III 279:37, 280:2; Bayer reads 'zwar' where Nadler has 'gerne'. He points out parallels in Hamann's work for 'hypokritisch' and 'politisch' which suggest an allusion to Pilate, Bayer p. 136.

thing is to be inside it with the sheep rather than outside with the goats. The fundamental methodological principle: not all-too-human, fallen reason, but God should come first; reason should know its place.

Not until a year later do the letters record any further progress on the project in the sense of putting pen to paper.[30] Meanwhile, Hamann's conception continued to evolve, and the working title changed. The focus moved from Starck to Kant, while the issue of natural religion remained central. Hamann continued to wait for the Hume translation, but by the time it arrived he had also decided he should wait for Kant's *Prolegomena* to come out before proceeding.

Hamann wrote to Hartknoch asking him to fill the gaps in his incomplete second copy of the *Critique*

> zu meinem privat Gebrauch, wozu das Dedications Exempl[ar] zu schade ist. Denn kommt es zur Ausgabe des Hume, so werde ich wie sie leicht erachten können, *Kants Kritik aller speculativen Theologie*, welche ein Hauptstück seines Buchs ausmacht und vorzügl[ich] ausgearbeitet ist, cum studio et labore durchwühlen müßen, unterstreichen, marginiren und obelisiren.[31]

Kant's critique of speculative theology has become central; Hamann thinks this is unsurprising. He asked the Berliner Johann Friedrich Reichardt:

> Nun was sagen die Herren Metaphysiker an der Spree zur Preuß[ischen] Kritik der reinen Vernunft ... die aller *spekulativen Theologie* der Spaldinge, Steinbarte ppp und jesuitischen Betrachtungen unserer Hephästione das Maul stopft. (25.8.81, B IV 330)

'Unsere Hephästione' refers to Starck, alluded to a few lines below as 'der freymüthige Verfasser' of the *Betrachtungen*; *Hephästion* was one of his earlier works. Kant's book, and especially the 'Kritik aller spekulativen Theologie' – Hamann's underlining is a reference to this title – is seen as the definitive answer to Starck and other 'spekulative Theologen'.

The same letter announces Hamann's intention to undertake some preliminary background reading:

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[30] Of course, Hamann may have produced drafts and not mentioned them to his correspondents; but when he does, writing to Herder, it sounds like a substantial beginning: '... daß ich heute ... anfangen können und den ersten Brief ... zu Ende gebracht', B IV 413:22.

[31] 11.8.81, B IV 322:5; cf. Hamann's letter to Herder, 20.4.82, 376:24: 'Mein Sinn geht noch immer etwas über den letzten 7. Abschnitt des kritischen Elemantarbuchs, die *Theol[ogie] betreffend*, auszuarbeiten.' At this time Hamann appears once again to have contemplated the publication of his own translation, though without enthusiasm, cf. B IV 330:30: 'Wenn meine Uebersetzung je wider meine Neigung herauskommen sollte', letter to Reichardt, 25.8.81.

> Will aber erst die Bibliothecam Fratrum polonorum, mit der ich eben den Anfang gemacht, durchlaufen und ihre Analogie mit unsern zeitigen Kirchenvätern u Reformationsseuchtigen ein wenig näher kennen lernen (B IV 330:33)

He hopes, that is, that the position of Starck and the debate surrounding it can be illuminated by the writings of Socinus and his followers, the persecuted and then exiled Polish theologians whose ideas were to give rise to what became known as Unitarianism. Then he writes to Hartknoch that he has finished volume one, containing the writings of Socinus himself, 'mit dem ich in Ansehung der natürl[ichen] Religion gleich denke',[32] and to Herder even: 'Daß ich mit Socino in Ansehung der natürl[ichen] Religion einig bin, bewog mich den Hume zu übersetzen' (9.12.81, B IV 353:32); he translated the *Dialogues* before reading Socinus, but when he did, the theologian's view on natural religion seemed to perfectly encapsulate Hamann's own existing attitude in reaction to Starck's *Betrachtungen*, the catalyst he normally mentions for the translation.

The second chapter of the *Praelectiones theologicae*, or theological lectures, of Socinus treats the question 'quid sit in homine naturaliter, quod ad religionem attinet', that is, what are man's innate religious dispositions? Socinus argues that, though it is commonly believed that man naturally possesses the notion of a God, in fact God revealed himself directly to Adam, and this belief could have been passed on to his posterity, and was in any case fostered by further revelations; so the universality of religious belief is not an indication that it is innate. Furthermore, such a natural belief could not depend on faith, yet Hebrews 11:6 tells us no-one can please God without faith; there would be no virtue in innate faith because what is natural must be universal. Moreover, some primitive peoples have indeed been discovered who lack the concept of God, and they are even mentioned in the Bible. Socinus then turns to the cosmological argument, that the very existence of the world is evidence – available to all – for a creator; though this is seemingly supported by Psalm 19:1 'The heavens declare the glory of God', Rom. 1:20, or Acts 17:26f, he argues against such an interpretation of these texts. His conclusion is that man naturally knows right from wrong, but he does not naturally know God; God revealed himself to man, who has fallen away from this knowledge by his own fault.[33]

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[32] 23.10.81, B IV 342:4. Socinus was the Latin name of the heterodox Italian theologian Fausto Sozzini, 1539–1604.

[33] *Bibliotheca Fratrum Polonorum, quos Unitarios vocant, INSTRUCTA Operibus omnibus Fausti SOCINI SENENSIS ...* IRENOPOLI 1656. Vol. 1. Praelectionum theologicarum Caput II, pp. 537–539. 'Irenopolis' presumably means Amsterdam.

Just after finishing Socinus, Hamann came up with a new title and a plan:

> *Schiblemini* oder *epistolische Nachlese eines Misologen*. Der 1. Brief enthält Zweifel über die Existenz eines ägyptischen Priesters, der Hephästion geheißen.
> Der 2. betrift die *jesuitischen* Betrachtungen über das Christentum.
> 3. Gedanken über eine neue Inschrift: Man kann was man will pp.
> 4. über die Uebersetzung der Humischen Dialogen. Die übrigen den *engl[ischen] u preuß[ischen] Hume* besonders seine Kritik aller speculativischen Theologie.[34]

These elements are not new – except that I am not sure what to make of 3. – but the title is. Hamann explains just above that 'Schiblemini' was Luther's name for his 'spiritus familiaris', a 'guardian angel' like the daemon of Socrates; this is its first appearance as part of a title, but Hamann had used the word as a catchphrase for the whole project at a much earlier stage.[35]

However, Hamann soon had second thoughts; when he heard that Kant, disappointed at the reception of the *Critique*, was planning a simpler exposition – what was eventually to be the *Prolegomena*: 'Kant redt von einem Auszuge seiner Kritik im populairen Geschmack, die er für die Layen herauszugeben verspricht'[36] – he thought *that* would help him understand:

> Den besten Schlüßel erwarte in dem neuen Buche ... Was ich Ihnen neulich von meinem Schiblemini geschrieben, sehen Sie als nicht geschrieben an. Der Titel möchte wol bleiben, aber von dem Innhalt und dem Plan ist noch nichts bey mir reif und zeitig. Ich werde nicht eher an das Schreiben kommen können, als bis ich die neue Uebersetzung des Hume habe, und Kant will ich erst ausreden laßen seinen Auszug oder Lehrbuch abwarten. (To Hartknoch, 23.11.81 and 9.12.81, B IV 344f, 350:28)

The Hume translation shortly did arrive, and Hamann was finally able to compare it with his own version (B IV 359:21, 365:15); but now he was waiting to read the *Prolegomena* before proceeding with the plan 'etwas über den letzten 7. Abschnitt des kritischen Elementarbuchs, die *Theol[ogie] betreffend*, auszuarbeiten' (to Herder, 21.4.82, B IV 376:25). In July the title 'Metakritik' is first mentioned, with the same reason given for delay (to Herder, 7.7.82, B IV 400:18).

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[34] Letter to Hartknoch, 23.10.81, B IV 343:21; at the top of the previous page he says he finished reading Socinus 'gestern'.

[35] In June 1780, B IV 195; for the connection with Luther, cf. also B IV 200:17: 'Luthers Schriften sind seit meinem Podagra meine Hauptlectur, und sein Genius Schiblemini mein Oberon! mein pium desiderium! mein ultimum visibile!' Hamann's spelling of the word (and of 'Golgatha') is not consistent. For the title *Golgatha und Scheblimini*, see W III 319:9–19; 'Golgatha' refers to the crucifixion, 'Scheblimini' to the resurrection, not only Christ's, but the coming resurrection of all believers.

[36] Letter to Hartknoch, 11.8.81, B IV 323:16; see also 319:13.

Earlier on, he had said that waiting to put pen to paper 'mich niemals gereut hat, und den besten Vers giebt die Muse Indignatio ein' (B IV 337:17). The necessary stimulus came in the form of a note on Hume's *Dialogues* by Mendelssohn in his edition of Thomas Abbt's correspondence: 'Sein Urtheil hat so auf mich gewürkt, daß ich heute meinen Schiblemini anfangen können und den ersten Brief meiner epistolischen Nachlesen eines Metakritikers zu Ende gebracht auch den zweiten angezapft' (B IV 413:20, to Herder, 11.8.82).

Mendelssohn's judgement on the *Dialogues* was indeed, in Hamann's words, 'ein hartes Urtheil' (B IV 404:19); he thought they were unworthy of their author:

> Sie enthalten die platteste Atheisterey, von der verwildertsten Zweifelsucht unter tausend grotesken Gestalten dargestellt, die den Leser immer aus einem Winkel in den andern äffen, und indem er sie greifen will, verschwinden. Die ganze Broschüre scheint eine bloße Neckerey zu seyn, mit welcher Hume irgendeinen dogmatischen Großsprecher hat rasend machen wollen, und verdient keine ernsthafte Widerlegung. Wer kann einen verwirrten Knäuel in Ordnung bringen, wenn ihm jemand die Fäden geflissentlich wieder zersauset und in die Wirre bringt, die er mit vieler Mühe bey Seite geschaft hat? Wenn Zweifel zur Erörterung der Wahrheit etwas beytragen sollen; so muß es dem Zweifler ein Ernst seyn, sie entweder gelöset, oder bestätiget zu finden.[37]

Mendelssohn was seemingly irritated by Hume's light touch – almost to the point of being 'rasend' – because he disagreed with his conclusions; the *Dialogues* undermined natural religion as a foundation for Christian – or any other – belief. As far as Hamann was concerned, this is precisely the wrong front on which to fight in defence of Christianity; but he may well also have had some sympathy with Mendelssohn's outraged estimate of Hume's style of argument. In any case, it was reading this note that got things moving again.

The contents of Hamann's book were now to be as follows:

> Die 1. Epistel handelt von der gedruckten Uebersetzung der Humischen Gespräche. Die 2. von der geschriebenen u dem Mendelsohnschen Urtheil. Die 3. vergleicht den Juden u Philosophen. Die 4. ist eine aufgewärmte Uebersetzung des letzten Cap. von Hume 1. Theil on human nature ... Die 5. dörfte wol auf Kant kommen ...[38]

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[37] *Thomas Abbts ... vermischte Werke. Dritter Theil welcher einen Theil seiner freundschaftlichen Correspondenz enthält. Neue und mit Anmerkungen von Moses Mendelssohn vermehrte Auflage.* Frankfurt und Leipzig, 1783 [384 pages]; *Anmerkungen zu Abbts freundschaftlicher Correspondenz von Moses Mendelssohn* [separately paginated, 72 pages], p. 58f.

[38] B IV 418:2, to Hartknoch, 25.8.82; cf. 426, which repeats the same plan. The second 'Epistel' is to deal with Hamann's own translation and Mendelssohn's comment on Hume's book. In 1771, Hamann had published a translation of the famous final section of the first part of Hume's *Treatise*, in which the author explores the implications of scepticism for real life.

Compared to the previous plan, Starck is no longer mentioned, and there is more emphasis on Hume – perhaps just because of the arrival of the translation. The 'Jude' of 3. is not Mendelssohn – his comments on Hume would not be much for a polemic to go on – but an allusion to the Pauline contrast between 'Jews and Greeks', which was to be particularly important in *Golgatha*; for 'Philosoph', read 'Greeks'.

However, around this time, Hamann learned that the 'Fooigelder', a substantial emolument associated with his customs post, were to be abolished.[39] He became consumed with worry at the likely effect on his already precarious finances, and then depressed. Though the *Metakritik*, as well as Hamann's wish to see the *Prolegomena*, is still occasionally mentioned, the correspondence records no substantial developments until the arrival on the scene of Mendelssohn's *Jerusalem*. A terminus post quem is the appearance of the *Prolegomena*, to which the *Metakritik* contains specific verbal allusions. Nonetheless, Hamann must have written it at some point, and his anger over his treatment by Frederick, who was ultimately his employer, may have added to the 'Indignatio' of the *Metakritik*. The second plan for the 'Episteln' suggests that he had not yet written the section about Kant, though there may already have been rough drafts; it seems unlikely he wrote it after reading *Jerusalem*, which was a new stimulus (by 1.8.83, B V 63:2). It was into *Golgatha und Scheblimini*, Hamann's response to this book, that he 'transplanted' elements of the project, as he wrote to Herder in the letter in which he copied out the text of the *Metakritik*: 'nebst der Kritik lag mir das liebe Jerusalem im Kopf, und eine Idee verdarb die andere. Ich habe also das vornehmste in das kleine Golgatha verpflanzt' (15.9.84, B V 217:3).

Der preußische Hume

When Hamann read Hume's *Dialogues*, he thought they offered a way of rebutting the views of Starck and others like him; Hamann had long opposed such ideas, and the importance of Hume's book to him was as an answer to them. In pursuit of a rational Christianity, Starck wished to reduce God to his traditional philosophical attributes, going back to Aristotle: the

[39]This development is first mentioned in the letters on 8.10.82, B IV 427:35.

omnipotent, benevolent, perfect creator. These qualities are actively arrived at by reason rather than believers being led to them by revelation. Hume, though his own sympathies hardly coincided with Hamann's, showed that one of the major arguments on the way – design – is not tenable. For Hamann, this does not mean there is one less reason to believe, but that the claims of an inadequate reason are discredited. It was to be rejected because it arrived at the wrong God, an idol conjured up out of the human philosophical imagination, and not the God of the Bible; Luther's reaction against scholasticism provided Hamann with a precedent for this line of thought. Therefore it was quite natural that Hamann's 'Beylage' to Hume would be about Starck, whose ideas he wished to discredit with Hume's help.

When Hamann got wind of Kant's *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, he expected it to lend further support to his case. In fact, the *Critique* was a baffling disappointment. Hamann's review attacked the book for the hubris of reason in Kant's conception, presuming to grasp the ineffable divine with its abstractions, and for his 'indifferentist' lack of commitment to true Christianity. Nonetheless, he continued to think that Kant and Hume were really playing the same tune – 'auf ein Horn blasen' – and that they could be useful to his cause in spite of their far from orthodox aims: 'Ich bin eben so sehr vor Hume's und Kant's Meinung als wider beyde.'

Before and after writing the review, Hamann was reading the *Critique* intensively. He decided that the 'Kritik aller spekulativen Theologie' was the key to the *Critique*, the book 'die aller *spekulativen Theologie* ... das Maul stopft'. This was the result he agreed with, the point of application of Kant's method to Hamann's problem.

For Socinus – arguing largely from proof texts from the Bible, a methodology in keeping with his conclusions – knowledge of God properly derives from revelation and faith, and is not attainable through innate human capacities. That was also Hamann's view, but rather than advancing it, he attacked the contrary idea, which was gaining ground among his contemporaries such as Starck, that unaided reason could demonstrate the existence of God.

Although Kant's verdict on speculative theology suited Hamann, he could not ignore his disagreement with the tendency of the *Critique* as a whole. If reason has nothing to say about the existence of God, that might be grounds for returning to revelation – or for addressing human existence and its problems within its own horizons, and leaving God out of the picture.

Rather than presuming to expand the claims of reason, as Hamann's review suggests, the *Critique* sought to limit them. If we can only know things as they appear to us, within the space and time we inhabit, then we cannot use the categories of reason – such as cause and effect – outside it; they are the indispensable schema of experience, part and parcel of the very possibility of knowledge of the world, but they do not apply beyond it. In consequence, all attempts to reason speculatively about such topics as God, the afterlife and free will are doomed to become entangled in contradiction. These had been the traditional subject-matter of much of philosophy since the Greeks, and Kant claimed to have drawn its debates on these topics to a close by defining the scope of reason. As he famously put it, this 'made room for faith' – exactly what Hamann desired – by demonstrating that reason cannot prove that Christianity is true: philosophy cannot serve as the foundation for the doctrines of religion.

The reputation of the *Critique* today is as a work of epistemology rather than metaphysics. This is a measure of its eventual success, for all the misunderstanding which met it at first, and for all the piecemeal disagreements of subsequent philosophy with it. But though epistemology takes up most of the book, the movement of the whole is towards the metaphysical questions that Kant sought to resolve. He developed a general theory of knowledge in order to address the speculative questions which dominated the philosophy of his time, and they are what he has in mind from the beginning. Every step on the way is indispensable; only once his epistemology can be shown to account adequately for the familiar and everyday, and also to be complete, not only sufficient but necessary, is there anything to be gained from showing that it is silent on the old familiar metaphysical questions.

German idealism misread the *Critique* as implying that the world is a subjective projection, a monstrous figment of the Romantic imagination. Subsequently, Kant's philosophical monument has suffered the fate described by Nietzsche: individual stones have been borrowed for new constructions, but the system is a ruin (*Menschliches* II, 1, §201, KSA 2 p. 466). Consequently, Kant today tends to be read in very small chunks, making it even harder than it already was because of his style to get a sense of the shape and aims of the whole. Whatever the verdict on individual arguments – and Kant said that the *Critique* would collapse if even a single argument were unsound – it is important not to lose sight of the critical philosophy's basic idea, which organises and motivates all the elaborate elements; in intention, the *Critique* is a tightly constructed whole. Knowledge could not exist at all without experience being structured. That structure is not an arbitrary whim or a local human convention, but the result of the fact that all experience is from a certain point of view; to put it another way, knowledge has a subject as well as an object. Therefore all knowledge is of the spatio-temporal objects that a subject can experience, and of generalisations that may be made about them, especially by using scientific method. Because the subject is an essential part of the process of knowledge, its categories cannot be generalised beyond the world of such possible experience or abstracted from it. Human knowledge is knowledge of the everyday world of human experience. So we can know nothing of God, the immortality of the soul or free will through reason. The next step, carried out in the second *Critique*, was to work out an ethics without these foundations.

The starting point of the whole critical enterprise, not only logically but genetically, is the set of problems within the preceding philosophical tradition – Hume waking Kant from his dogmatic slumbers – which Kant claims to solve in the Dialectic. To do so, he first set about putting epistemology on a sound footing. Every step looks towards the resolution of reason's existing – speculative – errors. At the very outset, the Aesthetic argues that perception is spatio-temporal, setting up the overall conclusion as to the bounds of knowledge. So although

Hamann's interest was in the theological implications of that conclusion, its epistemological foundation was just as important.

Kant fatally undermined the view of Starck and others like him that reason demonstrated the existence of God. This went further than Hume's *Dialogues*, which mainly dealt with the argument from design, though other arguments are hinted at. In this respect, the *Critique* was welcomed by Hamann. But he also opposed it because its limits on human reason were not placed in a spirit of Christian humility. Rather than modestly keeping to its proper sphere, leaving man free for higher theological reflection, it was to transfer its energies, in Hamann's view, from barren celestial spheres to building a secular Tower of Babel. If the critical philosophy as Hamann understood it gained acceptance, it would not mean a return to theological orthodoxy, but the advance of mammon. Therefore when the *Metakritik* was written, it was not in opposition to Starck but to Kant.

Metakritik: the devil's forked tongue

The *Metakritik* was definitively abandoned at the moment when Hamann cannibalised it for *Golgatha*; but he later copied out some of it in a letter to Herder, and this is the manuscript basis of what is today known as the *Metakritik*. It remains both fragmentary and provisional. Nonetheless, Hamann regarded it as both important and autonomous enough to be worth sending to Weimar.

As usual, the text is far from transparent. My aim is to focus on the wood rather than the trees, with a view to explaining the *Metakritik* in the context of Hamann's wider concerns and as part of the series of his later works. Some of the more obscure passages can, I believe, helpfully be seen as expressions of specifically political animus. I will begin with a brief overview before looking in somewhat more detail at the text.

Overview

If Hamann's disagreement with Kant as expressed here were to be summed up in a single word, it would have to be 'abstraction'. The *Metakritik* is dominated by two strands, 'abstraction' and language. In the same vein as Hamann's review, it attacks Kant's critical method for its remoteness from familiar and sensible ways of conceiving and apprehending the world. The lunar landscape of the critical terminology is an easy target for Hamann's parody. This parody is the vehicle for an argument so wrong-headed that it may be better regarded as merely an extension of the parody. The *Critique*'s express aim is to establish what can be known apart from experience, and it is clear from the outset that the answer is: not very much. The reader of the *Metakritik* might easily get the impression that Kant's attempt to strip knowledge of experience, explained in the introduction as an example of scientific method, is intended as an account precisely of experience, and is for that reason obviously wrong. In general, the analytic method does not propose that there could actually be such a thing as, for example, 'the stressed syllable' apart from actual instances in specific words. This impossibility is not an argument against general discussions of syllable stress, nor do such discussions mean to entertain the actual existence of ideal syllables of no specific sound. But such seems to be the basis of much of Hamann's attack on Kant's abstraction.

The second main strand of the *Metakritik* is the idea that reason is only made possible by language, but language is part of the empirical realm, so reason cannot be separated from it. This is meant to be true in two ways. The words a philosopher uses have a history, so his concepts can never be pure mental constructs; they are tainted by their history. Secondly, language itself exists in time (as sound) and space (as writing), so the spatiotemporal world of experience defined in Kant's Transcendental Aesthetic will always be present in reason. But the abstractions of the Transcendental Dialectic are supposed to be independent of the world of experience. This misses the point by a mile. Kant's whole argument is that we cannot know anything outside our experience within space and time – though not for Hamann's reasons, not because of the spatiotemporality imposed by language itself. The *Metakritik* turns the point about language into

parody when it asks how the seven letters (sic) of the word 'Vernunft', or its two syllables are related to the concept 'reason'.

The text may conveniently be divided into two main sections, the first ending with §9 (at the top of p. 286).[40]

Adopting Kant's own historical schema (Berkeley = idealism, Hume = scepticism), Hamann situates the undertaking of the *Critique* within its tradition. §3 attacks Kant's fundamental project of establishing the possibility of synthetic a priori knowledge, parodying his terminology. Reason itself, as a faculty, is not put into question, Hamann argues – but he thinks it should be. In particular, thought is necessarily in language: so our concepts are only as good as our terminology. Kant's model for his epistemological discussion is the language of mathematics, in Hamann's eyes impoverished and unsuitable for real thinking about the world.

The second division, from §§10–18, parodies Kant's attempt to get from a priori knowledge to synthetic propositions, and is interrupted from §§11–14 (p. 287) by a polemical digression continuing the attack on abstraction. The parody is to investigate the link between actual words and the ideas to which they correspond – of course, it is arbitrary. Note that Hamann does not advocate language mysticism here, but uses it as a reductio. Yet we can understand language, because we know what the words mean. The implication is that Kant's attempt to isolate the sources of knowledge is like asking how we could understand language if we did not know a language – not an altogether ridiculous question, but in Hamann's view a poor model for the normal case of understanding the language we do know. By extension, the Critical method is a poor way of understanding reason.

In conclusion,[41] Hamann reminds the reader that the implications of all this still remain to be unfolded.

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[40] In what follows I have adopted Bayer's convention of referring to the paragraphs of the *Metakritik* by number (§§1–18), but will also locate them within Nadler's text. Note that the last paragraph there ('Vielleicht' etc.) does not in fact belong to the *Metakritik*. Bayer analyses the text as a carefully crafted whole, but in my view such coherence as it has derives from the momentum of its arguments; my own rough division of it into two is based on content rather than being a rhetorical analysis. The *Metakritik* is not a finished work.

[41] Just because this final sentence has the effect of rounding off the fragment, though as it does not refer to the argument it could stand after any discussion of the *Critique*, it may well be that it was only added once it was clear that the *Metakritik* was to remain a fragment, precisely in recognition of its incompleteness.

The attack on abstraction and the argument about language are essentially two sides of the same coin: that Kant's concepts, already illegitimate in themselves, are made possible by the glorious woolliness of language. The impossibility of separating ideas from the makeshift words that embody them is just one example, albeit a telling one, of the absurdity of abstraction in general. Language, like knowledge, is empirical, earthy, corporeal. We know the word for a thing in our language not a priori, but a posteriori – that is just what people say, and we learn language in the world from our elders, not by introspection and ratiocination. We do not question it, but accept it on faith. So it should be, in Hamann's view, with our knowledge of the cosmos and of God.

This is the centre of Hamann's disagreement with Kant. Kant founds his enquiry on an analysis of how knowledge in general is possible, and Hamann focuses his attack on this foundation. Though both agree that knowledge is fundamentally empirical – in opposition to rationalist attempts to make the dove of reason, in Kant's metaphor, soar beyond the air which supports its flight – the emphasis, the tendency are utterly different. Kant sets bounds to reason beyond which there is no knowledge, and places God on the other side of them – so 'making room for faith'. For Hamann, God belongs within the world of experience *and therefore knowledge*: of course we do not know God through speculation, but through life and the Bible, through revelation and in our hearts. Because the Christian society in which we grow up tells us so, and lived experience – in Pietist vein – confirms the need for salvation, we accept the truth of the gospel. The archetype of knowledge must therefore be not knowledge *without* experience, but knowledge *through* experience. Kant may not make the positive claims that philosophy had made in the past for a priori knowledge, but he does assume that this would be the way we could have such knowledge if it were possible at all – just like Starck and Steinbart, who do think that it is possible. His system may leave room for faith, but it gives it no support, and ultimately undermines it by maintaining Plato's sharp philosophical distinction between belief and knowledge.

Apart from all this, what could be called the arguments of the text, there are many more or less direct implications, often very polemical in tone, which have received less attention. These relate to the underlying religious preoccupations that motivated Hamann to attack the *Critique* and to their political aspects.

Detail

The *Metakritik* opens with an attack on abstraction. Hamann translates Hume paraphrasing Berkeley: '... all general ideas are nothing but particular ones, annexed to a certain term, which gives them a more extensive signification, and makes them recall upon occasion other individuals, which are similar to them' (Hume, *Treatise* I 1,7). However, Hamann adds the word 'abstract', rendering 'general ideas' as 'allgemeine und abstracte Ideen' (W III 283:1). §2 asserts that this insight of Berkeley's, supposedly so important, is no more than common sense, as well as noting Hume's dependence on Berkeley – just as Kant had noted his own dependence on Hume's stimulus. Hamann is thus allowing the empiricist tradition on which Kant drew to condemn him in its own words: since abstract ideas are arbitrary conventions, Hamann's argument goes, they are not a sound basis for Kant's conclusions.

The first half of §3 (up to the semicolon, line 26) is a hostile summary of Kant's core project, 'den Grund der Möglichkeit synthetischer Urtheile a priori aufzudecken' (A 10). Hamann is inaccurate in detail, to his own rhetorical advantage, making clearly paradoxical statements out of Kant's (to be sure) bizarre-sounding apparatus. Instead of arguing that it is all nonsense, Hamann encourages the reader to draw the conclusion himself on the basis of texture rather than substance. There is more of the same at the end of §3 (284:2–6).

In between, Hamann introduces his central assertion that reason itself, as a faculty, is not investigated in the *Critique*, according to which it has need of 'weder einen empirischen oder ästhetischen, noch logischen oder discursiven Begriff' (283f). As Kant himself put it, his question

is not 'wie ist das Vermögen zu denken selbst möglich?' (A XVII, quoted in §9, 286:1), but what can reason know 'frey von aller Erfahrung'? For Hamann, this is a fatal omission.

§§4–5 detail the three 'purifications' of philosophy, the three key aspects that Kant's critique of 'pure' reason thus avoids considering: tradition, experience and language. The 'rein' of Kant's title refers to possible (rational) knowledge 'frey von aller Erfahrung', but Hamann, in keeping with his desire to put reason as a human faculty under the spotlight and his rejection of Kant's critical method as illegitimate, applies the adjective to reason as an *object* of knowledge.

The first purism is the 'Versuch, die Vernunft von aller Ueberlieferung, Tradition und Glauben daran unabhängig zu machen'. The acceptance of reason, and of certain styles of reasoning, is a contingent fact of history and culture that calls for justification, Hamann perhaps implies. More specifically, his choice of words suggests a parallel between reason and God, properly known through scripture, tradition and faith; this looks forward to other such parallels within these two paragraphs.

What Hamann says about the second purification, from experience, is in fact a return to the critique of Kant's abstraction rather than a further point about the nature of reason itself. It also repeats the quotation with which Hamann had chosen to open the review of 1781. After seeking 'man weiß nicht was' (surely: God, see below on the third purification) for two millennia, beyond experience, philosophy claims to be on the point of discovering the philosopher's stone, 'dem die *Religion* ihre *Heiligkeit* und die *Gesetzgebung* ihre *Majestät* flugs unterwerfen wird' – thus, something to do with alchemy, therefore suspect, which is set above religion. In fact in Kant's version of these words, (A XI) it is the critical philosophy itself, with its promise of completing metaphysics (A XX). As Bayer points out (Bayer 256f), the implied theological parallels give this idea of completion apocalyptic overtones.

The third purification is from language, 'das einzige erste und letzte Organon und Criterion der Vernunft'. Thought is in language – Hamann says in a letter (B V 177:18) 'Vernunft ist

Sprache'. But language is contingent and cannot be abstracted from its context in actual use, its only foundation and guarantee ('Creditiv'). Reason on its own ('Idol') is as ineffable as God ('Ideal der Vernunft'); Hamann here alludes to the story of Simonides in Hume's *Dialogues*, who kept asking for more time when asked to pronounce on the nature of God. This anecdote further suggests the proper attitude to such questions: you should not expect to get to the bottom of them.

'Ideal der Vernunft' is Kant's term for the generalised notion of God which reason inevitably arrives at in the course of speculation. Throughout these two paragraphs, Hamann plays on the confusion he creates between God and aspects of the critical philosophy in order to accuse Kant by implication of idolatry. The final sentence of §5 adds a political note, picking up on the fact that it was the tyrant Hiero who questioned Simonides:

> Weh den Tyrannen, wenn sich *Gott* um sie bekümmern wird! wozu fragen sie also nach Ihm? Mene, mene tekel den Sophisten! ihre Scheidemünze wird zu leicht gefunden und ihre Wechselbank zubrochen werden!!

'Mene, mene tekel upharsin' was the 'writing on the wall' recorded in the book of Daniel, the message that the tyrant Belshazzar had been weighed and found wanting, and his reign was over. The association with sophists, instead of tyrants, and then with the moneychangers in the temple, whose tables Jesus zealously overthrew (Mark 11:15), implicates Kant (the sophist) in tyranny and corruption; on the other hand, the reference to tyrants is a condemnation of Frederick for tolerating and fostering religious error. The juxtaposition of the themes of political corruption, new-fangled 'philosophical' ideas, and the diabolical departure from true Christianity that underlies and links them, is familiar from *Konxompax* – as is Hamann's tone.

This new tone, less measured and more polemical – indeed, it contains a note of prophetic[42] anger – persists in the subsequent paragraphs. §§6–8 continue the attack on the detail of Kant's system. These three paragraphs (from the bottom of p. 284 to the end of p. 285) lay out the accusation that Kant, through his new terminology, has just created a lot of hot air. Concepts must

[42] Hamann, writing as he was after Christ, was able to be eclectic when striking a prophetic note. The apocalyptic style, and also much of what the Gospels record of Christ himself, and St Paul's angrier side, were all themselves at least in part continuations of the prophetic tone or allusions to it; and as was seen in Chapter I, Hamann deliberately set out to do the same – in keeping with his typological view of history. My use of the words 'prophetic' or 'apocalyptic' in relation to Hamann does not mean to imply a sharp distinction between these various modes of fulmination.

be expressed in words and words work by referring to things which really exist; Kant's terms are empty. Once again, Hamann's accusation misses the mark; that was the very thing Kant sought to avoid, in contrast, as he saw it, to his dogmatic predecessors.

For Kant all our knowledge derives from two sources, sensibility and understanding. At A 50 he glosses these as 'Rezeptivität der Eindrücke' and 'Spontaneität der Begriffe'. Hamann's §6 begins with a doctored version of these terms that replaces 'Eindrücke' with 'Sprache', suggesting something quite different: language can be moulded to fit any old ideas, whether they make sense or not.[43] For Kant intuition and concepts are 'die Elemente aller unserer Erkenntnis', but for Hamann the critical philosophy ('Kunstrichterschaft') still contains the dogmatism and scepticism ('Rechthaberey, Zweifelsucht') Kant saw it as superseding. This is precisely because of its Achilles heel, language. The results are described in apocalyptic terms – 'Zeichen und Wunder'.

§7 gives a pointed example of the ambiguity of words. The name 'metaphysics' suggests something beyond the physical, but there is a story that it simply goes back to the location of the relevant books of Aristotle – 'after the *Physics*'. (Bayer p. 290f.) Also in the background is a passage from the *Prolegomena* (A 215 = Ak IV 379) where Kant says 'daß in der Metaphysik ein Erbfehler liege, der nicht erklärt, viel weniger gehoben werden kann, als wenn man bis zu ihrem Geburtsort, der reinen Vernunft selbst, hinaufsteigt.' For pure reason Hamann in his rewrite substitutes the 'zufällige Synthese eines griechischen Vorworts'. Contingent historical origins, the actual history of ideas, would be the right place to look for understanding metaphysics, Hamann implies, though of course not for neat solutions. The point is not that the story of 'meta ta physica' is itself illuminating, but that that is the sort of thing one is really dealing with – messy and not 'pure'. Some playfully incongruous juxtapositions make the point that experience should come 'first' not a posteriori – Kant then has got it the wrong way round, recidivist idealist that he is. The paragraph concludes with the moral that all metaphysical terminology is slippery and unreliable.

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[43] Cf. W III 147:3–6: 'non agitur de vocabulis, quae ... naturam rei minime mutant, quae aliunde quam ex vocabulis disci debet.' ('It is not the words that are important, since they do not alter the nature of a thing in the least; that must be learned elsewehere, not from words.') This quotation concludes the *Hierophantische Briefe* of 1774, directed against Starck.

§8 (the long final paragraph of p. 285)[44] further expounds Hamann's objections to Kant's philosophical style and method: too abstract and in particular too mathematical. Geometry offered Kant a model for rigorous argument, but the result in the sphere of metaphysics is a perversion of natural language, 'die *Biderkeit* der Sprache'. It all amounts to gnosticism, mysticism and a superstitious belief in 'entia rationis'.

Real reason isn't like this, Hamann concludes, it is imprecise and practical. The consistency and exactitude of the kind of reasoning that found Kant's favour is analogous to the 'Instinct der Insecten': reliable, maybe, but predictable and pitifully limited.[45] Apodictic certainty barely extends beyond mathematics, so it cannot do justice to to the wealth of human experience.

§9 (top of p. 286)[46] summarises the argument so far, and at the same time – by emphasising the topic of language – sets up the conceit which dominates the second half of the *Metakritik*. Reason, as a faculty, depends on language. Kant did not propose to investigate thought as a faculty (A XVII), but Hamann makes this the central issue. In support, he mentions Samuel Heinecke, an educator of the deaf who emphasised the importance of language for thought. Secondly, language causes philosophical error – it is the real 'Mittelpunkt des Misverstandes der Vernunft mit ihr selbst' that Kant claimed to have discovered.[47] The rhetorical character of language means readers can be convinced by arguments they have not really grasped (a point made by Hume, *Treatise* I 4, 7).

Rather in the manner of §6, but more elaborately, §10 replaces key elements of Kant's critical apparatus with words relating to language – 'Laute und Buchstaben' rather than time and space. Because language exists in time and space (in the form of speech and writing respectively), that is where our seemingly abstract notions of time and space come from. Hamann himself has no need to give them this foundation, as for him they are just part of common sense. Though they may not be innate ideas (following Henkel's reading 'wo' for Nadler's unintelligible 'war' at

[44] A verb is missing in the first sentence – Bayer suggests 'beruht' after 'Anschauung' at 285:21. Bayer, p. 425.

[45] Cf. Herder's discussion of instinct and 'Besonnenheit' in the language origin essay, which Hamann knew well because he wrote several pieces in reaction to it.

[46] This paragraph is missing a noun at the very end of line 12; Henkel suggests 'Vorzugs', BV 213:28.

[47] A XII. I am uncertain how to interpret what Hamann says about '*Coincidenz* des grösten und kleinsten Begriffs' (l. 11). Bayer (p. 320f) relates it to Hamann's argument that abstract terminology amounts to reification, which may be the general drift, but it is not clear to me that there is a specific parallel.

286:27, presumably a misprint for 'zwar'), they are 'matrices aller anschaulichen Erkenntnis'. The Latin 'matrix' originally meant a female domestic animal kept for breeding, so as well as suggesting that time and space are organising structures, the word implies that rather than being inborn, they exist before and beyond us, shaping experience as environmental influences rather than predispositions: because we grow up in a spatiotemporal world, we experience the world spatiotemporally.[48] The idea of nurturing further suggests the benevolence of the divine creator sustaining the world.

This general point about the foundations of experience is independent of the parodistic example of language that led into it, and the next four paragraphs (up to the end of p. 287) constitute a digression from the parody. But if the point is to undermine Kant's system, the digression is only apparent. Hamann simply moves on to further parts of the structure, and when he does return specifically to language on p. 288, it is to apply the technique used against the Transcendental Aesthetic in §10 to the Dialectic. The Analytic, which comes in between, simply invited attack from a different angle. Though Hamann's use of Kant's text to structure his own was more obvious in the Review, it is still there in the background of the *Metakritik*, and sufficiently explains some of its shifts in tone and content – particularly when we remember that it was never completed. §§11–14, by contrast with the material surrounding them, are highly polemical in tone, and perhaps the most obscure stretch of the text. The attitudes they hint at demonstrate the political animus underlying the *Metakritik* and its links with *Konxompax*.

§11 parodies the final lines of the *Critique*'s introduction, which states that there are 'zwei Stämme der menschlichen Erkenntnis, die vielleicht aus einer gemeinschaftlichen, aber uns

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[48] One might then expect Hamann to write that space and time are not innate, but '*höchstens* ideae matrices', whereas he actually wrote 'wenigstens'. But according to Hamann's own line of thought, which – typically – runs against the grain of the arguments he is immediately discussing, the epistemological priority of 'ultra-empirical' space and time is the truly desirable conclusion, making room as it does for revelation. He sets 'ideae matrices' below 'ideae innatae', but this is just an ironic gesture, again typical. I read 'doch wenigstens' as dripping with sarcasm. In his discussion of the parallel passage in the review (W III 278:9), Bayer suggests that the word 'matrix' implies that our predispositions need to be fertilised by language, Bayer p. 105. But the drift of §10 concerns the origins of the 'Begriffe von Zeit und Raum' in common experience, and the review pairs 'ideae matrices' with sensibility and 'ideae innatae' with understanding; the former are Hamann's own addition to Kant's account precisely in order to suggest an alternative explanation for what Kant understands as innate. Hamann's incorrect labelling of space and time as 'Begriffe', and indeed 'ideae', may be a further attempt to support this, because concepts at least may be empirical, whereas Kant's 'forms' cannot.

unbekannten Wurzel entspringen, nämlich, Sinnlichkeit und Verstand ...' (A 15).[49] The metaphor is an appropriate one for knowledge. The *Critique* does not contain all that many metaphors, making those that do occur striking. This one derives from the familiar Biblical association – familiar, perhaps, to the point of unconsciousness, since Kant does not make that much of it. The image is coherent enough – two adjacent trunks that enter the ground separately, so it is uncertain whether it is actually all one tree – but the critical doubt it voices is monstrous and absurd in Hamann's eyes, and he presents the reader with a series of monstrous and unnatural trees, with the Tree of Knowledge, that archetype of sin, in the background of them all. Kant's 'divorce' of sensibility and understanding is monstrous.[50] Hamann mockingly suggests an improvement to Kant's metaphor which, however, is deliberately ridiculous: a single trunk with two roots, one in the air. Making the lower root stand for understanding would fit in with Kant's mistaken 'prioritising' of understanding over sensibility, that is his focus on a priori knowledge.

The last lines of the paragraph, running over the page, hint at Hamann's own barely stated views in two quite distinct ways:

> Die erste [Wurzel] ist unserer Sinnlichkeit Preis gegeben; die letzte hingegen unsichtbar und muß durch den *Verstand* gedacht werden, welches mit der Priorität des *Gedachten* und der Posteriorität des *Gegebenen* oder genommenen, wie auch mit der beliebten Inversion der reinen Vernunft in ihren Theorien mehr übereinstimmt.

On the surface, this sentence asserts that the distinction between sensibility and understanding is nonsensical. Then, if 'data' are not (literally) 'given', but instead 'taken', that suggests – becoming more indirect – that they belong to someone, and that they are not freely given. Creation, the sum of our 'data', is God's, given to Man in stewardship. If he forgets this relationship and puts on independent airs, as Kant's *Critique* does by seeking to think entirely for itself, that is a Promethean gesture.[51] Finally, 'Posteriorität' and 'Inversion', with a glance back at '[der] Sinnlichkeit *Preis*

[49] Hamann quotes inaccurately, adding to the impression of nonsense – it is not sensibility which is given by objects, but vice versa. But perhaps this continues the empiricist thought of 'matrix' – suggesting that perception is learned by trial and error with objects.

[50] Note the substitution of 'Natur' for 'Gott' at 286:33; cf. Matt. 19:6, 'What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder.'

[51] Bayer, p. 340 n. 15, reads much less into 'genommen', taking it as a playful reminder that perception is an active process. I would argue that given Hamann's theology, it is a small step from emphasising the agency of the subject of perception to hinting at his fundamental dependence on the creator; but inevitably, all attempts to tease out such hints must be tentative. Certainly, Hamann meant to hint at something – perhaps above all to make Kant's terminology seem questionable.

gegeben' (my emphasis), allude to Frederick's sexual vices, vices associated in *Konxompax* with the theological and philosophical corruption of the Prussian metropolis.

To sum up, §11 indirectly indicates aspects of what Hamann would regard as a more adequate, Christian epistemology, and it also paints Kant's alternative in dark colours. The following three paragraphs, down to the bottom of p. 287, add lurid apocalyptic highlights to the picture.[52] The especially polemical character of this section of the text compounds its obscurity, so that focusing on the character and associations of the polemic may be more productive than attempting to reconstruct an argument; for a different approach, see Bayer's detailed and helpful discussion.[53]

§12, the first full paragraph on p. 287, begins almost as a rhetorical question – is there yet another, 'chymischer' tree to define the limits of sensibility and understanding? – but from the relative clause four lines into the paragraph, the tentativeness of 'vielleicht' is forgotten; the real force of the whole sentence is simply to attack 'reine Vernunft', first by associating it with alchemy, then by doubting its purity ('eine per antiphrasin getaufte reine Vernunft'), and by confounding it with the metaphysics Kant attacked. The new tree is really the old one in a new guise to suit the current attack. The confusion of the critical enterprise is so great, Hamann writes, that only a new language of nature – described in Messianic tones, and associated with the Enlightenment – can bring illumination. This alludes to Kant's conception of the critical system as merely clearing the way for an actual philosophy – made prominent in the title of the 'Prolegomena' – but the 'Natursprache', line 13, must actually be the terminology of the *Critique* itself, 'dunkel, verwirrt und öde'. The application of Messianic language to anything other than Christ contains the accusation of idolatry: Kant is meddling in the black arts in pursuit of unholy, indeed lubricious ends. Hamann's failure to sustain his rhetorical effect – initial irony disintegrates

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[52] Henkel's text has 'per Thesin und Arsin' at 287:25, Greek metrical terms, instead of Nadler's 'Thesin et Antithesin'.

[53] Bayer, pp. 337–73. His summary of §§11–13 on p. 337 is a good illustration of his approach: these paragraphs, he writes, 'erörtern das Verhältnis von Sinnlichkeit und Verstand ... ausgehend von den durch Kant vorgegebenen Problemstellungen. Die Abschnitte elf und zwölf befragen dabei Kants Unterscheidung metakritisch und beleuchten sie auf ihre implizite Voraussetzungen und Konsequenzen hin. Abschnitt dreizehn verweist demgegenüber auf die faktische, von der "gemeinen Volkssprache" im Sinne der Idiomenkommunikation bereits vollzogene Vereinigung von Sinnlichkeit und Verstand.' This gives more weight and more credit to Hamann's arguments than I would wish to do and does not do justice to his tone. The text repeatedly attacks Kant's distinction between sensibility and understanding – which is after all basic to the Critical system – but does not ever as far as I can see go beyond simply appealing to the common-sense notion that the two are united in actual use. The intellectual value of Hamann's response to Kant is discussed below.

into mere sarcasm – in effect creates a harder, browbeating tone, which is compounded by the difficulty of deciding where the irony lies.

§13 as a whole continues this confusion; the 'schlechte Busenschlange der gemeinen Volkssprache' is opposed to the Messianic and idolatrous aspects of Kant's system which the paragraph begins by picking out,[54] reinforcing §12, but by the end of the single long sentence, still describing the operation of language, but now in distorted form, Kant is once again the topic. The diabolical overtones of 'schlechte Busenschlange' are ironic, seeing matters from the viewpoint of philosophy[55] – ordinary language can lead us astray – but then Hamann outlines the view of language underlying the language parody to which he returns in §§15f; basically, language combines the mental and the physical as Christ combines human and divine natures, or as the sacrament combines its physical and spiritual meanings.[56] These opposites are expressed in terminology alluding to Kant's system, and so the sentence ends in sarcastic parody.[57] The logic of this is that Kant makes a false distinction between a priori and empirical, rational and sensible; Hamann's view of language is, he says, 'das schönste Gleichnis' for the bridge between these pairs.

§14 presents a mystical vision which is an attack on Kant, as is once again evident by the end of the paragraph. The vision includes both Christian and emphatically non-Christian elements, together with a sprinkling of Kantian terminology, so that the overall effect is to continue accusing Kant of idolatry. Hamann's point about the interdependence of sensibility and understanding is

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[54] Especially with the word 'Lucifer', literally 'bringer of light', which implies that the Enlightenment is a diabolical plot. Cf. *Konxompax*, W III 223:12, for a similar use of 'Lucifer'; also 227:15, 'die Engel des Lichts'.

[55] Bayer sees the 'Busenschlange' as an allusion to Aesop's fable of the snake that bit the farmer who warmed it up on his breast, but since the general topic is the Tree of Knowledge, it seems likely that the serpent in the garden is meant here too. Bayer, p. 352.

[56] The word 'hypostatisch' makes the christological reference inescapable, especially when followed by 'Naturen'; see Bayer's discussion of the theological background, p. 353f.

[57] Bayer, taking 'copulam' as referring to the verb that effects the transubstantiation of the sacraments, understands the negative language at the end of the paragraph as referring to the rough-and-readiness of everyday speech, and so as being really positive. However, the use of Kantian terminology and the general tenor of the passage suggest that at the very least Hamann means to attack Kant as well. The coexistence of different layers of meaning within the same words is common enough in Hamann. In my view there is definitely a negative tone and this needs to be accounted for. Note that the text of the last three words, according to Henkel, is 'Thesin und Arsin' – metrical terms, literally falling and rising, which perhaps constitute a sexual allusion if taken with 'copulam', which might then refer to synthetic a priori judgements. This would look back to the 'Busenschlange', and forward to the very explicit sexual reference to Baubo aimed at Kant in §14. Nadler's reading, 'Thesin et Antithesin', is what the reader expects; Hamann's change suggests, at the very least, that Kant's logical structure is really just a mindless back-and-forth.

repeated. The final lines of the paragraph confront the masturbating fertility goddess Baubo with a 'neue *unbefleckte Jungfrau*, die aber keine *Mutter Gottes* seyn mag' – Pure Reason. The tone befits a religious revelation, but the ironic reference in the second line of the paragraph to 'die noch kommen sollende Mimik' – a deprecatory allusion to the edifice for which the critical project merely lays the foundations, continuing the pseudo-Messianic theme ('noch kommen sollende') – already undercuts it.

The final four paragraphs of the Metakritik, §§15–18, elaborate the parody begun in §10, analysing language – 'das schönste Gleichnis' for the unity of sensibility and understanding – according to the Critical method. The going now becomes easier, and to a considerable extent this section speaks for itself; the main difficulty lies in interpreting the application of the extended parody.

§10 introduced the idea that Saussure would call the arbitrariness of the signifier, and §15 expands on it, using Kant's language relating to sensibility and understanding to make the point. Just as sense data have to be brought under the appropriate concept to be understood, words have to be associated with their referents in order for the word to evoke the concept of the referent. The association is contingent. This analogy is hardly exact, and the theory of language is not Hamann's own, but a commonplace of philosophical discussion – though the emphasis on language arising through use is distinctive, and looks forward to the attack on the Leibnizian 'universal character' at the end of §17. The main purpose of the paragraph is not to advance a view of language, but to set up the absurdity that follows in §§16–18.[58]

[58] Bayer reads a lot more into the paragraph, especially its last sentence, largely on the basis of views expressed by Hamann elsewhere. The best evidence for this within the text is the reference at the end of §18 to 'das Sakrament der Sprache'. The model of ordinary language presented in §15 may be consistent with Hamann's logos-theology, but it does not express it. I also fail to see how the final sentence of §15 answers Kant's central question as to how synthetic a priori judgements are possible, as Bayer maintains, Bayer p. 384; §15 contributes to the message of the whole text that reason depends on language, but that is not the same thing. For Hamann, arch-empiricist, there is no a priori – the argument about language is meant to be proof of that, as far as it is to be taken seriously. However, the sentence does continue the critique of Kant's abstraction from earlier in the text by emphasising the importance of the 'Gegenstand' in language. Hamann's theory as expressed here corresponds to the influential Augustinian model of language criticised by Wittgenstein at the beginning of the *Philosophische Untersuchungen* – it is adequate for objects you can point at, but not much else. 3rd ed., Frankfurt am Main, Suhrkamp 1982, §1, p. 15f.

§§16 and 17 ask – or rather, present Kant as asking – whether the concept associated with a word (the example is 'Vernunft') can be deduced from its actual letters or sounds, or on the other hand if the latter can be derived from the concept. This is supposed to correspond to the relation, in the world of the *Critique*, between intuitions and concepts. As §15 has just affirmed, the association is arbitrary, so the correct answer should be no. But 'even Homer nods', and Hamann suggests that though the answer to the second question, as to the first, is no, the critical philosophy does claim to be able to deduce certain formal characteristics of the signifier, 'vermöge welcher Form die eine von 2 Sylben a priori und die andere a posteriori steht oder daß die 7 Buchstaben,[59] in bestimmter Verhältnis geordnet, angeschaut werden'. This gives an amusing flavour of the abstractness of much of the *Critique*'s material, but more seriously, Hamann explains the philosopher's lapse as being 'weil er sich den bisher gesuchten *allgemeinen Charakter einer philosophischen Sprache* als bereits erfunden, im Geiste geträumt.'[60]

Leibniz's universal character was a project (or the notion of such a project) to create a philosophical language which corresponded exactly to the concepts, removing linguistic distortion – perhaps something like the logical notation of modern philosophers.[61] In that case, unlike with ordinary language, there might be some sort of formal correspondence between concepts and their representation. If you could get from concepts to words, that would be the only way, but the philosophical character doesn't exist. Taking language as a 'Gleichnis', the critical method's approach to human knowledge is as absurd, Hamann suggests, as the universal character; Kant's terminology, too, divorced as it is from living language, has something of the same feel.

§18 (p. 289) makes the link back to Kant's system, referring to 'Diese letzte Möglichkeit nun', i.e. the possibility of deducing the formal concepts of the word from the idea of reason; but then Hamann says instead that this is 'die Form einer empirischen Anschauung ohne Gegenstand noch Zeichen derselben aus der reinen und leeren Eigenschaft unsers äußern und innern Gemüths

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[59] Hamann is counting types rather than tokens, letters überhaupt rather than instances of them (two n's in 'Vernunft'); this contributes to the absurd, overcomplicated effect.

[60] W III 289:8–10. Bayer corrects Nadler's 'Sylbe' to 'Synthese' – a slip of the pen on Hamann's part, looking ahead as he copied to 'Sylben' – and notes the absence of 'seyn' in the manuscript, supplied by Nadler. W III 288:32, 289:3.

[61] In the seventeenth century, the project was seriously pursued by many others, for example the Jesuit Athanasius Kircher. The idea also at times bordered on being a secret code, and could have mystical overtones. Chinese characters, supposedly 'writing with ideas', were a significant influence from afar.

herauszuschöpfen' – not the game of deriving language from concepts, but the equivalent step in the *Critique* proper, Kant's derivation from outer and inner sense of the possible form in general of an intuition – space and time. This, he says, is the fundamental error, 'der ganze Eckstein des kritischen Idealismus und seines Thurms und Logenbaues[62] der reinen Vernunft.' Kant's supposedly pure ideas are contaminated by the philosophical tradition from which they in fact derive, as Hamann argued at the beginning of the *Metakritik*. Language, then, rooted in the social and physical and historical world, is not just a good metaphor for the true nature of perception, but also that which makes it impossible for any intellectual enterprise to have a completely fresh start such as Kant sought to ensure through his systematic rigour. Just as you can't have an empty, generalised perception, but it must always be a perception of one thing rather than another, the tree in your garden and not the queue in Sainsbury's,[63] similarly (!) the language Kant uses to talk about such things has a particular provenance and bears hidden assumptions. This is an inevitable and salutary aspect of all language that Kant attempts to deny in order to bolster the authority of his conclusions – 'alles aber aus Principien' (A XII, quoted by Hamann in the review, 277:30). According to Hamann, Kant is just reworking the same material as his 'dogmatic' predecessors.

The final sentence of the *Metakritik* summarises Hamann's text and gives an indication of how it should be read:

> Was die Transcendentalphilosophie matagrabolisirt, habe ich um der schwachen Leser willen auf das Sacrament der Sprache, den Buchstaben ihrer Elemente, den Geist ihrer Einsetzung gedeutet, und überlasse es einem jeden die geballte Faust in eine flache Hand zu entfalten. – –[64]

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[62] Note the Masonic reference. Bayer points out a parallel from Hamann's *Beylage zun Denkwürdigkeiten des seligen Sokrates*, 1773 (W III 116:18), but does not see the relevance of freemasonry to the concerns of the *Metakritik*, Bayer p. 409 n. 9. The tower is Kant's metaphor for fruitless philosophical endeavour, and also an allusion to the Tower of Babel: 'Freilich fand es sich, daß, ob wir zwar einen Turm im Sinne hatten, der bis an den Himmel reichen sollte, der Vorrat der Materialien doch nur zu einem Wohnhause zureichte ...' Kant goes on to mention the 'Sprachverwirrung', confirming the allusion to Babel. A 707. Hamann pointedly ignores Kant's distinction between 'Turm' (which Kant abjures) and 'Wohnhaus'.

[63] Griffith-Dickson sums up this point as follows: 'The foundational crime of pure reason is the desire to have a standpoint outside the world.' Against this, I would argue that Hamann is only using the Archimedean 'Give me a place to stand and I will move the world' (W III 289:15) as a metaphor for what he thinks is the similar impossibility of a generalised 'Anschauung'. But this is a misunderstanding: abstraction is not reification. Kant is simply asking what, in general, something must be like in order for us to be able to perceive it. Griffith-Dickson, p. 302.

[64] W III 289:20–24. The paragraph following in Nadler's edition belongs to Hamann's letter to Herder, not to the *Metakritik* itself, as is clear from the double dash and from the content. I have adopted Bayer's slightly different punctuation, and his spelling of 'matagrabolisirt' – borrowed by Hamann from a made-up Greek word in Rabelais, meaning roughly 'to write nonsense'; see Bayer p. 414, n. 28.

Bayer points out that this sentence is modelled on the first half of I Cor. 4:6: 'Solches aber, liebe Brüder, habe ich auf mich und Apollos gedeutet um euretwillen, daß ihr an uns lernet.' In its Pauline context, 'gedeutet' refers to an extended analogy – Paul's account of the factionalism among the Corinthian congregation is meant as a lesson to each individual to avoid such disputes and stick with 'what is written'.[65] The judgement of the Lord is what counts, not the opinions of mere men, and so we should be humble. Similarly, Hamann has written about language – which unites 'letter' and 'spirit', sound and meaning – in order to make it easier for the reader to digest his main point about the *Critique*: that the analytic method is not valid, a 'divorce' of aspects of reality that belong together and are held together by language, as instituted by God. But each individual reader must tease out the implications for himself.

Conclusion

It remains to consider Hamann's text both in relation to Kant and to its genetic context. Taken apart from that context, it is certainly an odd response to the *Critique*; on the other hand, at first sight the *Metakritik* has little directly to say about the theological concerns underlying it, though there are several clear political references. The conjunction of these with the apocalyptic tone also found in *Konxompax*, together with the evidence of the letters, gives an indication of how Hamann's reaction to the *Critique* should be understood. To judge by the arguments on the page, it can only be said that Hamann entirely missed the point – in which of course he was not alone. However, he was surely quite right in his estimate of the danger Kant's book posed to Christianity as Hamann understood it, for all Kant's diplomatic attempts to appear non-threatening.

Hamann misinterprets Kant in at least two parallel ways which are central and which indicate his own approach. Most basically, Kant is attempting to establish the conditions for experience, not describe the functioning of the experience we actually have. Of course this experience

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[65] Hamann elsewhere used the Greek verb, μεταςχηματίζειν, to describe his method as a writer, and Hamann scholarship frequently refers to his 'metaschematism'. Cf. the following from *Kreuzzüge*: '... die Alten also nachzuahmen, daß wir uns von ihrer Ähnlichkeit, je mehr je besser, entfernen. ... umgekehrte Nachahmung ... Wo der Schulweise Schlüsse spinnt, und der Hofsirach Einfälle näht, ist die Schreibart des Liebhabers Leidenschaft und Wendung. Unter allen seinen Redefiguren bedient er sich am glücklichsten ... derjenigen, welche in den vertraulichen Briefen eines Originalautors [Paul] Metaschematismus genannt wird' (W II 150:11–15). For further discussion, see the Conclusion.

is – almost by definition – a posteriori; his interest in the a priori is not to propose a new mode of knowledge, but to determine the limits, very narrow indeed in his view, of knowledge apart from experience. For Kant, such knowledge exists only as a necessary component of experience itself; it is necessary to account for those aspects of experience, such as causation, that Humean scepticism could not. Kant's aim was to explain everyday experience, as championed and appealed to by Hamann, without leaving a chink for metaphysical speculation of the sort that Hamann derided. But Kant's application of the analytical method to experience produced very abstract results and gave birth to an army of new concepts and new terminology; the *Metakritik* makes these out to be reifications of mental constructs, but they are precisely not. Abstraction is not reification.

Secondly, Hamann attacks Kant for not pursuing the question 'wie ist das Vermögen zu denken selbst möglich?' Norman Kemp Smith quotes a useful paragraph on this from Kant's *Logik*, Einleitung i:

> Some logicians, indeed, affirm that logic presupposes *psychological* principles. But it is just as inappropriate to bring principles of this kind into logic as it is to derive the science of morals from life. If we were to take the principles from psychology, that is, from observations on our understanding, we should merely see *how* thought takes place, and *how* it is affected by the manifold subjective hindrances and conditions; so that this would lead only to the knowledge of *contingent* laws. But in logic the question is not of *contingent*, but of *necessary* laws: not how we do think, but how we ought to think. The rules of logic, then, must not be derived from the *contingent*, but from the *necessary* use of the understanding which without any psychology a man finds in himself. In logic we do not want to know how the understanding is and thinks, and how it has hitherto proceeded in thinking, but how it ought to proceed in thinking. Its business is to teach us the correct use of reason, that is, the use which is consistent with itself.

For Hamann, reason is an imperfect human faculty, and logic a prop for the devil's sophistry. Without faith in God, reason is not pure and noble but naked and blind. For Kant, it is the only guide man finds within himself – it is all we have. More specifically, it is reason that is appealed to by the speculative philosophy Kant undermines in the Transcendental Dialectic; but if reason be taken as a guide, Kant aims to demonstrate that it will not support speculative conclusions. Again, Hamann might be expected to agree; indeed he himself expected the *Critique*, 'die aller

spekulativen Theologie der Spaldinge, Steinbarte ppp und jesuitischen Betrachtungen unserer Hephästione das Maul stopft', to offer the definitive answer to the speculative philosophy of religion. But if reason is all we have, and it offers no support to the truths asserted by religion, then that is an uncomfortable conclusion for anyone sympathetic to religion. Hamann agreed that reason was neither a proper nor an effective foundation for religion. For orthodox Lutheranism, this was not a new debate. Reason was secondary to revelation, and that was the end of the matter. Kant's position was all the more dangerous now that that consensus was crumbling in the face of the proponents of natural religion whom Hamann had so vehemently attacked in *Konxompax* and elsewhere – Starck, Steinbart, Lessing – just as he was also about to attack Mendelssohn's *Jerusalem* in *Golgatha*. Starck's interest, in which he was not alone, in what we can know of religion apart from revelation seemed to Hamann tellingly analogous to Kant's inquiry into what we can know of the world before experience. For Hamann, revelation is just experience, privileged perhaps, but inseparable from it – especially in that revelation consists not of scripture alone, but also includes the Book of Nature – and, in accordance with the Königsberg pietism Hamann was brought up in, above all this means the psychological and spiritual experience of the individual.

Hamann's attack on the arguments is based on pastiche rather than substance; though the pastiche often allows an opposed position to be glimpsed or inferred, this is not the same thing as engaging with Kant's system on its own terms. Hamann refuses the terms. If abstraction inevitably leads to philosophical confusion, and reason itself is suspect unless it defers to revelation, then such an enterprise as the *Critique* is impossible from the start. If we acquire knowledge of the world and the universe through the language of the community in which we grow up, and the pattern of our relationship to the wider world is one of dependence, gratitude, respect, and deference set by our initial encounter with parents who sustain and nurture us, then it is natural to accept the authority of revelation and the good faith of the creator and saviour who holds the world in his hand. All this is poles apart from the speculative theology attacked by Kant in the grand conclusion of the Transcendental Dialectic.

The *Metakritik* also employs ad hominem arguments against Kant, though without the sustained venom of *Konxompax*. The constellation of themes is much the same as it was there. Because 'he that is not with me is against me' (Matt. 12:30), Kant's opposition to Christianity as Hamann conceived it puts him in the devil's party. The accusation that he idolised reason ('es geht ... einem ... beinah mit diesem *Idol* [=Vernunft], wie jenem Alten, mit dem *Ideal* der Vernunft [=the *Critique*'s word for God]', W III 284:26) is meant in the fullest sense, and runs through the whole text. Kant's system is painted in lurid colours as an elaborate mystical cult linked to freemasonry, sexual perversion, and the metropolitan decadence of the Berlin Enlightenment. Though Hamann without doubt recognised that the *Critique* was in intention a work of philosophy rather than a heathen tract, because it threatened Christianity he indeed saw it as diabolical. Biblical allusions underline the link between contemporary politics and the age-old battle between the forces of good and evil, just as in *Konxompax*. Kant was careful to reject the hubris of Babel, the error of his over-ambitious speculative predecessors, and sought instead to construct a modest 'Wohnhaus', of exactly human proportions; but Hamann accuses him of precisely the opposite. All these parallels – their logic is typological – were apt and in keeping with Lutheran tradition. The violence Hamann does to Kant's intentions is not primarily the result of a failure to understand them; it reflects a refusal to accept them. Kant might not really mean to give comfort to the devil, but as far as Hamann was concerned that actually was the effect of the *Critique*.

To sum up, it seems fair to say that the *Metakritik* does not truly engage with Kant's arguments; if that is to be the criterion, it does not deserve to be taken as seriously as it often has been, perhaps on account of the reputation of Kant. The problem Hamann raises about thought being in language is analogous to the question of knowledge before experience. Of course, thought is in language, and language is contingent; it does sometimes deceive us, and rhetoric can twist it deliberately, but thought can still step back to other words and try a different way round if the first ends up not making sense. We might not end up thinking straight very often, but we ought to try. As an objection to the *Critique*, the difficulty of doing so is not especially cogent, because

it could be levelled against absolutely any persuasive piece of writing, whatever its attitude to language – even the *Metakritik* itself. Maybe the devil really is sitting on our shoulder and ensuring that the attempt fails every time, but it is still possible in principle, and a desirable aim, to think things through effectively. In practical matters, the results can be checked and refined empirically, as Kant describes. It is tempting to go further and say that reason, with all the impediments of muddy language and received ideas, is all we have, so all we can do is make the best of it. Hamann would disagree with the view that it is 'all we have' – through faith, we have God, or better, He has us – but even if we agree with that, or accept it for the sake of argument, it still makes sense to use our faculties, such as they are, to best effect; God is not himself a faculty. Our commitments, religious and otherwise, may prompt us to employ them to certain ends rather than others.

This is certainly the case with Kant. Hamann may not have understood the arguments, or even have been particularly interested in doing so, but though we should recognise clearly that this is not the same thing, he did understand the tendency of the *Critique* in a way which we have lost sight of, given the different preoccupations of the modern age, but which I think can be accepted as in keeping with those of Kant's own. In this way we can both recognise Hamann's own achievement accurately and benefit from it. The letters show that Hamann saw the 'Kritik aller spekulativen Theologie' as the centre, the goal, the result of the whole work; they are also a reminder of the currency of the sort of woolly ideas espoused by Starck and others, so that it makes sense to see Kant as writing with them in mind, just as Lessing had so notably sought to make Neologist platitudes ridiculous by radicalising a related debate two years earlier. These were the great issues of the day, especially just at the turn of that decade; issues which we now, mistakenly, see as proxies for questions of political authority rather than the religious authority which symbolised and propped up the autocratic political order. This was recognised by many at the time, certainly by Kant, and in his own way also by Hamann. From a religious perspective, the secular order reflected the spiritual health of the nation and beyond it the world, a connection so immediate it hardly needed to be made, and with an extensive and very familiar precedent

in the Old Testament history of Israel and in the admonitions of the prophets. That was why the Enlightenment needed to question religious orthodoxy: it was no accident that religion became one of the main battlegrounds; and it was why Hamann attacked the political innovations of the Enlightenment. The very fact that Frederick permitted, even fostered Enlightened debate on religious matters indicated his political dubiousness, confirmed at the local level in Hamann's personal experience of war, high taxation and administrative reform, which was eventually to lead to the summary abolition of his sinecure. Hamann's religion meant that his suspicion of authority led in a conservative direction, but had he been born twenty years later, he might have been a Prussian Tom Paine.[66] As it was, it was the liberal and progressive side of Frederick's regime he picked on to denounce as autocratic.[67]

Though these political connections are less salient in the *Metakritik* than elsewhere in Hamann's works of these years, they are present in the text itself as well as the letters, and their importance is confirmed by their more prominent place as part of the same constellation in *Konxompax*. *Golgatha*, which was conceived as part of the same project, deals explicitly and at length with the proper relationship between the political and the religious order. Since Mendelssohn proposed the separation of church and state to facilitate the toleration of the Jews, and even argued on the basis of natural religion that there was every reason to accord Judaism full religious respect, his *Jerusalem* was a natural target for Hamann and as such a better vehicle for the elaboration of Hamann's position. This may account for the failure of the *Metakritik* and the relatively greater length, completeness and success of *Golgatha und Scheblimini!*

[66]Tom Paine came from a similar social background, and even worked as a customs officer, though in a rather more demanding capacity than Hamann.

[67]This explains what seems to us his bizarrely wrong-headed response to Kant's *Was ist Aufklärung*, which of course emphasised religious issues.

IV *Golgatha und Scheblimini!*

> Siehe! ich will sie mit Wermuth speisen, und mit Galle tränken; denn von den Propheten zu Jerusalem kommt Heucheley aus ins ganze Land
>
> Jeremiah 23:15

> Hat man sein *warum*? des Lebens, so verträgt man sich fast mit jedem *wie*? – Der Mensch strebt *nicht* nach Glück; nur der Engländer tut das.
>
> Nietzsche, *Götzendämmerung*, Sprüche und Pfeile 12

Golgatha und Scheblimini! (1784)[1] is an attack on Moses Mendelssohn's *Jerusalem* (1783)[2] and the theology Hamann takes it to advance and imply. Mendelssohn's work is itself part of a polemical exchange, but the controversy in which it engages, its own focus and aim, is not the same as Hamann's focus. *Jerusalem* is a plea for freedom of conscience, but Hamann has no quarrel with this ideal. Judaism is, as Mendelssohn vividly put it, the lower storey on which Christianity is built,[3] and it is as a Christian that Hamann disagrees with Mendelssohn's interpretation of Judaism: 'Es gehet ihrer beiden Sache an' (J 154). Mendelssohn offers his interpretation in the second half of *Jerusalem* to show that the account of the place of religion within civil society he gives in the first half, on which the argument for toleration depends, is compatible with Judaism; the interpretation is also an attractive presentation of Mendelssohn's religion. The whole argument is based on the secular principles of natural law and emphasises the rational common core of all faiths; to this extent, Hamann's view of Mendelssohn's theological position is certainly correct. It also fits in with the preoccupations of *Konxompax* and the *Metakritik*, especially given the relationship between natural law and natural religion – both being rationally derived from first principles held to

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[1] In volume III of Nadler's edition (W), and also *Hamanns Hauptschriften erklärt*, Bd. 7, ed. Lothar Schreiner, Bertelsmann 1956, with detailed notes and commentary giving the parallels to relevant texts, cited as Schreiner.

[2] Volume 8 of the *Jubiläumsausgabe* (*Moses Mendelssohn: Schriften zum Judentum II*, ed. Alexander Altmann, Stuttgart 1983) includes not only *Jerusalem* but related works by Mendelssohn and other authors. Cited as J.

[3] Mendelssohn adapts a less vivid metaphor involving scaffolding used by his opponent Cranz (J 81, see below): 'Sie sagen, meine Schlußfolge untergrabe den Grund des Judentums, und bieten mir die Sicherheit Ihres obersten Stokwerks an' (*Jerusalem*, J 154).

be higher than any authority – all of which made *Jerusalem* a natural target for Hamann's 'Muse Indignatio' (B IV 337:17).

As often with Hamann's biblical quotations, the context of the second motto of *Golgatha*, quoted at the head of this chapter, is illuminating, so much so that it provides a helpful orientation and introduction to the themes of the work.[4] First, note that verses 5ff of Jer. 23 lend themselves to typological reading.[5] Verses 9–32 attack the lying prophets; the following abridged quotation aims to bring out the range of commonalities with Hamann's attack on Mendelssohn:

> 9 Mine heart within me is broken because of the prophets; all my bones shake; I am like a drunken man, and like a man whom wine hath overcome, because of the Lord, and because of the words of his holiness.
> 10 For the land is full of adulterers; for because of swearing the land mourneth; the pleasant places of the wilderness are dried up, and their course is evil, and their force is not right.
> 12 Wherefore their [the prophets'] way shall be unto them as slippery ways in the darkness: they shall be driven on, and fall therein: for I will bring evil upon them, even the year of their visitation, saith the Lord.
> 14 I have seen also in the prophets of Jerusalem an horrible thing: they commit adultery, and walk in lies: they strengthen also the hands of evildoers, that none doth return [i.e. repent] from his wickedness: they are all of them unto me as Sodom, and the inhabitants thereof as Gomorrah.
> 15 [quoted above]
> 16 Thus saith the Lord of hosts, Hearken not unto the words of the prophets that prophesy unto you: they make you vain: they speak a vision of their own heart, and not out of the mouth of the Lord.
> 17 They still say unto them that despise me, The Lord hath said, Ye shall have peace; and they say unto every one that walketh after the imagination of his own heart, No evil shall come upon you.
> 25 I have heard what the prophets said, that prophesy lies in my name ...
> 26 ... yea, they are prophets of the deceit of their own heart

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[4]The first motto, Deut. 33:9–10, is not straightforward. The Levites demonstrated loyalty to the point of ruthlessness by slaying 'every man his brother, and every man his companion, and every man his neighbour' after the incident of the golden calf, Ex. 32:27. Loyalty to God is the greatest loyalty of all, we might interpret, and because heterodoxy is idolatry – as in the case of the golden calf – it means breaking faith with God, and so justifies, indeed calls for, a drastic response. Schreiner points out that Hamann later glossed the rejection of father and mother etc. as his rejection of the Enlightenment, Schreiner p. 53. Whatever one makes of that – Hamann's declarations should not necessarily be taken at face value – the central point seems to be absolute loyalty to God, as summed up in the omitted last part of verse 9, marked by two dashes: 'die halten deine Rede und bewahren deinen Bund'. Hamann is ruthless in his treatment of Mendelssohn – in a greater cause. All this recalls Hamann's original crisis of friendship and loyalty with Berens and Lindner.

[5]The second half of verse 6 is printed in small capitals both in the Authorised Version and in Luther's translation, indicating that it was so understood; see also Luther's preface to Jeremiah, which singles out chapters 23 and 31 as especially referring to Christ, Rogner & Bernhard ed., p. 1270.

> 30 Therefore, behold, I am against the prophets, saith the Lord, that steal my words every one from his neighbour.
> 31 Behold, I am against the prophets, saith the Lord, that use their tongues, and say, He saith.

Prophecy in ancient Israel was a political as well as a religious institution; prophets either supported the status quo or sought to correct or undermine it. Jeremiah here attacks other prophets in the service of the powers that be. Their false words lead to immorality in the land and the sympathetic failure of nature to sustain the people. They lend moral support to evildoers. By following 'the imagination of their own heart' rather than speaking God's word, they make those who hear them 'vain'. They prophesy lies in His name. They steal His – purported – words from one another, misusing their tongues.

Their deception is thus a dishonourable use of language, and they have turned away from God to follow ideas they have come up with themselves. This recalls the 'eitel Tichten' of Rom. 1:21 and Luther's exegesis of Jonah, discussed in the previous chapter on Kant; compare Hamann's accusation on p. 300, discussed below, that Mendelssohn's theory brings to an end 'Glaube und Treue' and institutes 'Lüge und Trug, Schand und Laster' as means to happiness. The prophets' theological corruption corresponds to the corruption of the people and the land. All this moves Jeremiah, inspired by the Holy Ghost, to speak out against them, intoxicated with righteous anger.

The idolatry of the false prophets castigated by Jeremiah is thus analogous to Mendelssohn's Enlightened view of religion, both Judaism and Christianity. Further – the second part of *Golgatha* is largely devoted to this idea – it is analogous to the Jewish failure to recognise Christ as the Messiah; on Hamann's typological view, the Old Testament as a whole, and the Law in particular, is a prophecy of the incarnation. Just as the Jews mistakenly put their faith in the letter of the Law, so missing its true significance, philosophy when dealing with theological matters puts its faith in all-too-human reason instead of the Lord. These are two different ways of turning away from God, but they are equivalent in effect and related in substance, even ultimately identical; they are just two of the different masks the devil has worn, in keeping with the spirit of any given age. It

is no accident that Mendelssohn unites them; in each age, the devil adopts the most plausible and persuasive tone, the fashionable nonsense of the moment. Mendelssohn the Aufklärer is a type of Moses the patriarch. According to Hamann, Mendelssohn promotes a vision of God based on idle philosophical speculation rather than revelation and faith. Just as in the case of the false prophets, this is associated with the decay of the political order, an order sustained by the corrupt ideology it promotes. It is sinful because it is idolatrous.

Golgatha was written in conjunction with the unfinished *Metakritik*. Hamann's attack on Mendelssohn, like that on Kant in the *Metakritik*, makes many of its points by quoting fragments of his opponent's argument out of context, often juxtaposing them with other material, particularly from the Bible.[6] However, *Golgatha* makes far fewer demands than the *Metakritik* on the reader's knowledge beyond the Bible and *Jerusalem* itself; for long stretches, Hamann's text deals explicitly with theological matters taken for granted or alluded to much more densely elsewhere, giving a positive statement of his views.

Mendelssohn conceived *Jerusalem, oder Über religiöse Macht und Judentum* (1783) in response to August Friedrich Cranz's pamphlet of the previous autumn *Das Forschen nach Licht und Recht*, in its turn occasioned by Mendelssohn's preface (1782) to Menasseh Ben Judah's *Rettung der Juden*, a seventeenth-century apology for Judaism translated from the English. Mendelssohn used this publication to set out his case for Jewish emancipation. In 1781 Wilhelm Dohm's *Über die bürgerliche Verbesserung der Juden* had appeared, closely followed by moves toward emancipation in Bohemia and Austria. It was thus a moment which held out the possibility of radical improvement (J XIII, editor's introduction to *Rettung*).

A brief outline of these earlier texts will help situate *Jerusalem* itself, as well as giving an indication of how far removed Mendelssohn's concerns were from Hamann's.

Mendelssohn's preface to *Rettung* takes a strong stand in a practical debate. His purpose is to relate the seventeenth-century text he is introducing to the present situation; he points out the

[6] See Hamann's own description of this technique, written in 1786, printed by Nadler after the text of *Golgatha*, W III 319f; the third paragraph is a handy explanation of the title *Golgatha und Scheblimini*, which refers to the passion and the resurrection.

continuity between eighteenth-century antisemitism and its seventeenth-century antecedents, and brings Menasseh's argument up to date. Finally, he takes issue with Dohm on the powers the Jewish community should have to regulate its own affairs. That he does so is a reflection of his practical aim in writing the preface: these are matters of detail in relation to the main goal of establishing the principle of Jewish emancipation, but when its realisation was so tangibly near it became important to be clear just what was being sought – and to get this right.

Dohm maintained the right of the community not only to adjudicate in civil matters between its members, but to exercise religious control and discipline.[7] Mendelssohn disputes the latter point: he sees such control as equivalent to the intolerance of the Christian establishment against Judaism, 'ein gleichhartes Joch' (J 25). The key case is the *Bannrecht*, a religious penalty with civil consequences employed by Jews (famously in the case of Spinoza) as well as by Christians. But though Mendelssohn advocated removing the power of secular compulsion from both church and synagogue, both still exercised it. In particular it was by virtue of its position as the dominant religion that Christianity excluded the Jews from equal rights within secular society; on the other hand, the Jewish community had its own secular arm,[8] distinct from as it were 'Christian' secularity, by virtue of that exclusion. In arguing against the religious jurisdiction of the Jewish community over its own members, Mendelssohn was advancing the corollary of what he asked of the Church in relation to society as a whole, namely to renounce a religious authority which derived its force from its more than just religious consequences; however, his defence of an independent Jewish civil law reflected a situation in which Jews and Christians were still a long way from making up a single body politic.

Consequently, Mendelssohn needed a basis for separating the religious and civil spheres. His argument, essentially the same as that given the following year in *Jerusalem*, draws on natural law. 'Rechte' relate to goods and actions, and are incommensurate with opinions, which, because they

[7]This was the same arrangement as in the Ottoman Empire. Disputes between members of different religious communities, or 'millets', were subject to Muslim law, but each millet regulated internal matters according to its own law.

[8]Though this is the situation implied by Mendelssohn's discussion, the reality at least in Berlin may have been less rigid.

therefore cannot be the object of any contract, cannot be placed under the jurisdiction of another, even voluntarily in a social contract (J 18f):

> Sollten aber die Gesetze der Natur und Vernunft ein Recht einräumen, das sich auf das Annehmen, oder Verwerfen einer Meinung gründet; so müssen unumgänglich diese beiden Begriffe in einem Satze verbunden, und aus dem Beyfall, den ich einer Lehre gebe oder verweigere, begreiflich gemacht werden können, warum mir diese oder jene Aeusserung meiner Thätigkeit zukomme, oder nicht zukomme; warum mir ein gewisser Gebrauch und Genuß der Güter dieser Welt, nach den ewigen Gesetzen der Weisheit und der Güte vergönnt, oder nicht vergönnt sey. Ich muß gestehen, daß ich die Möglichkeit dieser Verbindung nicht einsehe. (J 19)

If no bridge can be made between the sphere of conviction and that of deeds, religious views must properly remain matters of conscience. Mendelssohn here defends a liberal principle which underpinned the practical toleration he advocated, but which was also central to his understanding of his own religion. It is not an opportunistic formulation squeezed out of the terminology of natural law; this is Mendelssohn's attempt to express the principle in that terminology.

Cranz's *Das Forschen*, the immediate occasion of *Jerusalem*, argued that Mendelssohn's opposition to the *Bannrecht* placed him closer to Christianity than to Judaism: the Mosaic Law, a 'bewaffnetes Kirchenrecht' (J 80), is essential to Judaism, Cranz argues, and if it is permissible to go so far as to reject it, why not go all the way and convert to Christianity? Mendelssohn's 'Enlightened Judaism' differed from much orthodox Jewish teaching, as he acknowledges in *Jerusalem* (J 153), but appeared closer to deism, which sought to rescue a rational core of Christian belief from what it saw as the superstitious and primitive content of the Old Testament. The essential religious truths, Mendelssohn argued, must be universally accessible to human reason unaided by any special revelation, and they were the same for all religions. This being the case, Cranz replied, what reason was there for Mendelssohn to remain a Jew? He challenged Mendelssohn either to reconcile his heterodox attitude to the *Bannrecht* with Judaism, or to explain his continuing reservations about Christianity. This was the moment for a free and rational debate, but it might not last:

> ... schon ietzt brütet der Geist der Schwärmerei neue Ungeheuer, die für die Zukunft mächtig heranwachsen können. Quakereien und Geisterseherei seufzen sich im Stillen zusammen, um bei verstärkter Macht dereinst noch einmal die freie Vernunft unter die Füsse zu treten – nur einen Ferdinand und einer Isabelle bedürft's, um den Geist der heimlich kochenden Inquisition über Scheiterhaufen und über die Gräber der Wahrheitsmärtirer tanzen und den alten Pharisäismus an den Ekken aller Strassen gaukeln zu sehen.[9]

Cranz thus appealed to Mendelssohn as one Aufklärer to another rather than out of Schwärmerei or antisemitism. But Mendelssohn did not reject the Law, and one of the aims of *Jerusalem* was to show that his attitude to the *Bannrecht* did not imply this.

As well as making the case for tolerance, *Jerusalem* aims to show that Mendelssohn's views are consistent with Judaism. True tolerance would not be served by a unification of faiths, which would only create a new orthodoxy of dogmatic formulae precluding the further exercise of reason. The argument for his conversion to Christianity is thus neither compelling nor appealing. More than a response to the debate which provoked it, Mendelssohn's book, written three years after *Nathan der Weise*, seeks to underwrite tolerance and humanity in all religious matters. Like Lessing, he thought that true tolerance meant accepting diversity.

The key principle on which Mendelssohn's argument is based is that an individual's beliefs are beyond the remit of civil society, which exists to regulate actions, not thoughts. Kant's *Was ist Aufklärung*, which appeared the following year, continued Mendelssohn's discussion of *Glaubenseide* and *symbolische Bücher,*[10] but advocated freedom of speech as well as freedom of conscience; this further step makes for more robust guarantees, as it is only by words or actions that we reveal our beliefs and that they could come to the attention of anyone who thinks they ought to be repressed, so in practice any question about freedom of conscience amounts to a question about freedom of speech.

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[9] J 86f. Notice the apocalyptic tone of Cranz's appeal, a tone that was clearly in the air, not just a private eccentricity of Hamann's. Here, it is an example of secularisation.

[10] The 39 articles controversy in the Church of England was paralleled by a German debate on this topic. It was opened by Friedrich Germanus Lüdke's *Vom falschen Religionseifer* (1767), and included the distinction made by Johann Salomo Semler in 1775 'zwischen innerer und äußerlicher Verbindlichkeit der symbolischen Bücher' (Aner, p. 263). This prepared the way for Kant's distinction; Kant's innovative stroke was to label the inner 'öffentlich'. See Aner, *Die Theologie der Lessingzeit*. Halle, Max Niemeyer Verlag 1929, p. 254ff.

One of the attractions of Mendelssohn's principle is its claim to make a clear and transparent distinction. He allows that certain religious doctrines are essential to the stability of civil society because they underwrite its moral foundations,[11] and so the state should keep a watchful eye out for 'Lehren ... die wie Atheisterey und Epikurismus den Grund untergraben, auf welchem die Glückseligkeit des gesellschaftlichen Lebens beruhet' (J 130f). This acknowledges the state's interest in religion for purely political reasons – an argument that was often made – but without allowing it any claim to regulate doctrine; secular oversight should only occur 'von Ferne'. Mendelssohn's separation of the two spheres is in principle complete. He founds it on a detailed excursus on natural law and the basis of contracts (pp. 114–125) which is the focus of Hamann's attack in the first part of *Golgatha*.

According to Mendelssohn, in the state of nature man has the right to certain goods[12] which he may choose to use for his own benefit or for that of others.[13] A contract is made when he gives up the right to make this choice, which is itself a good, to another (J 123). He must be able to do so, for if he were not his right to choose would be compromised. Effectively, giving the right to choose how to dispose of a good to another amounts to giving them the good itself, because the former arises directly from actual possession; but there would be no basis in the state of nature for ceding a good without the intermediate step of the right to choose contained within the right to the good itself. By this manoeuvre, Mendelssohn anchors moral freedom within the state of nature.

This is the framework for rights and duties within civil society: man naturally enjoys certain rights, and they may be ceded to others by contracts. In particular, the social contract involves giving up many of them to the state in the interests of greater general well-being, and the state may enforce the rights it thus acquires through punishments and rewards (J 125f).

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[11] 'Ohne Gott und Vorsehung und künftiges Leben ist Menschenliebe eine angeborene Schwachheit, und Wohlwollen wenig mehr als eine Geckerei, die wir uns einander einzuschwatzen suchen, damit der Thor sich placke, und der Kluge sich gütlich thun und auf jenes Unkosten sich lustig machen könne.' J 131.

[12] 'Alles *innere* und *äussere* Vermögen des Menschen, in so weit es ihm, oder andern, ein Mittel zur Glückseligkeit werden kann.' J 116.

[13] Whatever he has beyond his basic needs 'ist er verpflichtet ... zum Theil zum Besten seines Nebenmenschen, zum *Wohlwollen* anzuwenden; denn *Besserseyn* ist von *Wohlwollen* unzertrennlich.' J 116.

However, the key point is that all the rights under discussion relate to the disposal of goods, that is to *Handlungen* rather than *Gesinnungen*. There can be no contractual basis for *Glaubenseide*, because contracts relate to actions and not beliefs.[14] Since the latter are the proper sphere of the church, it has no claim over actions; on the other hand the state has no legitimate interest in our beliefs.[15] Consequently to privilege one religion over another, even indirectly, is wrong, [16] and excommunication, as a secular penalty for a religious offence, is illegitimate (J 140). To have value, religious convictions must be freely arrived at, based on reason, not authority. Mendelssohn founds this immediately attractive view on the theory of contracts, according to which beliefs are 'unveräußerlich' (J 138) – because they are not a good.

Though there are some overlaps, broadly, the first part of *Golgatha* responds to part one of *Jerusalem*, especially the theory of contracts, and the second part attacks part two, putting forward a typological reading of the Old Testament, especially the Law; of course, this only makes sense from a Christian perspective. References to contemporary philosophy and politics – the latter somewhat veiled, but still bold – occur throughout, but there is a blistering peroration at the end of the second part of *Golgatha*. Finally, an epilogue sums up the argument, emphasising the philosophical side. I will now discuss the first part of *Golgatha* before returning to part two of *Jerusalem*.

Hamann's attack on the social contract theory: *Golg*atha part 1

Hamann's attack targets Mendelssohn's theory of contracts, 'weil ... es am meisten darauf ankommt, ob solche anerkannt oder in Zweifel gezogen werden können, ehe man zur *Anwendung* schreitet' (W III 294:3–8), but Mendelssohn invites the reader to skip if they find it too 'spekulativ' (J 114); for Mendelssohn as perhaps for the modern reader, his argument does not stand or fall with the technicalities attending the elaboration of its basic axioms. He thinks it is obvious that our relation to God creates no new duties in addition to the ones we have to our

[14] Further, contracts exist to regulate conflicts of interest, which cannot exist between man and God, because only two human beings can have commensurate interests in a good. J 127.

[15] Mendelssohn allows exceptions for the payment of priests (p. 128f) and radical atheism (which the state does have an interest in because it subverts the basis of civil society; p. 131).

[16] Whether by sanctions or by inducements. J 129f.

fellow men (J 127), from which it follows that even in religious matters there is no basis for circumscribing the key principle of freedom of conscience.

Mendelssohn's other opponents such as Michaelis are not troubled by Hamann's concern with foundations, but rather by the proposed relationship between church and state and by the implications this has for tolerance. Like Mendelssohn, they have an eye on the practical issues. Michaelis thinks priests do have obligations within the secular order because they are *Beamte*.[17] The strength of Michaelis's position is that it corresponds to the actual situation of the church, however valid Mendelssohn's objections of principle. By contrast, Hamann's interest is not in the practical background to the debate, but in its general theological ramifications. To be sure, these had a practical side, but the specific question of religious tolerance is not Hamann's focus.

Hamann's criticism of Mendelssohn's theory of contracts is threefold: he argues that the terminology of natural law conceals unstated assumptions; he objects to the absence of God from the state of nature; and he does not accept that *Handlungen* can be separated from *Gesinnungen*. I will consider these points in turn.

1. Reification

Much of Mendelssohn's terminology is borrowed from the Latin of earlier writings on natural law. The natural law tradition goes back to Cicero and beyond,[18] but Mendelssohn's theory is closely linked to the works and usage of Pufendorf, Wolff and others.[19] In particular, Mendelssohn's 'sittlich' translates *moralis*, which 'hat hier den Sinn der freien Wahl im Unterschied zu naturgesetzlicher Notwendigkeit' (J 306, editor's note). Hamann ignores this technical sense:

[17] Johann David Michaelis, the Göttingen theologian whom Hamann attacked in *Aesthetica*, reviewed Mendelssohn's preface to *Rettung der Juden*; Mendelssohn responds to his sharp criticism at the beginning of the second part of *Jerusalem* (p. 148). The antisemitic tone of Michaelis's attack suggests he is less interested in Mendelssohn's view on *Glaubenseide* than in resisting its implications for the toleration of Judaism.

[18] Cicero's importance lay in the wide currency of his philosophical writings from when they were written onwards. Hamann quotes from *De officiis* on p. 300f. Garve's translation of this work had recently appeared.

[19] See the notes in the *Jubiläumsausgabe* on Mendelssohn's natural law excursus, p. 306ff.

> 'Sehr wohl! ließe sich der Zwist durch eine Worterklärung entscheiden'[20] – Dennoch stehen ihrer drey gleich im Vorhofe der Theorie. Mit dem sittlichen Vermögen scheint es mir (in parenthesi) eben die Bewandnis zu haben, wie mit einem moralischen Wesen. Das Vermögen heißt *sittlich*, wenn es mit den Gesetzen der Weisheit und Güte bestehen kann: so sollte denn auch Weisheit mit Güte verbunden, *Sittlichkeit* heissen. Nennt man aber ihren Bund *Gerechtigkeit*: so sollte man mit gleichem Fuge ein Vermögen, das mit den Gesetzen der Weisheit und Güte bestehen kann, gerecht nennen. Sind ferner *Macht* und *Recht* auch schon im Stande der Natur heterogene Begriffe: so scheinen *Vermögen*, *Mittel* und *Güter* mit dem Begriffe der *Macht* gar zu nahe verwandt zu seyn, daß sie nicht bald auf einerley hinauslaufen sollten. (W III 294:17–29)

The passage Hamann refers to is the opening of Mendelssohn's theoretical excursus (J 114ff), where he defines his terms; he distinguishes between 'Vermögen' which are *compatible* with the 'Gesetze der Weisheit und Güte', and what *must* occur if the 'Gesetze ...' are not to be contradicted – namely between rights and duties. Compatibility with the 'Gesetze ...' is the prerequisite for something to be a 'Vermögen' at all, not (as Hamann takes it) the criterion for it to have the attribute *sittlich*[21] – which means that it belongs in the realm of entitlements and obligations (which can be contravened, but ought not to be) rather than in the realm of physical possibility or necessity, the laws of nature (which cannot, bar a miracle). In the absence of legitimacy, there is only physical possession, not entitlement. For Mendelssohn, rights may indeed be enforced,[22] but only if they are legitimate.

Hamann, bringing out the financial sense of 'Vermögen' by juxtaposing it with 'Mittel' and 'Güter', implies that all this technical talk is just a front for arbitrary, commercially backed power. Hamann's claim to focus on the theoretical foundations is belied by his failure to take them seriously. The violence done to the technical term 'Vermögen' (=facultas) is a deliberate reminder of the political aspect of Hamann's opposition to the Berlin Enlightenment. In his view Frederick's *philosophes* were not an ornamental accident: the godless society described by the social contract was rapaciously materialistic, characterised by Hobbesian arbitrary power that subordinated

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[20] A quotation from *Jerusalem*, J 107, referring to Locke's argument for the separation of church and state on the grounds that the latter exists to further the temporal welfare of its members. Though the intended effect of Locke's distinction appears much the same as Mendelssohn's, the latter's emphasis on *Gesinnungen* and *Handlungen* makes for a more radical liberal theory.

[21] A crime would be *sittlich*, but it would not be *gerecht*. Similarly in English, *moral* does not necessarily have a positive sense ('a moral failing').

[22] 'Zwangsrechte dürfen mit Gewalt *erpreßt* ... werden.' J 115.

the individual to the streamlined Prussian state machinery administered by French bureaucrats according to the latest rational principles. Whether or not this is a valid criticism of Mendelssohn's political theory, it is certainly not directly relevant to Hamann's declared intention to engage with its foundations as Mendelssohn understood and presented them. Hamann will not allow the innocence or good faith of Mendelssohn's axioms. Where Mendelssohn seeks to justify tolerance, Hamann finds political injustice:

> Bey *vollkommenen Rechten* tritt an die Stelle des sittlichen Vermögens *physische Gewalt*, und bey *vollkommenen Pflichten* die physische Notwendigkeit mit Gewalt erpresster Handlungen. Mit einer solchen *Vollkommenheit* bekommt das ganze speculative *Recht der Natur* einen Riß, und läuft in das *höchste Unrecht* über (W III 298:33ff)

namely Frederick's injustice; that is, Hamann sees the restriction of the social contract to secular ends not as an abstraction, but as a programme for the society he lived in.

2. Naturbund: der Mensch im Stande der Pflicht

However, Hamann does question what he sees as some undefended and unstated assumptions of Mendelssohn's system – its hidden secular tendency. First, the unexamined greatest good at its heart is 'Glückseligkeit', which makes Mendelssohn a utilitarian. Then, his criterion for weighing one claim against another is the undefined 'Gesetze der Weisheit und Güte' (W III 295:37f). Finally, the state of nature itself gives man a clean slate, as it were, without considering his relationship with the creator. This omission is the common element in all three of these points.

The concept of happiness must be understood, Hamann argues, as part of the wider order within which the subject exists. If no wider goal is specified, that implies the individual freely determines his own goals out of what amounts to Promethean self-interest:

> Er hat also weder ein physisches noch moralisches Vermögen zu einer anderen Glückseeligkeit, als die ihm zugedacht, und wozu er beruffen ist. Alle Mittel, deren er sich zur Erlangung einer ihm nicht gegebenen und beschärten Glückseeligkeit bedient, sind gehäufte Beleidigungen der Natur und entschiedene Ungerechtigkeit. Jede *Lüsternheit* zum *Besserseyn* ist der Funke eines höllischen Aufruhrs. (W III 299:28–4)

Mendelssohn makes room for virtue within his utilitarian framework by extending the scope of man's self-interest into the afterlife:

> Dem Menschen wird im Grunde nie eine Ewigkeit zu Theile werden: Sein Ewiges ist blos ein *unaufhörliches Zeitliche*. Sein Zeitliches nimmt nie ein Ende, ist also ein wesentlicher Theil seiner Fortdauer, und mit derselben aus einem Stücke. Man verwirret die Begriffe, wenn man seine zeitliche Wohlfart der ewigen Glückseligkeit entgegen setzet. (J 108)

But for Hamann, virtue thus motivated is worthless because self-interested (302:9f). It is theologically dubious, in Lutheranism if not in Judaism, because we depend on grace for justification and not on works.[23]

Mendelssohn does not say what the 'Gesetze der Weisheit und Güte' are or what their validity is based on, but he emphasises the right of the individual to make moral choices: 'Mir, und mir allein, kömmt im Stande der Natur das Entscheidungsrecht zu ...' (J 117). Hamann objects that the moral freedom of the individual does not entail the right to set one's own moral standards (299:21). But Mendelssohn here defends the individual's moral freedom only against other individuals; he does not set it above God. The right is a right (indeed, a responsibility) to apply a given standard (the 'Gesetze der Weisheit etc.'), not to set the standard. Hamann, however, emphasises the considerable ethical problem of defining and justifying that standard; in his view, a specific foundation is needed. Although it could be argued that Mendelsson is not here dealing with ethical issues, and that ethical vagueness is therefore appropriate, the distinction between applying and setting a standard only has substance to the extent that that standard is defined. In fact Mendelssohn could point to the Mosaic Law as his foundation, as he did in the second part of *Jerusalem*, but not when he is developing a contractual theory meant to be valid for all faiths. It is as if he is saying, 'Insert the basic ethical teachings of your own religion here.' However, this step depends on the universality he advocates, and which Hamann does not allow; for Hamann, the 'Gesetze der Weisheit und Güte' usurp the authority of a specifically Christian divine revelation.

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[23] Cf. W III 312:6–17f; the main point is that Hamann argues that virtue is worthless if extrinsically motivated. In this he follows Luther's position in the faith/works controversy. However it could be argued that Mendelssohn here stands in the tradition of the Platonic *οὐδεὶς ἑκὼν ἁμαρτάνει*; his view would then be that a proper understanding of the relation between the secular and the eternal would actually provide an *intrinsic* motivation for virtue, just as with Platonic anamnesis. Later in *Jerusalem* he says that he would wish in principle to be subject to punishment in the afterlife if it worked for the good of his soul; J 189f.

Thirdly, the idea of a state of nature is incompatible with a traditional theistic framework: 'Giebt es aber einen *gesellschaftlichen Contract*: so giebt es auch einen *natürlichen*, der ächter und älter seyn, und auf dessen Bedingungen der gesellschaftliche beruhen muß' (W III 299:7–9). If there is a creator, man stands in a relationship to him which begins with existence. Even as a thought experiment rather than a historical theory, the state of nature has no validity for Hamann. Man's starting point is not as an autonomous individual, but as a dependent creature.

3. Verantwortungsethik versus Gesinnungsethik

The central place given to the distinction between *Gesinnungen* and *Handlungen* in Mendelssohn's argument arises from his rejection of Locke's strategy for separating church and state, which was to limit the latter to purely secular ends (see J 107). Mendelssohn thinks man's spiritual and material interests make up an undivided whole, so he pursues the aim he shares with Locke, that is to make state interference in religion illegitimate, by the more abstract device of limiting the state to an interest in the actions of its citizens.[24] Hamann's political objection to this is similar in a way to Mendelssohn's objection to Locke's approach, namely that it amounts to a materialist model of society as merely an association for the regulation and enforcement of property rights; but Hamann's vision of the proper alternative is quite different. As in the case of Hamann's criticism of Mendelssohn's social contract theory, his central disagreement is theological.

Actions are motivated by attitudes: 'Das Einstimmen in Lehrmeinungen wirkt in unsere Gesinnungen, und diese in unser sittliches Urtheil und ein damit übereinstimmendes Gebaren' (W III 298:27–9). Mendelssohn's theory itself gives a central role to the principles of 'Weisheit und Güte' according to which actions are to be regulated; on the other hand, Hamann objects, Mendelssohn discusses the influence of writing systems – surely 'physical' rather than 'moral' – on the development of superstitions.[25] So for Hamann the separation of *Handlungen* from *Gesinnungen* is a nonsense.

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[24] In fact it has an interest in both actions and convictions, but only the former may be compelled, because the latter are inalienable. See Mendelssohn's summary, J 137f.

[25] W III 298:17–20; for Mendelssohn's discussion, see J 173–183.

To underline this point, Hamann quotes a sentence from Cicero's *De officiis*: 'Res a natura copulatas errore divellere, fons est fraudium, maleficiorum, scelerum omnium'.[26] Cicero, in a discussion on inheritance chasers cultivating the elderly, is referring to self-interest and integrity – they should not be separated. This is reminiscent of a passage in the *Metakritik* where Hamann is making a similar point, attacking Kant's distinction between sensibility and understanding as though it were a separation. There, his words allude to Matt. 19:6, where Jesus condemns divorce: '... eine so gewaltthätige, unbefugte, eigensinnige Scheidung desjenigen, was die Natur zusammengefügt hat';[27] the substitution of 'Natur' for 'Gott', aimed at Kant, creates a clear resonance between the Ciceronian and the biblical passage. In both *Metakritik* and *Golgatha* the point is the same: abstract distinctions are not just dubious, but a source of 'deceit, wickedness and crime'. But to distinguish is not necessarily to separate. Using words of Cicero's that referred to the separation of two quite different things – and not to the distinction between them – Hamann rejects Mendelssohn's distinction between *Handlungen* and *Gesinnungen* as a step towards separating them, with the Hobbesian consequences he saw already manifested in the regime of Frederick the Great. Hamann's arguments are not directed against the distinction, which Mendelssohn certainly makes, but against the separation, which Hamann sees as the result if Mendelssohn's way of thinking should gain acceptance and add to the existing secular tendency.

Mendelssohn did advocate a separation of jurisdiction, though that is far from being the same thing as the actual separation of *Handlungen* and *Gesinnungen* – which could only mean insincerity. One situation where its practical application was troubling to some[28] was the swearing of *Glaubenseide*. This special case of the relationship between action and belief was the immediate

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[26] 'The error of separating [these two] things joined by nature is the source of all deceit, wickedness and crime.' *De officiis* book 3, chapter 18; Loeb, p. 344f. Quoted in *Golgatha*: 301:1–2. Note that Cicero's point is very similar to Mendelssohn's about the unity of benevolence and self-interest, with which Hamann disagrees. His use of the quotation is utterly opportunistic: Cicero was symbolic of a whole tradition of philosophical ethics that Hamann rejected, and it was rhetorically effective to condemn Mendelssohn in the words of one of his sources; and the accidental verbal echo of Matt. 19:6 was a good opportunity to introduce a prescriptive and specifically Christian overtone that combined effectively with the final three nouns of Cicero's sentence.

[27] W III 286:33; cf also *Jerusalem* p. 199: 'was Gott gebunden hat, kann der Mensch nicht lösen.' Mendelssohn here uses the same principle to support his adherence to the Law, binding on Jews even should they convert.

[28] E.g. Michaelis, who conducted a polemical exchange with Mendelssohn after the publication of *Jerusalem* on the 39 articles controversy. The 39 articles were points of doctrine which bishops were required to swear to, and sign, upon their ordination in the Church of England.

practical point of Mendelssohn's abstract discussion. Just as the state was limited to an interest in actions, for Mendelssohn the church's proper remit was beliefs, and actions only insofar as they arose freely from beliefs; it could only secure them by persuasion, not by compulsion. This ruled out *Glaubenseide*,[29] which was a key step in Mendelssohn's argument for toleration: heterodoxy within Christianity must be sanctioned if the further step of equal rights for all faiths (based on the same principles) was to be compelling.

Mendelssohn's central objection to *Glaubenseide* is that *Gesinnungen* are inalienable, but he makes the supplementary point that ideas are slippery: it is hard to be sure precisely what we mean in conversation, let alone what we meant or thought we understood by the text of an abstract doctrinal oath. Disputes often turn out to have arisen from confusion about the definition of terms, and it is far from certain whether a given form of words matches our beliefs or not. Mendelssohn also points out that the institution of *Glaubenseide* is likely to lead to insincerity – as Hamann would put it, the separation of *Handlungen* and *Gesinnungen*. These arguments complement the main theoretical one.[30]

Hamann uses the element of language inherent in the question of *Glaubenseide* to attack Mendelssohn. The theory Hamann advances is different from that of the *Metakritik*, where the linguistic sign unites signifier and signified; here, it unites thought and action.

Although every action potentially expresses some inner disposition, words are the most direct and articulate case, and unlike other actions whose expressive aspect is secondary to their actual effect, expression is generally the primary function of words. Language would not exist without *Gesinnungen*, and it is the clearest trace they leave in the world. Speech is the place where *Handlungen* and *Gesinnungen* meet. It, and not rights in the state of nature, is for Hamann the true basis of the ability to make contracts:

> ... alle gesellschaftliche Verträge beruhen, nach dem Rechte der *Natur*, auf dem sittlichen Vermögen *Ja!* oder *Nein!* zu sagen, und auf der sittlichen Nothwendigkeit, das gesagte Wort wahr zu machen. Das sittliche Vermögen Ja! oder Nein! zu sagen gründet sich auf den natürlichen Gebrauch der

[29] For Mendelssohn's discussion of *Glaubenseide*, see J 131–7, and J 139f for a summary of the church's rights.

[30] Compare Lessing's position in *Das Testament Johannis*, for which see Chapter II on *Konxompax*.

> menschlichen Vernunft und Sprache; die sittliche Nothwendigkeit, sein gegebenes Wort zu erfüllen, darauf, daß unsere innere *Willenserklärung* nicht anders als mündlich oder schriftlich oder thätlich geäußert, geoffenbart und erkannt werden kann, und unsere Worte, als die natürlichen Zeichen unserer Gesinnungen, gleich Thaten, gelten müssen. Vernunft und Sprache sind allso das innere und äußere Band aller Geselligkeit ... (W III 300:22–32)

Their separation, Hamann goes on to say, abolishes faith and trust; the separation he means is when we mean one thing and say another ('Lüge und Trug', l. 35). Words are as irrevocable as deeds themselves – words are deeds. As the only possible expression of inner dispositions, words (and actions insofar as they express dispositions) are binding. The archetypal case of binding utterance is God's, as hinted by 'geoffenbart'. Hamann here treats all language as fundamentally performative. The case in point, the confessional oath, is indeed just that, a public declaration with the force of a commitment made in the utterance, even though it consists of propositions.

Metaphysically, language bridges the gap between mind and body. Language is the outward expression of inner dispositions; except in the case of introspection, it is as close as we can come to a knowledge of mind. That may seem a startling exception to make, but for Hamann the assumption of the Greek philosophical tradition – that the solitary individual constitutes a basic case and an epistemological starting-point – is undermined by what is the archetypal and primary instance of language, God's relationship with the creation and man's analogous relationship with it in His image:

> *Er spricht: so geschichts!* [Psalm 33:9] – 'und wie der Mensch alle Thiere nennen würde, sollten sie heissen' [Gen. 2:19]. – Nach diesem Vor- und Ebenbilde der *Bestimmtheit* sollte jedes Wort eines Mannes die Sache selbst seyn und bleiben. Auf diese Ähnlichkeit des Gepräges und der Überschrift mit dem Muster unseres Geschlechts und dem Meister unserer Jugend – auf dieses *Recht der Natur*, sich des *Worts*, als des eigentlichsten, edelsten und kräftigsten Mittels zur Offenbarung und Mittheilung unserer innigsten Willenserklärung zu bedienen, ist die Gültigkeit aller Verträge gegründet, und diese feste Burg der im Verborgenen liegenden Wahrheit ist aller welschen Praktik, Maschinerey, Schulfüchserey und Marktschreyerey überlegen. Der Misbrauch der Sprache und ihres natürlichen Zeugnisses ist also der gröbste *Meineid* und macht den Übertreter dieses ersten Gesetzes der Vernunft und ihrer Gerechtigkeit zum ärgsten Menschenfeinde ... (W III 301:18–31)

Just as God's creative word holds good, so does man's, made in this respect above all others in God's image. The naming of the animals gave Adam the power of reference, and with it reason. First he named them, then he could think – and talk – about the creation, which is the first given. The misuse of this power, whether in meaningless utterance or out-and-out lies, is pernicious; Hamann, swearing like Caliban, goes on to say that Frederick (the French-speaking 'Diable der Finsternis') is a prime example.

Language is not only the distinguishing human attribute[31] and mark of the divine image, but the medium of society. Language, not property, is the divine *a priori*:

> Fundamentum est iustitiae FIDES – dictorum *constantia* et *veritas*. – Est enim *primum*, quod cernitur in universi generis humani societate, eiusque vinculum est RATIO et ORATIO, quae conciliat inter se homines coniungitque naturali quadam societate. – – *Res a natura copulatas errore divellere*, fons est fraudium, maleficiorum, scelerum omnium.[32]

Hamann quotes sentences of Cicero out of context to summarise his own social theory; the false etymology which also appealed to Cicero suggests a close link between reason and speech. Leaving this aside[33] (its greatest relevance is to Hamann's attack on Kant in *Golgatha*'s companion piece, the *Metakritik*) Hamann's criticism of natural law is plain. The primacy of language undermines the individualism[34] which is the starting-point of Mendelssohn's social contract theory, because language already implies social relations and even moral expectations of 'straight talking' in the actual context of utterance. Truth and lies are deeds, Austinian performatives. Language is inherently ethical.

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[31] Schreiner draws attention to Luther's remarks to this effect in the preface to the Psalter, and their relevance for Hamann to this passage: 'Es ist ja ein stummer Mensch gegen einem redenden / schier als ein halb todter Mensch zu achten. Vnd kein krefftiger noch edler werck am Menschen ist / denn reden / Sintemal dr Mensch durchs reden von andern Thieren am meisten gescheiden wird / mehr denn durch die gestalt oder ander werck. Weil auch wol ein holtz kan eines Menschen gestalt durch Schnitzer kunst haben. Vnd ein Thier so wol sehen / hören / riechen / singen / gehen / stehen / essen / trincken / fasten / dürsten / Hunger / frost vnd hart lager leiden kan / als ein Mensch.' Luther, *Biblia* ..., Rogner & Bernhard, vol. I p. 965; Schreiner ad loc. Cf. Hamann's footnote 5 (p. 301), though the text is corrupt.

[32] W III 300:37–301:2. 'FAITH is the basis of justice – the constancy and truth of utterance. It is the first thing to be seen in every association of humankind, and its bond is REASON and SPEECH, which reconciles men to each other and joins them in a sort of natural society. – –The error of separating [these two] things joined by nature is the source of all deceit, wickedness and crime.'

[33] Hamann's focus on utterance is not materialist/behaviourist; he sees it as an alternative to Cartesian dualism. His rejection of dualism is not reductionist, but holistic. In rejecting private *Gesinnungen*, he is also rejecting dead *Handlungen*. The two go together.

[34] In fact Mendelssohn allows 'individuals and their families' in the state of nature; see J 118f on the family.

According to Hamann's conception, it is a perversion of language bordering on blasphemy to use empty words; yet that is precisely Mendelssohn's reason for opposing *Glaubenseide*: 'Religiöse Handlungen, ohne religiöse Gedanken, ist leeres Puppenspiel, kein Gottesdienst'[35] – that is his argument against applying sanctions to doctrines, an extrinsic motivation for an assent which can only be more than an empty token if it is spontaneous and sincere. The distinction between 'Handlungen' and 'Gesinnungen' by which Mendelssohn means to safeguard religious honesty is twisted by Hamann's reading into a recipe for undoing it, as if Mendelssohn advocated insincerity.

Though this is an utter distortion, it is is not a misunderstanding, but a way of putting forward a basic criticism: surely, Hamann insists, we can mean what we say when we make a declaration of faith? As in the *Metakritik*, he appeals to the common sense of the man in the street to imply that behind Mendelssohn's technical complexities there lurks absurdity. Hamann's argument is that by not meaning what we say – if we use empty technical language as a smokescreen – we turn from truth to darkness; Mendessohn on the other hand hopes the same technical discussion will help to prevent individuals from being forced into saying things they don't mean.

So Hamann is not really responding to Mendelssohn's argument at all, but making the same general criticism he had made of Kant: just their complexity and dryness condemn them; furthermore, these are an indication of sophistry and bad faith. Mendelssohn's real 'Lüge und Trug' lies in his incorrect religious principles, for which the theory of contracts is merely the diabolical window-dressing. It does not deserve to be taken seriously in itself, though the blasphemy it masks is a mortal threat. For Hamann, the problem of secular sanctions and rewards attaching to religious beliefs is simply irrelevant; his objection to Mendelssohn is that the religious principles on which he founds his liberalism are incompatible with true Christianity, and his way of thinking is a hubristic, perverted abuse of human reason.

[35] J 113, alluded to at W III 301:4 ('Puppenspiel').

Greeks and Jews: reason and the Law

The second part of *Jerusalem* aims to square Mendelssohn's model of the place of religion in society with his own religion, Judaism. The first half of *Jerusalem* argued that the church should have no power to compel either actions or beliefs,[36] but at the heart of Judaism stands the Mosaic Law, a body of religious prescriptions. The Law is also central to Hamann's Christianity, and he has a very different understanding of it – in a word, a typological one. The question at the centre of the second parts of both *Golgatha* and *Jerusalem* is: what should one do about the Law? This is a problem for Mendelssohn both as a Jew and as a philosopher – in Hamann's terminology, as both 'Jew' and 'Greek': how to reconcile the revealed prescriptions of the Law with the rational truths of religion. This was also the great problem facing the early church, and Hamann concurs with Luther's interpretation of the solution arrived at by St. Paul. The purpose of the Law is to bring home to us that we can only be justified by faith – the 'usus elenchticus legis'. For Hamann, the correct understanding of the Law is given – revealed – by and through Christ, who died on the cross to save us, and it is incompatible with any view of religious truths as based on reason: the Law and the gospel form a continuous revelation, and faith in it depends on an acceptance of divine authority and mercy, not on reason.

Mendelssohn opens the *Zweiter Abschnitt* with a discussion of the background of *Jerusalem* and some responses to Mendelssohn's preface to *Rettung der Juden*, including Michaelis's review. Cranz's pamphlet made the accusation 'der hauptsächlich diese Schrift veranlaßt hat' (J 152):

> Das bewafnete Kirchenrecht ist immer eine der vorzüglichsten Grundsteine der jüdischen Religion ... In wiefern können Sie, mein teurer Herr Mendelssohn, bey dem Glauben Ihrer Väter beharren, und durch Wegräumung seiner Grundsteine das ganze Gebäude erschüttern ...? (J 152f = J 80)

Mörschel, in the open letter appended to *Das Forschen*, went so far as to accuse Mendelssohn of being a deist, and called upon him either to refute Christianity or to convert. Mendelssohn refuses to be drawn on to this dangerous ground, but defends the foundation of religion on reason:

> Es ist wahr: ich erkenne keine andere ewige Vernunftwahrheiten, als die der menschlichen Vernunft nicht nur begreiflich, sondern durch menschliche Kräfte

[36] '[Der Kirche] kann also niemals ein Zwangsrecht zukommen, und den Mitgliedern kann keine Zwangspflicht gegen dieselbe aufgelegt werden.' J 128.

> dargethan und bewährt werden können. Nur darin täuscht ihn ein unrichtiger Begriff vom Judentum, wenn er glaubt, ich könne dieses nicht behaupten, ohne von der Religion meiner Väter abzuweichen. Ich halte dieses vielmehr für einen wesentlichen Punkt der jüdischen Religion ... ich glaube, das Judentum wisse von keiner geoffenbarten Religion ... Die Israeliten haben göttliche *Gesetzgebung*. Gesetze, Gebote, Befehle, Lebensregeln ... um zur zeitlichen und ewigen Glükseligkeit zu gelangen; dergleichen Sätze und Vorschriften sind ihnen durch Mosen auf eine wunderbare und übernatürliche Weise geoffenbaret worden; aber keine Lehrmeinungen, keine Heilswahrheiten, keine allgemeine Vernunftsätze. Diese offenbaret der Ewige uns, wie allen übrigen Menschen, allezeit durch *Natur* und *Sache*, nie durch *Wort* und *Schriftzeichen*. (J 156f)

Mendelssohn identifies three kinds of facts: *a priori* truths (accessible to reason alone), laws of nature (regularities which we come to know through observation, by inference) and contingent historical truths for which we depend on report. The Mosaic Law belongs in the third category, and in Mendelssohn's account it prescribes actions, not beliefs. Since there are therefore no revealed dogmas, the doctrine of Jewish religion can be based entirely on reason. However, the laws constantly recall the eternal rational truths on which they are based: 'die Gesetze und Lehren verhalten sich gegen einander, wie Körper und Seele' (J 166) – a different metaphor, but the same idea as 'letter' and 'spirit'. Their interpretation was the pedagogical heart of Judaism, oral teaching which cemented the bonds of society. For this reason, he says, it was originally forbidden to record interpretations of the Law in writing.[37]

There follows an excursus (J 171–83) on the origin of writing and its tendency to encourage mysticism. Then Mendelssohn describes the Law in operation; its sanctions were legitimate because the complete unity of 'church' and state[38] meant religious transgressions, considered simply as actions, were tantamount to insurrection.[39] Although the Law is not essential to salvation, because it is a contingent historical revelation rather than a universal rational one (J 161), it is still binding on those who received it: 'was Gott gebunden hat, kann der Mensch nicht lösen ... Von dem Gesetze können wir mit gutem Gewissen nicht weichen, und was nützen euch

[37] J 168f. Mendelssohn points to the bookish eighteenth century as an example of the dangers of written culture, which – rather like television in our time – supplants human intercourse: 'Der Lehrer auf dem Catheder liest seine geschriebene Hefte ab. Alles ist todter Buchstabe; nirgends Geist der lebendigen Unterhaltung. Wir lieben und zürnen in Briefen, zanken und vertragen uns in Briefen, unser ganzer Umgang ist Briefwechsel, und wenn wir zusammen kommen, so kennen wir keine andere Unterhaltung, als spielen oder *vorlesen*' (p. 169f).

[38] '... bis auf die geringste Polizeyanstalt, war alles *gottesdienstlich*.' J 193.

[39] J 195. As evidence, Mendelssohn cites the suspension of such punishments after the destruction of the second temple, when the Jewish state ceased to exist.

Mitbürger ohne Gewissen?' – namely, if they nonetheless converted (J 199; 200). Mendelssohn concludes that to restrict doctrine to any agreed form of words would merely stifle debate: 'Glaubensvereinigung ist nicht Toleranz' (J 203). The 'common rational core' would cease to be rational if it were made into a new orthodoxy, because the essence of reason is living discussion.

This reading of Judaism says nothing overtly about Christianity, and it has no need to since its aim is to demonstrate the compatibility of Judaism with the doctrine of freedom of conscience. However, it would be hard to make a similar case for Christianity. Though Mendelssohn's account sometimes seems forced,[40] it is more plausible than a Christianity without articles of faith. For Hamann, this distinction was untenable, because the Mosaic Law is also in the Christian Old Testament, 'Es gehet ihrer beiden Sache an.' The only proper interpretation was the Christian one. Still more uncongenial to Hamann, and highly reminiscent of Starck's views in the *Betrachtungen*, was the idea of a religion founded on reason and not revelation. Though Mendelssohn's discussion concerns Judaism and not Christianity, his view of the proper place of prescribed dogma in religion – the liberal theory of freedom of conscience developed in part one of *Jerusalem* – was meant to apply to any and every religion. For Hamann, the Old Testament was, rightly understood, a Christian revelation, quite as important to Christianity as the metaphor of the lower and upper storeys – Judaism and Christianity – suggests; it was not an 'Elementarbuch', but a divine revelation 'durch Wort und Schriftzeichen'.

Mendelssohn's excursus on writing is not a digression, but relates implicitly to the controversy about 'symbolische Bücher'. Mendelssohn demonstrates the absence of a fixed body of doctrine within Judaism,[41] but says nothing about Christianity. Although there had been no 'eidliche Symbolverpflichtung' in Prussia since 1713 (Aner, p. 266), heterodox teaching elsewhere did attract sanctions and it was felt that a resolution of the issue in principle would secure freedom of conscience against a possible backlash under Frederick's successor.[42] The chief argument against

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[40] Especially the assertion that the Jewish state was not a theocracy; Mendelssohn has no argument except that it was unique: 'Warum suchet ihr ein Geschlechtswort, für ein einzelnes Ding, das kein Geschlecht hat, das mit nichts schichtet, mit nichts unter eine Rubrik zu bringen ist? Diese Verfassung ist ein einziges Mal da gewesen: nennet sie die *mosaische Verfassung*, bey ihrem Einzelnamen.' J 196. However, it does seem reasonable to say that Judaism is founded on observance, not doctrine.

[41] J 167f. 'Niemand durfte Symbola beschwören, niemand ward auf Glaubensartikel beeidiget' (p. 167).

[42] Aner, p. 267ff. See also Cranz's plea to Mendelssohn to seize the tolerant moment, quoted above.

the practice was that it led to an ossification of doctrine and a misplaced emphasis on doctrine in the abstract rather than the text and teaching of the Bible;[43] these are Mendelssohn's reasons for favouring the focus he sees within Judaism on action. He recounts how hieroglyphic writing led to idolatry when the Egyptians, misunderstanding the referential character of their symbols, mistook them for things in their own right (J 176f); priests were inevitably tempted to use iconic mysticism as a cover for ignorance (J 177), and fixed symbolic representations lend themselves to misinterpretation within their context of origin just as much as to outsiders.[44] The Pythagoreans contemplated numbers, which have no mimetic component, but still slid into mysticism (J 182f).

> Bilder und Bilderschrift führen zu Aberglauben und Götzendienst, und unsere alphabetische Schreiberey macht den Menschen gar zu spekulativ. Sie legt die symbolische Erkenntniß der Dinge gar zu offen auf der Oberfläche aus, überhebt uns der Mühe des Eindringens und Forschens, und macht zwischen Lehr und Leben eine gar zu weite Trennung. (J 184)

According to Mendelssohn, the ceremonial law was conceived to overcome these tendencies; Judaism's defining feature, widely regarded by the Enlightenment as conservative, primitive, and irrational, was the very thing that made it a profoundly reasonable religion.

Mendelssohn argues on p. 166f that when the Jews are exhorted to faith, that is not a commandment to believe propositions such as 'there is only one God' (Deut. 4:39), where a verb of knowing is used, but an encouragement to have a faithful attitude, 'Vertrauen, Zuversicht'. This distinction is important to his view that the Old Testament revelation does not directly enjoin belief in any doctrines, only the performance of actions. According to Mendelssohn's account, this is why it was forbidden to discuss doctrine in writing; the fixed form of writing – just like the fatally careful wording of *Glaubenseide*, themselves then a text to be interpreted – might lead to a mystical veneration of the letter, and on the other hand once a dogma is fixed, it has authority as well as reason on its side, whereas free and rational discussion would preserve and bring out the true spirit of the Law. This turns on its head the Pauline account of the Law – that it is only fulfilled in Christ – as well as amounting to an implicit criticism of the doctrinal disputes that have riven the church throughout its history.

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[43] I.e. it is too 'Catholic'. Aner, p. 264.

[44] The Hindu image of the earth supported on a tortoise, a snake and a bear originally had an abstract and rational signification. J 180f. This was a stock example, cf. Locke, *Essay*, 2.32.2.

Overview of Hamann's response

Hamann's response to the second part of *Jerusalem* has two main strands. His own understanding is that Christianity is the historical fulfilment of the Old Testament. Christ came not to destroy the Law, but to fulfil it (Matt. 5:17). The New Testament is continuous with the Old; but this entails interpreting the latter as a specifically Christian revelation, incompatible with Judaism. The Jews were wrong not to acknowledge the Messiah. Mendelssohn's radical interpretation of the Law as an implicit revelation of natural religion was doubly unwelcome to Hamann because it introduced a new error that threatened Christianity itself. In the Pauline terms familiar from *Konxompax*, Mendelssohn was not only a 'Jew', but a 'Greek'. Philosophical theology, just as much as the Jewish preoccupation with ritual, was a form of idolatry; it was fostered and applied by the despot of Berlin, Frederick the Great.

For Hamann, what were in the view of many of his contemporaries[45] the epistemologically third-rate historical truths which make up the specifically Jewish, non-universal, and therefore contingent component of Judaism are the non-negotiable core of Christianity, misunderstood by Jews because they do not recognise the further revelation of Christ, in whom the true meaning of the Law first came to light. The key fact of the incarnation is historical, inaccessible to unaided reason. The desire to encompass the most fundamental truths in that all-too-human faculty is a reprise of the hubris of Babel. These two points are related: historical faith motivates suspicion of philosophical religion; conversely, natural religion undermines orthodoxy. *Golgatha* is unusual in that, because of the particular text that provoked it, Hamann gives a lot of space to explicit positive statement of his own historical theology. This is helpful for the modern reader, but it was an entirely orthodox position that would have been familiar to any theologically literate person at the time, outdated though it may have seemed; the glancing scriptural allusions to the central doctrine of 'Christ crucified' found in other works would have been clear enough for them. Hamann's explicit formulations here arise from his parody of Mendelssohn's own remarks about

[45] English deism had been particularly hostile to the Old Testament, sometimes with antisemitic overtones. Mendelssohn is keen to establish that it will serve as a vehicle for rational religion; Hamann's esteem for the Old Testament is diametrically opposed to such an interpretation.

faith. It was precisely this notion of historical faith against which the likes of Starck, Steinbart – and in Hamann's eyes Lessing, Kant and Mendelssohn – were reacting.

The confrontation, in the second section from p. 303 to p. 315, between Hamann's orthodox 'historicher Glaube' and Mendelssohn's Enlightened religion, together with its political aspect, is both the core of *Golgatha* as a text and what links it most clearly to the complex of concerns which, I argue, shapes and motivates all Hamann's output of the late 1770s and early 1780s. Given this framework it is, by Hamann's standards, relatively straighforward to interpret; but since that is the claim I seek to demonstrate, it makes sense to focus especially on these eleven pages, which are still not without their difficulties.

This section of the text is largely concerned with Hamann's Christian understanding of the Old Testament. Two paragraphs on p. 309f offer a sustained consideration of 'philosophy', and Hamann then returns to his typological theory, now emphasising the actual coming of the Messiah rather than the prediction of this in the Pentateuch. From p. 312 onwards, he explores the expression of the errors of both 'Greeks' and 'Jews' in the atheistic tendency of his contemporaries.

Detail

To Mendelssohn's eternal rational truths Hamann opposes 'unaufhörlich zeitliche [Wahrheiten]' (303:36–7),

> *Thatsachen*, die durch einen Zusammenhang von Ursachen und Wirkungen in einem Zeitpunct und Erdraum *wahr* geworden, und also nur von diesem Punct der Zeit und des Raums als *wahr* gedacht werden können, und durch Autorität bestätigt werden müssen. (304:33–37)

The incarnation of Christ, the central truth claimed by Christianity, was revealed in history and in scripture; the recognition, or not, of Christ as the Messiah is the key difference between Christianity and Judaism – not, as Mendelssohn maintains, the Law (J 157), the Christian *Umwertung*[46] of which depends on the incarnation as its justification.

[46] Matt. 5:17–18; cf. Romans 3:31.

For this reason, Hamann rejects Mendelssohn's opposition between specific scriptural revelation and universal, rational, natural revelation (J 157); the Old Testament is not, as Mendelssohn maintained, a vehicle – through debate and study – for rational religious truths, but for Christian revelation. The Law could only be properly understood as the 'Schatten von *zukünftigen Gütern*' (W III 304:18; Hebr. 10:1), and Moses was Christ's 'Vorbild' (305:39; Deut. 18:18):

> ... die ganze Mythologie der hebräischen Haushaltung war nichts als ein *Typus* einer transcendenteren Geschichte, der *Horoskop* eines himmlischen Helden, durch dessen Erscheinung alles bereits vollendet ist und noch werden wird, was in ihrem Gesetze und ihren Propheten geschrieben steht[47]

The picture is only completed by future events in salvation history, '*Geschichtswahrheiten* nicht nur *vergangener* sondern auch *zukünftiger Zeiten*' (305:2f, see also 311:17–36); '... die ganze Geschichte des Judentums war *Weissagung*' (311:17).

This typological understanding goes back to St. Paul:

> Gleichwie daher Moses selbst nicht wußte, daß sein Antlitz eine glänzende Klarheit hatte, die dem Volke Furcht einjagte: so war auch die ganze Gesetzgebung dieses göttlichen Ministers ein bloßer Schleier und Vorhang der alten Bundesreligion ...[48]

Israel at the time of Moses was not able to see the light. The true significance of the Old Testament revelation, which embraces salvation through Christ, the Messiah, must be accepted on scriptural authority (bottom of p. 304) and through faith (305).

The following long paragraph (305–6) continues the discussion of the place of Moses and the Mosaic Law in Christianity, basically outlining the orthodox view; the point is that that is incompatible with Mendelssohn's. But there is a twist in the tail: Mendelssohn's misreading is not only as a 'Jew', but also – and more profoundly – as a 'Greek'. Lothar Schreiner's formulation in his commentary on *Golgatha* cannot be bettered. After referring to Hamann's early idea, based on Luther's 'usus elenchticus legis', that reason, like the Law, is there to convince us of its insufficiency as a road to God, and so show us the true way – faith – he concludes: 'Mose ist der Name für Gesetz und dieses der Typus der Vernunft.'[49] Moses stands for the Law, but

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[47] W III 308:29–33; cf. 311:3–4 for comparison with hieroglyphs.

[48] 304:22–25; cf. II Cor. ch. 3, especially from v. 14 on.

[49] Schreiner 111; cf. above Chapter I, note 18.

the theological error that represents is exemplified in the age of Enlightenment by reason; the temptation to idolatry now embodied in reason was formerly offered by the Law. Ultimately, it is the same error, just in a guise suited to the times. Indeed, it is a 'sign of the times'; Hamann's tone is apocalyptic. Though his objections to Mendelssohn here and in much of *Golgatha* are framed as objections to Judaism, the real point is Mendelssohn's proximity to 'Vernunftreligion'. This is made explicit in the 'also' at the opening of the following paragraph (p. 306), which turns without comment – or even a link, except for 'also' – from Jewish idolatry to 'Lehrmeinungen der Philosophie'.

Dressing the disagreement up in these Mosaic clothes suits both the language of Mendelssohn's book, which presents at some length a theory of the Law, and Hamann's typological view that there was a genuine continuity between the forms taken by the struggle between God and mammon throughout the ages, making the analogy entirely legitimate. There was a further advantage. The choice language in which the Bible condemns idolatry exactly suited the attitude to reason Hamann wanted to advance, as well as the pose he wanted to strike; it lent both familiarity and the highest authority to his untimely stance. It provided just the right prophetic tone.

The paragraph on the Law (305f) gives an account of Israel's wrong turn. Abraham's faith was true, but Moses was not allowed to enter the Promised Land. The changes Jewish religion underwent during the Egyptian captivity were an attempt to preserve it in coded form, but the Jews turned to worshipping the code rather than the message. A Christian view can interpret this history typologically as part of the revelation of Christ, 'eines andern Propheten, dessen Erweckung [Moses] seinen Brüdern und ihren Nachkommen verhieß'.[50] But instead the Jews worshipped the Golden Calf, 'unter dem Schein göttlicher *Vernunft*', turning away from the Word. Moses, standing also metonymically for the Law, became their 'Pope' – the object of misplaced and uncritical veneration – and the Law became the object of idolatry; the house of prayer has become a den of thieves, and Jerusalem, the city of Christ ('der Blutbräutigam'), 'eine babylonische Metze und Schule des herrschenden Anklägers, Verläumders, Lügners und Mörders von Anfang.' This

[50] J 305f, cf. also 310:36–312:3 for an exposition of Hamann's typological approach.

needs a little unpacking. The 'Mörder von Anfang' is the devil (John 8:44, where Jesus is criticising the Jews in the temple, and accuses them of belonging to the devil's party), so the city of Jerusalem, standing for Mendelssohn's book and presumably also for the Prussian capital in which it was written, is a diabolical school of lies; more than that, it is a 'babylonische Metze'. Babylon, a name Hamann often uses for Berlin, is Babel, where the construction of the famous tower was punished by the confusion of tongues. 'Metze' alludes to Baruch 6:9. This chapter – not found in most bibles, but included by Luther – contains a letter written by Jeremiah to the Jews entering Babylonian captivity in which he describes and warns them against the idolatrous practices they will encounter there. The idols, which have forked tongues, like the serpent in the Garden of Eden, are dressed up in gold 'wie eine Metze zum Tanz', though the priests, debauched as well as false, steal the gold to pay for real whores. The same idolatry and confusion, it is implied, is reflected in Mendelssohn's book. The constellation of ideas Hamann uses to make this point is familiar from *Konxompax* and the *Metakritik*.

In the paragraph (306:14–35) following his account of the significance of Moses, Hamann accuses Mendelssohn of all the superstitions associated with the letter of the Law that he in fact carefully denied, saying that it is actually Christianity that avoids them. But he adds to the list 'Lehrmeinungen der Philosophie', where Mendelssohn has simply 'Lehrmeinungen' (J 157), which he there describes as the province of reason, not revelation. The implication is that Mendelssohn's truths of reason are the object of idolatrous mystical veneration; furthermore, Hamann's long list of quotations of Mendelssohn on language mysticism must be taken as applying to 'Philosophie', which opens the chain of anaphora. The 'also' of the first sentence also links the 'Lehrmeinungen der Philosophie' back to the Old Testament errors catalogued in the previous paragraph, creating an equation between Jewish legalism, natural religion, mysticism and idolatry. To all this is contrasted the orthodox Christian revelation, of which Hamann understands the Old Testament to be a part.

The first paragraph on p. 307 links Enlightened despotism, the Mosaic Law, Mendelssohn's philosophy, and natural religion, with a dig at Mendelssohn's praise of the oral tradition within Judaism. The reference to Frederick – 'Königlich' and 'Despot', lines 5 and 8 – is indirect, but if Hamann simply meant to attack Jewish legalism, this would have to be personification, and it is not clear what the point would be. Assuming a reference to the Prussian regime is intended, it implies a society of slaves regimented by excessive regulation.

The following two paragraphs, up to the bottom of p. 308, develop Hamann's Christian interpretation of the history of Israel. Mendelssohn's diplomatic answer to the question of the best form of government was that it depended on the circumstances (J 111); Hamann draws a parallel between this and God's 'Politik', which evaluated Abraham – who had faith without the Law – differently from Moses. But the Jews lost the key to this history, and the 'Rabbinen göttlicher Vernunft' went down the path of narrow literalism, misappropriating[51] the Law. Hamann alludes to Mendelssohn's account of how, after the destruction of the temple, the Jews suspended the injunction against discussing the Law in writing, departing from the oral principle Mendelssohn holds up; Mendelssohn refers to this as a 'Zerstörung des Gesetzes' (J 169), creating an irresistible opportunity for Hamann to agree that that is just what the Jews did.

The next paragraph continues this account. The Messiah arose 'gleich einem Schmetterlinge' out of 'dem leeren Raupengespinnste und der todten Puppengestalt des Judentums';[52] this is clear for all to see, like Mendelssohn's universal rational truths, but he (the 'Sophist', 308:16) is too caught up in his speculative hypotheses to perceive 'die Stimme des leisen Menschenverstandes vor dem Gebrüll seiner Artillerie'. Hamann implies that he himself is the 'reasonable' one, though in his own way, whereas Mendelssohn is caught up in sophistry. How could the Mosaic Law, designed for desert nomads, still be meant to apply to the Jews of the diaspora? No, its purpose was as an

[51] As Schreiner explains, the 'III literae' are F U R , as thieves were branded in Rome; Schreiner p. 118.

[52] Compare the fugitive butterfly of *Ernst und Falk*, also a symbol of the spirit as opposed to the letter. If Hamann was thinking of this, he is here reclaiming for Christianity an image that stood for the secularisation of that piece of Christian discourse.

indirect revelation of the coming of the Messiah, 'ein *Typus* einer transcendenteren Geschichte, der *Horoskop* eines himmlischen Helden'.[53]

The two paragraphs from 308:36–309:26 round off Hamann's estimate of the importance of Moses on a positive note. Genesis ('die allerälteste Urkunde') is worth more than the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* put together; and the Jew is 'der eigentliche ursprüngliche *Edelmann* des ganzen menschlichen Geschlechts'. This is a dig at the German aristocracy, of which Hamann had had unhappy personal experience in service as a *Hofmeister*. It also may imply some sympathy with Mendelssohn's actual aim in writing *Jerusalem*, the emancipation of the Jews; this issue is otherwise not touched on in *Golgatha*.

Hamann now turns from Judaism to contemporary philosophy – though perhaps 'intellectual life' would put it better. The next two paragraphs (309:27–310:35) combine general remarks with specific references to Kant, Lessing, Mendelssohn and Frederick, who was of course also an author. On p. 311 Hamann returns to the question of the interpretation of Jewish history.

Greek philosophy, which Hamann writes off as childish, has become fashionable in the age of Enlightenment, with the result that, like Israel, it does not even know God: 'The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master's crib; but Israel doth not know, my people doth not consider' (Isaiah 1:3). Hamann's typological reading takes the 'crib' as a reference to Christ. The result is 'systematischer Atheismus'; through Hamann's parody it becomes clear that this is a specific reference to Kant, whose system is founded on oriental fables and other insubstantial 'Kindereyen'.

The following paragraph (310:7–35), which will need to be unpicked in some detail, turns briefly to Lessing, by now known to have been the author of *Erziehung*, but Frederick, who calls the tune at Berlin, is the real target of the whole elaborate chain of associations; this only becomes clear towards the bottom of the page. Mendelssohn's speculative tendency – which Hamann demonstrates by misrepresentation – is akin to Frederick's irreligious intellectual sympathies.

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[53]W 308:30–31. Note the echo of Kant in 'transcendent', and also in 'a priori und a posteriori' at the end of the following paragraph. There does not seem to be a specific point to these references beyond the appropriation of the terminology for Hamann's Christian purposes.

The first sentence contains an allusion to Frederick's role in the philosophical distortion of religion:

> Seitdem sich aber die *Götter* der *Erde* zu allerhöchsten *Philosophen* selbst creirt, hat sich *Jupiter* (weiland *summus philosophus*!) in die Gugucksgestalt eines *Pädagogen* verkriechen müssen

The 'Götter der Erde' (an allusion to J 107, where Mendelssohn is discussing Hobbes) are the holders of secular authority. Jupiter – like Zeus in Plato, shorthand for the idea of a monotheistic God – used to be seen by the proponents of philosophical religion as the supreme philosopher,[54] but now that place has been usurped by the 'Götter der Erde'. Frederick's philosophical pretensions, and especially his *Essai sur l'amour-propre, envisagé comme principe de morale*, attacked by Hamann in *Konxompax*,[55] mean that he is setting himself up as an entirely secular authority in God's place. God is therefore now reduced – in Lessing's view of the workings of providence – to the role of pedagogue, the educator of the human race. Taking 'pedagogue' in its etymological sense as 'one who leads (away) a boy', Hamann alludes to the rape of Ganymede; but rather than appearing in the form of an eagle, Zeus/Jupiter is reduced to a mere cuckoo; the implication is that Lessing's idea is not up to much.

Mendelssohn disagrees with Lessing – after all, he was unlikely to want to see Christianity as a more advanced stage than Judaism. But, Hamann objects, he too has a pedagogical view of religion, given the value he places on oral discussion of the Law.[56] Furthermore, Hamann criticises Mendelssohn's theory of writing. Mendelssohn argued that writing could refer directly to things without the intermediate step of spoken language, giving the example of the congenitally deaf (J 174); the point of Mendelssohn's assertion was to explain how alphabetic writing could arise from hieroglyphic writing. Hamann's disagreement recalls the mock argument of the *Metakritik* about the relation between sound and meaning; there, he mentioned Samuel Heinecke, the teacher of the congenitally deaf (W III 286:8). The issue for Hamann in the *Metakritik* was that philosophy should keep its feet on the ground of natural language, otherwise, should it imagine it had

[54]The 'summus philosophus' is usually Aristotle; Spinoza called Christ 'summus philosophus', and it is an attractive supposition that Hamann is alluding to this. Even if not, the somewhat overcondensed association of philosophers, their conception of the deity and God is shown in the attribution to Jupiter of the title 'summus philosophus'.

[55] Hamann scathingly refers to 'purpurne Selbstliebe', W III 222:29; see the discussion in Chapter II on *Konxompax*, p. 51.

[56]W III 310:14; of course, the 'pedagogy' in question has only the word in common.

discovered the Leibnizian universal character, inspired by Chinese ideographic writing (289:9), it ran the risk of degenerating into mysticism.[57] That is precisely Mendelssohn's argument for oral rather than written discussion of the Law, but Hamann seizes on Mendelssohn's assertion that the written word can refer directly to things to accuse him of just this confusion; it enables him to think of 'das Unermeßliche als meßbar, und umgekehrt' (310:31). This is a misquotation of part of Mendelssohn's discussion of the development of alphabetic writing (J 175); here, Hamann's point, entirely unrelated to Mendelssohn's – which is, very roughly, about phonemes – is to imply that Mendelssohn imagines he can fathom the unfathomable, God, while on the other hand ('umgekehrt' is Hamann's addition) he is blind to the obvious.

The end of the paragraph applies the long chain of thought behind this decidedly perverse dig at Mendelssohn to the target hinted at at the beginning of the paragraph, Frederick, the 'Imperator zu Pekin' – and specifically his *De la littérature allemande*, of which Hamann takes a dim view, not least because it was not written in German. Frederick has ignored the actual language German literature is written in, as if the texts could refer directly to ideas while bypassing the language, in this case German. This idea does not quite work, but Hamann's real concern is to associate Frederick, the least of whose sins is a poor understanding of literature, with the philosophical error of the Enlightenment – abstraction, reification, speculation; here, specifically disregard for natural language – and its religious consequences.

My rather involved analysis of this passage – though it still passes over many details – shows that Hamann, while thinking in these pages about theological issues, blamed Frederick for a certain Enlightened strand of philosophical reflection on religion; the constellation of ideas – the hubris of reason, the folly of reason if it does not keep its feet on the ground of common sense natural language – is familiar from other contexts. It is also a good example of how Hamann often constructs his chain of thought. The links are elaborate and considered, but the mode is largely associative rather than analytical – Lessing has a 'pedagogical' view of salvation, so does Mendelssohn; Mendelssohn's pedagogy is 'speculative', so is Frederick's philosophy – and often

[57] Hamann actually alludes to Mendelssohn's statement that 'unsere alphabetische Schreiberey macht den Menschen zu spekulativ' (J 184) against him, even though it puts them on the same side of the question, at 306:15f.

entirely without regard for the sense in their own context of ideas alluded to or quoted. This is not an oversight, but a systematically applied method.

These two paragraphs, aimed against 'philosophy', follow Hamann's long discussion of Moses and the Law. The next page (up to the first few lines of 312) reiterates and makes more explicit the idea that the proper way to read the Old Testament is as a typological prophecy of the Messiah. The structure of Hamann's text, which mentions 'philosophy' before it mentions the failure to believe in the Messiah, implies that the error in Mendelssohn's understanding of the Law has as much to do with Enlightened philosophy as with Jewish theology, and that lack of faith in the Messiah is more than merely a Jewish failing. It seems Hamann is not interested in refuting Judaism, but in his disagreement with philosophical religion.

According to what follows in the paragraph beginning at the bottom of p. 310, the history of Israel is indeed an 'Elementarbuch', just as Lessing said, but it should be understood typologically, as a 'Fingerzeig auf die ... Staatspläne der göttlichen Regierung über die ganze Schöpfung von ihrem *Anfange* bis zu ihrem *Ausgange*'; the riddle of the Law, Hamann continues, is reflected in the ruin of the Jewish nation, its purpose to illuminate the whole world.[58] 'Fingerzeig' is the word used by Mendelssohn in his parallel account of the pedagogical value of the Law, a 'Fingerzeig auf religiose Lehren und Gesinnungen' (J 169). This paragraph begins with several allusions to the text of *Jerusalem* that together suggest that Mendelssohn, with his rather different preoccupations, has missed the point of the Old Testament. For instance, the clause 'Wenn sich aber alles menschliche Wissen auf wenige Fundamentalbegriffe einschränken läßt' is taken by Hamann to refer to the fundamental tenets of Christianity, which in his view are *Geschichtswahrheiten*, whereas Mendelssohn was thinking of Maimonides' project to distil the key principles of Judaism.[59] What is

[58]The typological resonance of Hamann's quotation ('Tröpflein' etc.) from Micah in l. 13 is clearer in context: 'And the remnant of Jacob shall be in the midst of many people as a dew from the Lord, as the showers upon the grass, that tarrieth not for man, nor waiteth for the sons of man. And the remnant of Jacob shall be among the Gentiles in the midst of many people ...' Micah 5:7–8; the combined images of dew and rain recall the prophetic vocation of Moses: 'Give ear, o ye heavens, and I will speak; and hear, o earth, the words of my mouth. My doctrine shall drop as the rain, my speech shall distil as the dew, as the small rain on the tender herb, and as the showers upon the grass: Because I will publish the name of the Lord ...' (Deut. 32:1–3). Note the apocalyptic resonance of 'Ausgang', contrasting the Bible's cyclical view of history with Lessing's concept of ever upward progress in *Erziehung*.

[59]Hamann quotes from J 168, where Mendelssohn refers to science, but see the discussion of Maimonides and the 'Jewish catechism' on the previous page.

implied is rational principles, and that smacked of the philosophical religion attacked in Hamann's previous paragraph.

The rest of p. 311 details the messianic expectation encoded in the history of Israel; it both summarises much of what was said in the preceding pages and makes it more explicit. The reference in l. 20 to Christ as 'Ideal' recalls Hamann's mockery of Kant's use of the term 'Ideal' for God, or rather for the generalised notion of a supreme being inevitably arrived at by speculative reason. Hamann calls the fundamental historical truths of Christianity '*zeitlich* und *ewig*', (l. 37) in opposition to Mendelssohn's distinction between eternal rational truths and merely historical ones. Going over the page, the contrast between 'Glaubensflügel' and 'Handlungsfesseln' picks up Mendelssohn's reference to 'Glaubensfesseln' in his discussion of Jewish doctrine on J 167, which he said is quite unlike the dogmatic constraints of Christian creeds. Hamann's 'metamosaische Handlungsfesseln' are the obligations of Jewish ritual; the implication is that Mendelssohn's alternative to dogmatic Christianity has none of the advantages it professes; far from being rational (Greek), it is legalistic (Jewish).

The next three pages are Hamann's peroration, a jeremiad against the godless present and the powers that be. Now that he has advanced the theological dubiousness of Mendelssohn's view of the Law, and drawn the analogy between that and the place of reason in Enlightenment, Hamann turns to the political order that has fostered this turn away from the Lord.

The long paragraph on p. 312 begins with the declaration that '*Unglaube* ... ist also die einzige Sünde gegen den *Geist* der wahren Religion ...' Though 'also' links back to the preceding discussion of Judaism's failure to recognise that Jesus is the Messiah, the argument moves from this specifically Jewish error to present Prussian circumstances. The effect of this is to draw a parallel between the theological errors of Judaism and the wrongs of the Berlin establishment. Up to line 17, Hamann – using a mixture of quotations from the Bible and from *Jerusalem* – states that Christianity calls for faith not works. He then uses Mendelssohn's conception of the relationship of the church to the state as a bridge. Mendelssohn's formulations

are necessarily abstract, because they are meant to embrace synagogue, church and mosque; and he defines church in opposition to state within the framework of his theory of rights: 'Oeffentliche Anstalten zur Bildung des Menschen, die sich auf Verhältnisse des Menschen zu Gott beziehen, nenne ich *Kirche*; – zum Menschen, *Staat*' (J 110). Hamann lumps the two together as subjecting 'Dogmatik und Kirchenrecht' to 'obrigkeitliche Willkühr'; such institutions – both the state itself, and any 'church' in a cosy relationship with it – are in the service not of true religion, but of 'envy and selfish ambition';[60] they are

> *irrdisch*, *menschlich* und *teufelisch* nach dem Einfluß welscher Cardinäle oder welscher Ciceroni, poetischer Beichtväter oder prosaischer Bauchpfaffen, und nach dem abwechselnden System des statistischen Gleich- und Übergewichts, oder bewaffneter Toleranz und Neutralität[.] – Kirchen- und Schulwesen haben, wie Creaturen und Misgeburten des Staats und der Vernunft, sich beiden oft eben so niederträchtig verkauft, als selbige verrathen; Philosophie und Politik haben zu allen ihren gemeinschaftlichen Täuschungen und Gewaltthätigkeiten das Schwert des Aberglaubens und den Schild des Unglaubens nöthig gehabt, und so wohl durch ihre *Liebe* als durch ihren *Haß* die *Dogmatik* ärger gemishandelt, denn Amnon die Schwester seines Bruders Absalom –[61]

This is difficult to disentangle in detail, but overall it is a strong statement against the powers that be. The key point is that philosophy and politics are linked. That Prussian circumstances in particular are meant is apparent from the conjunction of motifs Hamann habitually employs against Frederick, such as anti-Catholic language – strictly inapplicable to protestant Prussia, and borrowed from Luther, who used it equally loosely – and from parallel passages in *Golgatha* itself, especially the mention of the 'Imperator zu Pekin' on p. 310. The concluding reference to the story of Tamar (II Sam. 13) recalls Hamann's use of the same episode in his letter of 1st June 1759 to J.G. Lindner, discussed in the first chapter; the rape and then rejection ('*Liebe*' and '*Haß*') of Tamar by her brother Amnon was a terrible wrong that cried out for vengeance.

It was an important step in Mendelssohn's argument to say that man could not have duties to God in the same way as to man, because man and god are not commensurate beings; so the church has no right to make demands in the name of God. Though this seems clear enough if stated 'in trockenen Worten', Mendelssohn argues, the idea of such duties has gained currency

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[60] James 3:16, in the NRSV's translation. Hamann quotes from the previous verse, 312:23f.

[61] W III 312:24–35. 'Beichtväter ... Bauchpfaffen' looks like a reference to Starck, who was for a time Hamann's confessor.

and infected everyone's 'innere Säfte' to some extent.[62] Hamann, who believes that man's duty to God is the only absolute one – see the first motto of *Golgatha*, and the discussion in part one of man's dependent relation to God – adapts Mendelssohn's words in the paragraph beginning at the bottom of p. 312 in order to turn this upside down, continuing the attack of the previous paragraph on the drily named 'Anstalten'. It is Mendelssohn's idea of the church, the 'öffentliche Bildungsanstalten, die sich auf Verhältnisse des Menschen zu Gott beziehen', that infects minds; and philosophy, by privileging human reason, puts man on an equal footing with God – wrongly. But the 'unendliches Misverhältnis' of God and man, God's utter superiority as father and creator, makes a nonsense of this. The only way to bridge the gap is if man participates in the nature of God, or if God assumes human form – the incarnation. 'Die *Juden*,' however, 'haben sich durch ihre *göttliche Gesetzgebung*, und die *Naturalisten* durch ihre *göttliche Vernunft* eines Palladiums zur Gleichung bemächtigt'. Rather than accepting that we can only apprehend God through Christ, in whom He meets us half way – in more senses than it would be helpful to enumerate here – Jews and Greeks both presume to have found their own method.[63] The Law was given by God, but Jewish legalism, because it focuses on letter not spirit, idolises the Law and misappropriates it for what are then merely human ends, making it into a fetish in its own right rather than a divine means to a divine end,[64] as if independent human action could be a source of merit. Reason was also given by God, but natural religionists – the 'Greeks' in the Pauline schema – deify it by according it the status of *letzte Instanz* in general; by turning to it in particular as a source of knowledge about God, they misuse it to try to put man on an equal footing with God. In the face of this hubris, the paragraph concludes, it only remains to put one's faith in salvation through Christ.

The next paragraph (313:15–25) turns to Mendelssohn's second variety of 'Anstalten', the ones that regulate relations between man and man – the state. Mendelssohn gave an example of a case where 'gewisse Dissidenten' were disadvantaged on account of their beliefs; this was justified

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[62] J 126. In fact Mendelssohn absolutely acknowledges the idea of duties to God, but not as enforceable by man, J 127.

[63] The 'Palladium', 313:9, being a sacred relic associated with Athene, seems to stand for reason as the good thing it would be if it were not misappropriated.

[64] The 'usus elenchticus legis', to convince man of his incapacity to fulfil the Law, and so of his need for salvation through faith not works.

on the grounds that 'jene wären doch überall im bürgerlichen Leben *deterioris Conditionis*' (J 130, note). Hamann uses Mendelssohn's phrases to make a different complaint about the arbitrary disadvantaging of ordinary citizens, made into 'Leibeigenen deterioris conditionis', in favour of the French administrators who sinfully enjoy the proceeds. Hamann's bitterness against Frederick had been sharpened by the recent abolition of the *Fooigelder*, a substantial extra emolument traditionally associated with his customs post.[65] Once again, the paragraph concludes with the Christian alternative, according to which 'wenig nehmen und doppelt geben' – a maxim the local arm of the government signally fails to follow, but that it effectively imposes on the populace – is a virtue.

Mendelssohn recounts the anecdote of Rabbi Hillel who, when asked to sum up the teaching of the Law, said: 'Sohn! *liebe deinen Nächsten wie dich selbst*. Dieses ist der Text des Gesetzes; alles übrige ist Kommentar. Nun gehe hin und lerne!' (J 168, cf. Lev. 19:18) This is meant to emphasise a key common point of the two religions, and that the Law is no more a 'dead letter' in Judaism than in Christianity; it also recalls *Das Testament Johannis*, where Lessing used a similar text (I John 3:23) to sum up his refusal to be pinned down to a detailed statement of doctrine – just as Mendelssohn opposed *Glaubenseide*. But the King's 'ausschließende *Selbstliebe* und *Neid*', Hamann argues, contravene the commandment of the one true King, Christ, to 'love thy neighbour'; and this arises from 'jüdischer Naturalismus' (313:27) – the 'Greek' philosophical error, idolising reason, exemplified in Mendelssohn that Hamann has just linked to the parallel 'Jewish' one, legalism; this phrase serves to further cement the association by force of mere repetition.

The bulk of this next paragraph, up to the dash at 314:12, expands on Hamann's criticism of the government and its philosophers; the conclusion is that Christianity cannot expect good treament from such a regime. Frederick's arbitrary power – described in language borrowed from Mendelssohn's discussion of rights in the state of nature – makes him no better than a 'todter *Gott der Erde*' (313:33, cf. 310:7, discussed above), like Satan tormenting Job. The true

[65] Cf. 299:1–6 and 299:35–300:13, where Hamann likens Frederick to Nero, Nebuchednezzar, and Nimrod, alluding explicitly to the *Fooigelder*. Schreiner speaks of Hamann's 'Zivilcourage', Schreiner p. 84, based on documentation from the letters, Schreiner p. 166, though the fact that his complaint mentioned his colleagues, who were also affected, does not mean he was not acting primarily out of self-interest – no doubt with every justification. The real point is that Hamann had reason from his own experience to regard Frederick's rule as oppressive, quite apart from the intellectual and theological corruption he detected from afar in Berlin, through reading.

God, on the other hand, is just. The following long sentence makes a complex and perhaps not altogether coherent comparison between the Jews, and Frederick – 'unsere *illustres ingrats*' – and his 'heillose Sophisten'. Just as the Jews made the Law – like reason, a locus for idolatry – into a 'Götze ihrer Eitelkeit', the King and his philosophers misappropriate the gifts of nature and of God, and, thinking themselves to be gods,[66] oppress the people by fleecing them.[67] The machinery of the state, including its management of religion, is run with a self-consuming 'höllischer Feuereifer'. The true church cannot expect anything better than grudging toleration under such circumstances, because ('weil', l. 15) these latter-day Philistines and their idols will not endure when the Kingdom of Heaven comes, revealing their true nature, a laughable monstrosity under the fine-seeming head (cf. *Ars poetica* 3–5).

The short paragraph from 314:20–27 suggests that church and state should have the same – cooperative – relation as Moses and Aaron, with philosophy firmly placed in a subordinate role as their sister Miriam, who was struck with leprosy for criticising Moses and expelled.[68]

The section concludes with Hamann's criticism of Mendelssohn's interpretation of the parable of the *Zinsgroschen*, quoted programmatically at the end of *Jerusalem* (J 204).[69] This is Mendelssohn's final word on the whole subject of Jewish emancipation: because the state has every right and reason to expect the Jews to fulfil their civic responsibilities, but no more than that, they should be allowed freedom of conscience. Diversity, not uniformity is the right recipe for a

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[66]This is the force of 'für keinen Raub halten', 314:7, cf. Philippians 2:6, where Paul says Jesus did not think his divinity was a prize to hold on to, but was ready to be made man. The quotation is used ironically, because Hamann's targets do not show the same modesty, though they have more reason to, since they are not in fact gods as their actions show they think they are.

[67]'Anbetung' etc. is not clear to me. The 'Lastträger' is a donkey described in one of Aesop's fables who, when carrying a divine image on his back, thinks the 'Anbetung des [ihm] verwandten Pöbels' is meant for him, not the god (see Schreiner's note ad loc.). But however exactly this translates to Frederick and the Prussian people, it is hardly meant to be flattering.

[68] Num. 12:15. Schreiner rightly says that this should not be taken as the germ of a political philosophy of church and state, Schreiner p. 150. The whole impetus of *Golgatha* is negative, except insofar as Hamann seeks to voice the Christian message.

[69]The first sentence of the paragraph criticises Mendelssohn for using the story of Job as an example of God's unreasonable behaviour – 'er sei in deiner Hand, doch schone seines Lebens' – which is blasphemous. This provides a bridge to the *Zinsgroschen*, because Hamann had just alluded to the same passage from Job at 313:35, carefully using a more respectful tone. The link is that these are two examples of Mendelssohn's hermeneutic incompetence.

tolerant society. Indeed, the argument is framed universally; given the question of *Glaubenseide*, Christians are included too:

> Lasset niemanden in euren Staaten Herzenskündiger und Gedankenrichter seyn; niemanden ein Recht sich anmaßen, das der Allwissende sich allein vorbehalten hat! Wenn wir *dem Kaiser geben, was des Kaisers ist*; so gebet ihr selbst *Gotte, was Gottes ist! Liebet die Wahrheit! Liebet den Frieden!*

Unfortunately, Mendelssohn's discussion a few pages earlier combined this with another biblical reference with the wrong connotations: '... dienet zweien Herren in Geduld und Ergebenheit: Gebet dem Kaiser und gebet auch Gotte!' (J 198). This plays into Hamann's hands and perhaps sums up what he thinks is wrong with *Jerusalem*, insofar as he engages with the book on its own terms; the liberal separation of church and state in fact supposes far too cosy, indeed tolerant a relationship between the two, because on the contrary: 'Ye cannot serve God and mammon' (Matt. 6:24).

Hamann compares Mendelssohn's stance to that of the Pharisees; Jesus's parable was

> kein pharisäischer Rath zween Herren zu dienen ... um als ein freies Naturalisten-Volk ohne Religion und Staat, den Stolz der Bettler und das Glück der Schelme, auf Kosten des menschlichen Geschlechts nähren und genießen zu können.[70]

The consequence of Mendelssohn's proposed accommodation between religion and state, given Frederick's support for 'Vernunftreligion', is to promote the latter, robbing the people of both true religion and a state worth the name; in fact, it allows the intellectual and political establishment to reap the proceeds of the emiseration of the populace, prey as they are to rogues – just as in the time of the Pharisees.

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[70]W III 315:4–8. The sentence beginning 'War es ...' (314:35), which makes the link between philosophers and Pharisees, is difficult to interpret. I propose the following reading. The Pharisees were accused, roughly and among other things, of 'serving mammon'. Jesus's condemnation of them in Matt. 23 was clearcut, unlike Mendelssohn's 'Jesuitical' and balanced division between religious and civic obligations. Hamann perhaps also refers to the fact that Mendelssohn, when he mentions the Pharisees just before quoting the moral of the parable of the Zinsgroschen, does not actually name them, J 197.

Conclusion

Golgatha is a puzzling response to *Jerusalem*, and must have seemed so at the time. Hamann's quarrel with Mendelssohn was one he had been picking with other Aufklärer for some time, and had little to do with Jewish emancipation – though it seems possible Hamann would indeed have opposed this on religious grounds. Mendelssohn was attacked as a typical figure of the Berlin Enlightenment putting forth Enlightened views on religion; but the fact that Mendelssohn's book laid claim to the Old Testament and the Law as part of its case made it an irresistible target. Hamann had already made good use of the Pauline trope of 'Greeks and Jews' to present the cult of reason as a superstition like any other, worthy of no more consideration than Masonic hocus-pocus or the trappings of paganism, though in fact he accorded it the attention it merited as a leading component of the Zeitgeist and a real threat to his kind of religion. Not only was Mendelssohn a Jew – something Hamann might have made play with, but only in passing[71] – but he made the Law into a main plank of his rational edifice. Secondly, emancipation was a political theme that made it easy for Hamann to bring Frederick into his argument. He had long pilloried Frederick as a patron of the Enlightenment, suspected him for his lack of support for Christianity, and reviled him for the local character of his rule in Königsberg and for his faults as an employer; Mendelssohn appealed to Frederick in his capacity as ruler to effect a religious change because of his Enlightened sympathies. Although for the most part it can hardly be said that Hamann engages with Mendelssohn's argument, which he cavalierly ignores even when intricately playing off quotations and misquotations from it against scripture, it is indeed clear from Mendelssohn's book that he espoused just the sort of religious views that Hamann was opposed to and which are his true concern in *Golgatha*, the last work of his prophetic *Autorschaft*.

Hamann used similar tactics against Kant in the *Metakritik*: he asserts that his opponent's terminology makes arbitrary distinctions which do not cut reality at the joints, and he undermines Kant's argument by reconstituting the terminology in an absurd alternative pattern which, it is implied, is just as valid. Such a polemical reductio seeks to impose its own framework; it does

[71] Though Hamann can be accused of insensitivity and indifference, he was not antisemitic in the sense of having any positive animus against the Jews, with whom he had friendly relations in Königsberg.

not aim to succeed discursively, but rhetorically, by seizing control of the agenda. Hamann's real objection to *Jerusalem* is not Mendelssohn's arguments, but the incompatibility of the book's basic conceptual framework with orthodox Lutheranism as Hamann understood it.

Mendelssohn's contractual excursus makes no claim to be a complete theory of man's moral being; it is a model of dealings between man and man *sub specie hominis* and says nothing either way about his eternal part.[72] The arbitrariness of axioms is a way of delimiting the scope of what a theory aims to explain, not a surreptitious attempt to step over its methodological boundaries. Mendelssohn deals with this very question of proper scope in his response to Michaelis, who accused him of arbitrary questioning of wider principles: '... "dieses alles ist neu und hart. Die ersten Grundsätze werden weggeleugnet, und aller Streit hat ein Ende."' (J 148). Mendelssohn's counterexample is the amoral murderer: the trial judge may properly ignore the criminal's rejection of the standard which condemns him, but the priest who attends him before his execution ought to defend it (J 149); similarly, the foundations of morality, as philosophy or religion might approach them, have no place in a political treatise, but their exclusion does not imply that the question is a matter of indifference. Elsewhere, Mendelssohn discusses the useful role of scientific terminology in organising observations even when it cannot be derived from more fundamental principles, for example the concept of gravity (J 172f). This recalls Kant's maxim for the method of the natural sciences in the 1787 preface to the *Critique*: 'demjenigen, was die Vernunft selbst in die Natur hineinlegt, gemäß dasjenige in ihr zu suchen (nicht ihr anzudichten), was sie von dieser lernen muß' (B xiv); compare Mendelssohn's remarks (J 175) on constellations – though arbitrary, they are objective.

In accusing Mendelssohn of being careless of method, Hamann ignores – indeed, rejects – his evident sophistication and scrupulousness. In most cases, an examination of the context from which Hamann has torn supposed examples of Mendelssohn's false categorisations, reification or inconsistency shows there to have been deliberate misrepresentation on Hamann's part. Such

[72] But although Mendelssohn's view that '*Besserseyn* ist vom *Wohlwollen* unzertrennlich' (J 116) discussed below is not strictly essential to the contractual theory, it does motivate the conflicts of interest which the theory serves to regulate.

criticism is bluster, and does not go to the heart of Hamann's objection to *Jerusalem*. The real disagreement is theological rather than philosophical.

Mendelssohn argues at length that Judaism does not prescribe faith, but for Hamann faith is epistemologically basic:

> *Glaube* und *Zweifel* wirken auf das Erkenntnisvermögen des Menschen; wie *Furcht* und *Hoffnung* auf seinen Begehrungstrieb. *Wahrheit* und *Unwahrheit* sind Werkzeuge für den Verstand: (wahre oder unwahre) Vorstellung des *Guten* und *Bösen* sind Werkzeuge für den Willen. Alles unser Wissen ist Stückwerk und alle menschliche *Vernunftsgründe* bestehen entweder aus *Glauben* an *Wahrheit* und *Zweifel* an *Unwahrheit* (317:15–21)

or vice versa. This epistemology *in nuce* is strung together out of phrases from *Jerusalem*; their context is the argument that beliefs are not subject to the will, so they cannot be prescribed by law (J 167) or induced by sanctions or enticements (J 130). Hamann joins together again what Mendelssohn has put asunder, suggesting that knowledge arises in a wider framework of belief, rather than being separated from voluntary and ethical influence; the epistemological priority of *Vernunftgründe* is, psychologically speaking, a fiction.[73] As in the *Metakritik*, Hamann uses the weakness and fallibility of reason in practice to undermine its claim on us; but Mendelssohn might join Kant in saying that the question is 'not how we do think, but how we ought to think'.

Most of Hamann's disagreement with *Jerusalem* is not specific to the text; arguments used in *Konxompax* and the *Metakritik* are repeated. Enlightened philosophy is the latest form of an age-old error; what unites all its manifestations is that they turn away from God in favour of something else. For the Jews, this was the Law; for pagans, it was heathen religion, in the Roman Empire especially mystery religions. In the eighteenth century, which saw the revival of a tradition running back through mediaeval scholasticism to antiquity, it was a philosophical approach to religion that emphasised a common rational monotheistic core rather than the uniqueness of Christian revelation. That had been threatened in the Fragmentenstreit and watered down by Neologie. The vogue for freemasonry and the sympathetic interest taken in the pagan mysteries had given Hamann the opportunity in *Konxompax* to link the Enlightenment, in spite of its professed

[73] Contrast Mendelssohn's view that rational beliefs arise in a framework of open discussion.

adherence to reason, to one sort of superstition; *Jerusalem* allowed him to tar it with the brush of another – Jewish ritual.

The logic holding all this together, making it legitimate and profound in Hamann's eyes, not an opportunistic distortion, was the typological view of history, according to which these various combats spanning three thousand years truly were linked, different fronts on which the same battle was being fought. The extended discussion of Moses and the Law in *Golgatha* permits Hamann to unfold this approach within the Jewish history for which it was originally developed, clearly showing his debt to that tradition; the fact that he then applies it to the Prussia of his day, encompassing both intellectual and political aspects in his denunciation, demonstrates his radicalism, which is in keeping with that of the Hebrew scriptures.

Conclusion

> God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the mighty; and base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to naught things that are.
>
> I Cor. 1:27–28

The three works I have examined attack very different targets, but Hamann's response is fundamentally the same – not in detail, but in its structure. This structure is obscured by the detail, an intertextual thicket that hampers the free movement of the reader to the greatest degree imaginable; but in the process of gingerly picking through the thorns, a few bright colours turn up again and again. The logic of the whole is provided by typology, and it is from a typological perspective that Hamann's disparate opponents belong closely enough together to merit such similar treatment. In allowing reason to be in some measure the arbiter of religious questions, they reflected and furthered one part of the Zeitgeist that helped them each advance their individual arguments; but Hamann's principal interest was in the status in general of reason in the Enlightenment as that touched on theology. From a typological perspective, they *were* 'all the same'; not because Hamann did not see their particularity, but because the important thing to him was the larger tendency they represented. Not only were they the same as each other, playing the same tune – variations on the theme of 'reason' – but they were the same in effect as the devil's avatars throughout salvation history. The unlikely eighteenth-century triad of freemasonry, pagan mysteries and reason, not concocted by Hamann, but a gift to his polemic, exemplifies this identity synchronically. All forms of idolatry, and the secular structures that support them, the 'powers that be', are fighting in one and the same cause, with true Christianity in the other camp; it is neither permitted nor possible to sit on the fence; everyone must take sides in the ultimate battle. It is not reason itself that is bad, only the fact that it is put at the service of the enemy, used

as a rallying-cry for secession and as a Promethean weapon, so Starck is as important as Lessing, and it is not Kant's arguments that matter, but the secular intention they reveal.

But 'die Hure Vernunft' was always a fickle servant at best. In none of the ages during and about which the Bible was written was reason the principal cloak of the devil, but there is nonetheless an irrationalist thread running through both Testaments that Hamann, following in Luther's footsteps, could pick out as the type of current errors; given that thought, any scriptural reference to false idols could be grist to the same mill. The cunning serpent in the garden tricked Eve into eating of the tree of knowledge. The diabolical project of the tower of Babel, an arrogant assertion of human independence, was a mistaken and doomed attempt to reach heaven through human skill and resources, rather than leaving it to God to reach out to man. Babel – Babylon – was the seat of mammon, symbolising the importance of the secular authorities in propping up heathen cults and sinful lives. The tension under the Kings of Israel between the state and its prophetic critics was Hamann's precedent for taking his own stand in the same battle at the point it had reached, according to his lights, in the Prussia of his day: the prophets castigated idolatry, but Hamann attacked the cult of reason because that too was idolatrous.

St. Paul's talk of 'Greeks and Jews' was a useful starting-point for Hamann in making some of these connections, which seem so bizarre to modern ears, and which must also have puzzled eighteenth-century readers. Cut loose from its historical context in the early church, but employed by Hamann in the same rhetorical spirit, it was a precedent for defining diverse opponents by their opposition to one's own cause, reducing them to that foreign lowest common denominator at the expense of the specific qualities and arguments on which alone they might be judged and appreciated for themselves, substituting without argument adherence to that cause as the only criterion. If the error of the 'Greeks' was akin to that of the 'Jews', because they both departed from the same – Christian – truth, setting up standards of their own devising in place of faith, then, similarly, it could make sense to lump together freemasonry, pagan

mystery religions of merely antiquarian interest, and rational theology, from Neologie to atheism. Into this witches' brew Hamann then threw the indigestible *Critique of Pure Reason*, an utter novelty – but in the atmosphere of the turn of that decade, that was a natural enough step to occur to Herder too, based merely on the projected title of Kant's book, and betokened no special insight or perspective, just a shared political disgruntlement; perhaps Hamann even got the idea from his friend. Mendelssohn's *Jerusalem*, which picked up the theme of tolerance from the Fragmentenstreit, with which it has substantial continuities, not just an accidental similarity, fitted in perfectly with Hamann's use of the Pauline schema, because of Mendelssohn's attempt to reconcile his political plea with the theology of the Old Testament, and so proved easier to digest.

These three polemics attack a phenomenon that Hamann saw as wider than their immediate targets, chosen just because they were representative, and also prominent or otherwise convenient. Hamann's output of the later 1770s, after the *Herderschriften*, deals, among other things, with the mystery religions of antiquity and with freemasonry. The mysteries had attracted interest partly in the way of comparative religion: for scholars like Meiners, the continuities with and differences from Christianity might shed light on the special character of Christian revelation. For Hamann, the danger was that this might undermine revealed religion and support a deist agenda; the pagan mysteries themselves were hardly a threat in eighteenth-century Germany, though they did provide a loose inspiration for masonic hocus-pocus. In *Konxompax* these concerns are secondary to the Fragmentenstreit, but – at first sight bizarrely – linked to it. Kant's *Critique* too, whatever other aims it had, was dangerous to revealed religion and recognised to be so at the time. For Hamann, Kant's privileging of reason was a late variant of the gnosticism of antiquity; or rather, putting the *Critique* in that lurid light, against the clear intentions of its author, showed it in what Hamann thought were its true colours. 'Greek' and 'Jew', philosophers, mystics, and peddlers of mumbo-jumbo, are all in the same game, and the philosophers' justification for thinking themselves above being associated with the canaille of mere superstitions lies solely in their pretension to truth, which Hamann will not allow. Reason is their device and their patent

of intellectual nobility, Kant's ultimate arbiter, which blasphemously sets itself above religion itself.[1] The secularised optimism of the Enlightenment's hopes of reason, as exemplified variously by Lessing, Kant and Mendelssohn, is for Hamann as foolish as any less specious error, utterly vitiated by the sin of turning away from Christ: 'Der Grieche, seit zweitausend Jahr in Erwartung einer Wissenschaft und Königin, die noch kommen soll' is like a Jew still waiting for the Messiah; Hamann takes as his proof-text the example of Hume, quoting the reference in the *Dialogues* to an 'adventitious instructor'.[2] Though gnosticism pretended to offer access to higher spiritual truths through *secret* knowledge, in contrast to the public record of the gospel, whereas the message of Kant's book was in principle open to all, the commonality Hamann detects is that such knowledge is seen as the spiritual or intellectual achievement and attainment of an individual (sapere *aude* – singular!). In contrast, the orthodox understanding of revelation, especially Luther's, was that it was the work of God, in the person of the Holy Spirit, knowledge of which man was not the agent but the recipient. Its depths and heights are not the human dimensions which Kant measured out, but an ineffable divine reality.

Hamann's suspicion of reason as a rival to faith, far from being a specific response to the intellectual currents of his late period, went right back to the beginning of his 'Autorschaft'; the following extract from a letter to Kant at the time of the quarrel with Berens, which borrows an idea of Hume's commonly adapted to Christian ends, prefigures the thought of *Golgatha*:

> Der attische Philosoph, Hume, hat den Glauben nöthig, wenn er ein Ey eßen und ein Glas Waßer trinken soll. Er sagt: Moses, das Gesetz der Vernunft, auf das sich der Philosoph beruft, verdammt ihn. Die Vernunft ist euch nicht dazu gegeben, dadurch weise zu werden, sondern eure Thorheit und Unwißenheit zu erkennen; wie das Mosaische Gesetz den Juden nicht sie gerecht zu machen, sondern ihnen ihre Sünden sündlicher. Wenn er den Glauben zum Eßen und

[1] A XI; but note that Kant – democratically! – dethrones the 'Königin' metaphysics (A VIII). Hamann's religious interests prevent him from making common political cause with the Enlightenment; instead, he mistakes the character of Kantian reason for a prop of arbitrary tyranny, when Kant meant just the opposite. For Kant, nothing whatsoever should be arbitrary, but Hamann put human judgement second to faith.

[2] See W III 316:12–24. '... the most natural Sentiment, which a well dispos'd Mind will feel on this Occasion [ignorance about the nature of God], is a longing Desire and Expectation, that Heaven would be pleas'd to dissipate, at least alleviate this profound Ignorance, by affording some more particular Revelation to Mankind ...' Of course, for traditional Christianity, the incarnation has already provided such an 'adventitious instructor'. Hume – speaking here in the person of Philo, the sceptic – is being ironic, and Hamann knows it. Hume, *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, ed. Price, p. 261.

> Trinken nöthig hat: wozu verleugnet er sein eigen Principium, wenn er über höhere Dinge, als das sinnliche Eßen und Trinken urtheilt. (B I 379, 27.7.59)

The Lutheran idea of the 'usus elenchticus legis' is here already applied to reason. The political overtones of Hamann's prophetic impulse are recorded still earlier, before the epistolary quarrel that was the midwife of Hamann's authorial voice, in a letter to the eleven-year-old Baron Joseph von Witten:

> Laß diejenigen, die zu den Höfen großer Herren geboren sind, weiche und seidene Kleider tragen; derjenige, welcher zu einem Prediger in in der Wüsten beruffen ist, muß sich in Kameelshaaren kleiden und von Heuschrecken und wilden Honig leben. (B I 267, 17.10.58)

In common with many intellectuals of his day – Lessing, Lichtenberg, Kant, Mendelssohn – Hamann, whose uncle was an author but whose father was a barber-surgeon, had achieved upward social mobility through education. As with many others, his first step was then a job as a *Hofmeister*; but his subsequent advance into the guild of international merchants was not sustained, and his attempt to ally himself to the House of Berens by marriage failed. He ended up as a minor functionary of the Prussian state, financially insecure, underemployed, badly housed and resentful. In a provincial town, this made him feel an intellectual outsider, and his inaccessible style made his participation in the Republic of Letters more marginal still. What could be more natural than for Hamann to write as an advocate of the underdog, Christianity? Of course, every author is more than the sum of his social and historical circumstances, but they are among the ingredients that he combines. Hamann's rejection of the Enlightenment has theological grounds, but it also makes sense in political terms. Rather than seeing the Enlightenment as a progressive force that sought to right the ills he suffered, he thought it was an ally of the oppressor, the prince of Augustine's 'earthly city'. In fact, the symbolism of Hamann's orthodox view of man's utter dependence on the creator had long been one of the principal supports of arbitrary power, and the main pillar of the unholy alliance between church and state that liberalism, the ideology of the rising middle classes, sought to undermine.

Given the personal roots and the theological context of Hamann's attitude to the Enlightenment as it unfolded throughout his life, we should be cautious in estimating the intellectual substance of his response to particular works he attacked. Kant was big game, so he is the most striking case. A representative study[3] simply accepts Hamann's view that Kant's first *Critique* seeks to establish the possibility of knowledge without experience, but this is true only in a very limited sense, and the limitation is crucial – Kant sought to establish the bounds of knowledge, excluding the kind of speculation that Hamann too opposed while still accounting for common-sense generalities such as causation, which unadulterated empiricism could not.

Similarly, Hamann accuses Kant of ignoring the preconditions – philosophical, existential and linguistic – of his reasonings. It is far from clear that this is a coherent objection. Of course philosophy has a tradition, but it should still aim to think thoughts that are valid in themselves, not because of the authority of that tradition. Kant tried very hard to do just that, and the case against him is not proved by Hamann's mere assertion that he failed.

Again, Hamann objects that thought is rooted in language, and for him that means we imbibe a sense of the social order and, beyond it, the divine with our mother's milk. That may be so, but it still need not prevent us from thinking critically about that framework. Perhaps there are good reasons not to, for instance theological considerations, but those would not be inherent limitations to the capacity of thought; Hamann thought life could only be lived aright within the horizon of faith, but that is a theological view, not a philosophical argument. Language itself is an imperfect instrument, but we can both recognise and try to overcome its deficiencies. It makes no sense to assert that, because there is no thought *without* language, thinking *in* language is somehow compromised. If words get in the way – this can be hard to see, but is not impossible – then more serviceable ones can be found or invented. That is what logical symbolism attempts to do, or Kant's arid Critical terminology; these are specialised new developments within language, not doomed attempts to step outside it. The very idea of doing so is incoherent, like its corollary, the idea that the particularity of language is an absolute constraint. On the contrary, language is

[3] Griffith-Dickson 1995, p. 307f, and see the whole 'Analysis' section on the *Metakritik*.

constantly under construction. To give one concrete example, it has been asserted that grammar encodes metaphysical prejudices such as 'Cartesian dualism'. But the same language can be used to describe a different schema, as for instance by Schopenhauer. The very fact that language is always provisional lends it the flexibility to accommodate new thoughts.

Furthermore, Hamann accuses Kant of reification, creating empty 'entia rationis' within the critical system. Though the casual reader of the *Critique* could be forgiven for thinking there might be something in this, it is a crude misrepresentation: abstraction is not reification, and if it were, no discursive thought of any sort would be possible. To say the least, the case against Kant on this remains to be made; that would need to involve engagement in detail with his arguments.

Above all, the central accusation not only of the *Metakritik*, but also of *Konxompax* and *Golgatha*, is that by according reason such ultimate importance, the Enlightenment is worshipping a false idol: Kant is just one more example of the growing tendency to put one's faith in reason. This is not a sustainable objection to Kant's thought or anybody else's. You cannot *not* have faith in reason, because without it it would be impossible to think at all; but that does not mean believing unquestioningly in the truth of any given conclusion based on rational argument, because the argument is always open to reexamination and debate – to begin with, any argument is only as good as its premises. Nor does it mean having unwarranted confidence in reason as a guide in uncharted territory, where special circumspection is called for. It was precisely Kant's aim to check reason's speculative urge to fly too high, not for fear of the heat of the sun, but for lack of air.[4] Nobody disputed the fallibility of reason in practice; what was at issue was, and remains, how we ought to think. Hamann and Kant are in entire agreement, for what it is worth, that there are certain regions into which reason should not stray, but not on the same grounds: Hamann's are theological rather than philosophical. At first, Hamann hoped to find in Kant an ally against the misuse of reason in theological matters, because he debunked scholastic speculation; but Kant circumscribed the bounds of reason the better to employ it within them to cultivate human ends, and not truly to 'make room for faith'. Unlike Hume, he therefore could not even be pressed

[4] See Kant's metaphor of the dove, *Critique* A 5.

into service as an ally of convenience. His great Copernican Revolution set out to put man's possibilities and mental faculties at the centre of the human view of the world, and so Kant was no help to Hamann in his battle to keep God at the centre, with man cast as Ganymede rather than Prometheus, defined by his weaknesses and failings rather than his independent capabilities, not a free agent but a dependent creature.

Misrepresentation is Hamann's typical form of attack. 'Wenn 2 Gegner jeder in sensu suo Recht haben, ist keine Möglichkeit sie zu vergleichen. Einer muß sich entschließen Unrecht zu haben. Um nicht Unrecht zu haben, thut man lieber Unrecht' (B IV 74:24–7). I Cor. 4:6 is the passage on which Hamann based his concept of 'metaschematism', a term he coined from the Greek verb *μετασχηματίζειν*. It is his principal way of engaging with the texts he confronts.[5] St. Paul used himself and Apollos as an example to condemn factionalism, but then revealed that he really meant this lesson for everyone. If Paul had told a story about faction leaders in a different situation, a dispute about some other topic, in which his listeners were not involved, this would have been like a parable. The message of a parable is meant to be applied by the listener to himself. Paul's example is taken from the same context as its point of application, but Hamann seized on the idea of applying one thing to something else, even in a different context. However, rather than employing the logic of the parable, he brought his typological thinking to bear; if typology is understood in its broadest sense, there is only one context for everything – the context of salvation history.

Throughout his work, certainly from *Aesthetica in nuce* on, Hamann used quotation in an unheard-of way. He quotes from a wide range of authors, but the two principal sources are the Bible, and whichever book he happens to be attacking. The quotations from the Bible, which are distinctive in their concentration without being a radical innovation, provide the model for his hostile treatment of other texts. In Pietist hermeneutics, the principle of 'applicatio ad hominem' sought to apply the content of scripture, the events described there, to the reader's own present situation, creating a resonance between these two points in time similar to the typological

[5] See Paul Ernst, *Hamann und Bengel. Ein Aufriß ihrer Werk- und Lebensbeziehungen als Abriß wesentlicher Hamann-Züge*, pp. 82–9, in: Königsberger Deutsche Forschungen. Eds. Paul Hankamer, Gottfried Weber, and Walther Ziesemer, vol. 13. Gräfe und Unzer Verlag, Königsberg 1935. Ernst also makes interesting remarks about prophecy on pp. 126–156.

resonance between Old and New Testaments. Hamann quotes from the Bible to bring out what he feels it has to say about the topical debates his work addresses. This is not yet metaschematism, because in his typological view of history those debates really are continuous with the history documented in the Bible – they are part and parcel of it, its current manifestation. The Bible is addressed to us, today. The difference between then and now lies in the changing disguises of the devil, who wears any mask that can give him advantage. The deists, philosophers and freemasons of the eighteenth century are in all important respects identical, for Hamann, to the sophists, Pharisees and false prophets of every age, because they all fight in the same satanic cause. Just as the Bible, because of its universal historical scope, can be taken without distortion as referring to whatever situation is at hand, so the words of Starck, Lessing, Kant or Mendelssohn can legitimately be twisted to reveal their diabolical underbelly, without regard for the sense in the context from which they are roughly plucked, as long as this shows them in what Hamann, for far broader reasons, thinks are their true colours.

This is metaschematism: playing rough with the enemy. The original Pauline context provided the notion of legitimate deceit, but Hamann made it into something new. He systematically ignores the whole movement of his opponents' thought in order to reveal what he thinks are the true loyalties concealed in their assumptions, language, omissions, use of scripture, or tone. In some cases, as the reader can discover by consulting the original text, he reads them against the grain with such brazenness that there can be no question of misunderstanding or mere carelessness, even to the point of negligence – stringing together phrases seemingly expressing a view the target author also opposed as if they condemned him, juxtaposing elements that belong in incommensurate contexts, ignoring the whole drift of an opponent's work. Unger characterises Hamann's metaschematism as 'die umdenkende Beziehung irgendwelchen Gedankenmaterials auf das Subjekt des Autors, also das Allegorisieren mit subjektiver Wendung oder, was im Grunde dasselbe ist, das Vornehmen einer literarischen Maske', Unger p. 502. He correctly identifies the importance here of 'applicatio' hermeneutics, but the analogy is not between quoted text

and authorial subject; the reader of the Bible was supposed to relate what he read to himself *in his situation*. Similarly, Hamann, at the same time reader and author, takes words from his enemies' mouths and treats them as part of his own debate with them, within the debate they ought to be having but are not, one that acknowledges things as Hamann, God's publicist, thinks they really are rather than as they are made out to be in this age. Unger may be thinking in particular of Hamann's adoption of the figure of Socrates in *Sokratische Denkwürdigkeiten*; the Athenian philosopher, reinvented typologically as a Christian prophet, is indeed a mask for Hamann, the 'Prediger in der Wüsten'. But Socrates was a mascot of the Enlightenment, and Hamann transforms him into its critic, picking out just the characteristics that the Enlightenment celebrated him for. That was why he chose Socrates, at first sight an unlikely vehicle; it was the ultimate coup. The topos of Socratic ignorance was an icon for the Enlightenment ideal of transparent rational debate, and Hamann turned it into a type of Christian humility before God, humility that acknowledged the poverty of reason and repudiated the sophistical hubris of its slippery champions.

Though in this case Hamann has indeed fashioned Socrates into a mask for himself, most instances of metaschematism do not involve personas. For example, the wanton distortion of Mendelssohn's *Jerusalem* in *Golgatha* (Hamann ends the book by glorying over the 'Trümmer' to which he has reduced Mendeslssohn's politeia) misrepresents the intellectual substance of the argument and imposes foreign associations on the text, not in order to make specific points about Mendelssohn, but to suggest that the general tendency of the work allies it with a wider secular trend. The language parody of the *Metakritik* is not a completely typical example of Hamann's metaschematism, but it shows the same deliberate disregard for the logic of the argument it attacks. In the *Metakritik*, Hamann applies 'reason', some pieces drawn from the structure of the Critical system, parodistically to the case of language; this is supposed to make Kant ridiculous, and also to deliver the criticism that Kant's idea of 'reason' is deficient because it ignores language. What is 'metaschematic' about this is that it does not take Kant seriously on his own terms: it tries

to make his system do something nobody could imagine it was meant to do. Hamann's parody is avowedly absurd, though in the service of a deadly serious larger purpose – as in all his works.

Hamann's stature as a serious intellectual critic of those he attacks has been overestimated;[6] his difference with them is a theological difference with the Enlightenment as a whole and does not arise from differentiated insights. For example, he was surely quite right in his judgement of Kant's secular tendency, but for all the penetration of this view, and for all the theological sophistication and originality of his answer to that challenge, it is a distortion of the *Metakritik* to see it as a substantial philosophical response to Kant, and a misunderstanding of the device of 'metaschematism' to regard it as a form of argument; that is why Hamann must leave it to the reader 'die geballte Faust in eine flache Hand zu entfalten' (W III 289:23f).

Such estimates miss Hamann's literary qualities. His writing is indeed intricately deliberate, 'rhapsodic' only in his own sense of being a colourful patchwork; but this playful complexity, for all its serious intent, is a matter of wit rather than analytical penetration. Hamann's polemical focus on his opponents leads the reader to expect specific engagement with their ideas, but the substance of his thought lies after all in his own theological system, which is profound. What influence he may have had on Sturm und Drang might rest largely on misunderstanding, and his principal place in intellectual history might be, as I have argued, merely as an untimely and largely ignored[7] reminder of a typological perspective that he certainly did not invent, though he returned to the radicalism of Luther's similar views; but he merits appreciation in his own right as a unique afterbirth of the Baroque. The irritation of Christianity gradually produced an involute monstrosity, a labyrinth in a nutshell, that, though not conventionally beautiful, continues to fascinate.

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[6] Oswald Bayer, to cite one prominent example, describes him as 'Kant und Hegel ebenbürtig'. *Zeitgenosse im Widerspruch*. Munich, Piper 1988, p. 9.

[7] However, the work of theologians taking an interest in Hamann draws on these ideas now, and often sees Hamann as a precedent for their application to contemporary debates around the – continuing – Enlightenment. But current debates, for instance those started by the Frankfurt School, are not the same as those of the eighteenth century; arguably, this is to read Hamann himself typologically. That is just as he would have wished, as his quotation of the Augustine passage discussed in Chapter I implied; but his wish to be read within a Christian horizon is not binding on the reader.

Hamann's work is also an instructive catalogue of bad arguments. Hostility to abstraction is a philistine tactic, and so is indifference to the specific character of one's opponents. Hamann's requirement that the reader unfold his position from scattered indications is a dangerous rhetorical principle that exposed Nietzsche, for example, to readings he would not have countenanced. Such ploys remain all too common in political discourse, with its irresponsible appeals to unnamed fears or resentments. The acrimonious dispute of recent decades about the method of literary studies is another case in point: argument, based on evidence, should be advanced in plain words, not riddling hints, and it makes no sense to claim that this is an unfair condition. Anyone who refuses it is no longer engaged in rational debate. Hamann did his utmost to avoid being pinned down in argument, but he can still be held to account by sifting through the shifting obscurity and recognising the bluster. This reveals a rich theological system of surprising unity, but not very much about the Enlightenment luminaries Hamann attacked – except for their secular tendency, which is now more obvious than it then was.

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