

# **The Idolatry of Philosophy**

**Johann Georg Hamann's Critique of his Contemporaries as Driven by his  
Notion of Philosophical Superstition and Idolatry**

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## Abbreviations and Translations

The present work utilizes the standard abbreviations for Hamann's collected works and correspondence of Johann Georg Hamann as indicated below:

- N *Johann Georg Hamann: Sämtliche Werke*, Vol. I-VI, ed. Josef Nadler, Wien: Thomas-Morus Presse im Herder-Verlag, 1949-1957.
- ZH *Johann Georg Hamann: Briefwechsel*, Vol. I-VII, ed. Arthur Henkel and Walther Ziesemer (Vol. I-III), Wiesbaden: Insel, 1955-1957; ed. Arthur Henkel (Vol. IV-VII), Wiesbaden: Insel, 1959; Frankfurt a.M: Insel, 1965-1979.

Any other primary sources consulted besides the standard works will be cited in accordance with the Chicago Manual of Style. The primary English translation used is Kenneth Haynes, *Writings on Philosophy and Language*, Cambridge Texts in the History of Philosophy. Cambridge, UK ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007. There have been disparate translations of varying quality through the years; however, many of them are either difficult to find (e.g. Gwen Griffith-Dickson)<sup>1</sup> or lacking in academic precision (e.g. Ronald Gregor Smith).<sup>2</sup> Quotes of Hamann not by Haynes or otherwise noted are the author's own. Also of note, Hamann's orthography (spelling, punctuation, etc.) has been retained in the German texts provided in the footnotes.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Gwen Griffith Dickson and Johann Georg Hamann, *Johann Georg Hamann's Relational Metacriticism* Theologische Bibliothek Töpelmann, Bd. 67 (Berlin ; New York: W. de Gruyter, 1995).

<sup>2</sup> Ronald Gregor Smith, *J. G. Hamann 1730-1788: A Study in Christian Existence* (London: Collins, 1960). Smith provides very readable translations. However, they are highly interpretive, reflecting Smith's reading of Hamann as a Christian existentialist. At times this leads Smith to oversimplify Hamann's complex and tumultuous style.

<sup>3</sup> The reader accustomed to modern German texts will notice significant changes, some due to the spelling at the time (e.g. sein = seyn), others due to Hamann's singular style (e.g. his excessive use of dashes).

## **Introduction**

The present work argues that Johann Georg Hamann's (1730-1788) critique of his contemporaries was driven by his notion of superstition and the corresponding idolatry. This bases itself on his broad understanding of faith, and further, its misappropriation (i.e. superstition). It outlines the motivation behind his authorship and his loose philosophical approach as he challenged the thinkers of his era via rigid critique sprinkled with wit. This distinctive style of critique runs throughout the variety of his thought. Although his criticism is informed by theology, it will be established that it is fundamentally philosophical insofar as its approach retains its poignancy removed from its religious foundations. This is not to be confused as asserting that Hamann's thought was not theological; indeed, it was immersed in the Christian idiom - e.g. his idea of the condescension of God and its relationship to human knowledge. Be that as it may, this work will elucidate that his critique of his contemporaries was of a philosophical nature. Moreover, he resolved the tendency to create philosophical idols with an approach that here is termed *hermeneutics of humility*, and is based on the interdependency of the faculties of knowledge, a convivial understanding of reason, and the contingency of thought.

## **Course of Argumentation**

The current study consists of four chapters, commencing with the interpretation of Hamann as a critic of his century. The first chapter gives a survey of Hamann scholarship as well as discussing some of the broad markers of how the critique of superstition and idolatry was one of the primary motivations of his authorship. Additionally, some of the key

interlocutors who were decisive in making up Hamann's view of his century will receive commentary. The second chapter deals with Hamann's notion and condemnation of the philosophical superstition of his contemporaries. Initially, it addresses a few eighteenth century views and opinions regarding superstition (*Aberglaube*) and faith (*Glaube*) – explicating how these philosophies, in Hamann's view, cannot achieve what they set out to accomplish. Furthermore, why Hamann's idea of superstition should be considered a *philosophical* superstition rather than a *religious* one will be discussed. Chapter three deals specifically with Hamann's notion of idolatry: tracking how one gets from superstition to idolatry. Subsequently, specifying the major idols identified by Hamann in his critique will be undertaken, examining how and where this thinking manifests itself, as well as the deficiencies with these various perspectives. This culminates in a detailed account of how the idol of abstract reason evolved over the course of Hamann's authorship. The fourth and final chapter will attempt to give a Hamannian reply to the idolatrous thought of his century. This consists not in juxtaposing his own system whereby all things might be measured, but in what might be called an organic/communicative approach: emphasizing the multiplicity of human capacities that receive and impart knowledge. Put differently, he seeks a dialogical, organic approach that manifests itself in a Hamannian hermeneutics of humility. A brief note on the terminology of superstition and idolatry will be helpful before plunging in to the specifics.

### **Superstition (*Aberglaube*) – Idolatry (*Abgotterei, Idolatrie, Götzendienst*)**

Hamann does not use the word *Aberglaube* exclusively when accusing his contemporaries of superstition, but it is the dominant term. With the present study written



in English, a short terminological clarification of the words most commonly used by Hamann for superstition will be provided. Concurrently, these insights will aid in carefully constructing Hamann's understanding of the term itself, and are therefore useful for those familiar with German.

*Aberglaube* (superstition) is a compound word comprised of the conjunction, *aber* (but), and the noun, *Glaube* (faith). In older forms of German, *aber* is used as a prefix denoting a negative form, i.e. false, bad:<sup>4</sup> hence a bad-faith, or false-faith. There is then a direct etymological connection within the word superstition to faith; it is a misplaced faith. For Hamann, it also carries the notion of negation, being against faith.<sup>5</sup> Observe, however, that faith was not merely a confessional faith, but encompassed all types of revelation: in experience and in history as revealed in language mediated through senses.

Although the etymological similarities between faith and superstition are in fact present in the English word superstition, they are not as readily apparent, and thus lack some of Hamann's nuance and word play when using *Aberglaube*. Since many Enlighteners were concerned with superstition, some of the inferences made to faith are not readily apparent in English.<sup>6</sup> Working with this language, Hamann is clearly interacting with the themes of Enlightenment thought.

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<sup>4</sup> "Duden | Aber-glau-be, Seltener Aber-glau-ben | Rechtschreibung, Bedeutung, Definition, Synonyme, Herkunft," accessed April 11, 2017, <http://www.duden.de/rechtschreibung/Aberglaube>.

<sup>5</sup> This is supported by other synonyms Hamann uses, at times interchangeably. E.g. "Unglaube" (literally, un-faith).

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Kant, *Kritik der Urteilskraft* I, § 40). Also, H-G Fritzsche, "Aberglaube," ed. Jenssen, *Theologisches Lexikon* (Berlin: Union-Verl., 1978). "In Hegels Phänomenologie bezieht sich 'der Kampf der Aufklärung mit dem Aberglauben' auf einen der Vernunft und Wahrheit entgegengesetzten Glauben, wie der 'im Allgemeinen ein Gewebe von Aberglauben, Vorurteilen und Irrtümern ist' (VI B II a)."

## Tracing the Thread

Do not marvel at the individual character (*Eigene*) of my letters; it would be unbelievably easier for me to write shorter and more properly. There is a common thread (*Faden*) in all the chaos of my thoughts that an insider (*Kenner*) can find, and which above all my friend would recognize.<sup>7</sup> – Johann Georg Hamann

The quote above demonstrates that Hamann perceived his thought containing a unity or common motive. The present study traces the notion of superstition and the idolatry which follows from it as a common thread woven throughout Hamann's thought as a common thread and motive of his authorship. This terminology deserves some definition before proceeding.

At first glance, the use of the words idolatry and superstition may appear peculiar terms to utilize when writing a philosophical critique of the philosophers of the Enlightenment – with its etymology and meaning being religious in nature.<sup>8</sup> Hamann's own religious convictions aside, it will be argued that in order to properly grasp how he understood his century as idolatrous is key to his philosophical critique. To fully understand this critique requires an understanding of Hamann's notion of faith, specifically, his assertion that all thought is preconditioned by faith (*Glaube*). Hamann's understanding of faith is very broad; encompassing everything from the skepticism of David Hume (1711-1776) – he needed belief (*Glaube*) to even eat an egg or drink a glass of

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<sup>7</sup> ZH I, 311:9-13. To Johann Gotthelf Lindner, March 31<sup>st</sup>, 1759. "Wundern Sie sich nicht über das Eigene meiner Briefe; es wäre mir ungl. leichter kürzere und ordentlichere zu schreiben. In allem dem Chaos meiner Gedanken ist ein Faden, den ein Kenner finden kann, und den mein Freund vor allen erkennen würde."

<sup>8</sup> The language of the superstition in philosophy has found some recent attention. Markus Gabriel, in his book addressing philosophy of mind, argues that some modern philosophical positions (e.g. Richard Dawkins) are themselves susceptible being their own type of superstition. Markus Gabriel, *Ich ist nicht Gehirn: Philosophie des Geistes für das 21. Jahrhundert*, Ungekürzte Ausgabe, 1. Auflage (Berlin: Ullstein, 2017), 93.

water<sup>9</sup> – to the faith in the historical revelation mediated through language. Therefore, Haman asserted that philosophical thought cannot remove itself from being subject to varying arbitrary faith-based presuppositions. Since all human experience and reasoning is preconditioned by faith, abstract thought (e.g. rationalism, French *bon sens*) – with its denial of the dependency on faith – or the misappropriation of faith – leads Hamann to accuse these philosophical approaches of superstition (*Aberglaube*). Often Hamann’s accusations were a response to the elevating of one human capacity of knowledge to the detriment of others. If all philosophy is engaged in faith-based commitments (e.g. the various postulates of a state of nature or reason that exists apart from history), then failing to acknowledge these commitments – and placing the object or results of these presuppositions as supreme – is indeed partaking in philosophical idolatry. Even positions that sought to establish themselves upon principles of sound reason, for example, to Hamann were engaging in faith as any type of first principles were based in faith according to him. In taking their respective faith commitments without acknowledging their contingency, they are indubitably “serving”, in Hamann’s mind, a philosophical idol. Generally this takes the form of a quest for totality, certainty, or systematic purity, expressed concretely in turning moral values into economics, the mathematical manipulation of nature, or epistemological certainty, to name a few examples.<sup>10</sup> In addition

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<sup>9</sup> ZH I, 379:30-31. To Immanuel Kant, July 27th, 1759. “Der attische Philosoph, Hume, hat den Glauben nöthig, wenn er ein Ey eßen und ein Glas Waßer trinken soll.”

<sup>10</sup> Even the Roman Catholic Church comes under fire as Hamann sees it as a totalizing force. Despite the difference between the Enlightenment project and the Roman Catholic Church, in Hamann’s mind they have an analogous relationship in their tendency to abstract and systematize. He equated Enlightenment philosophy with Catholicism. Renate Knoll, *Johann Georg Hamann und Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi*, vol. 7, Heidelberger Forschungen (Heidelberg: Carl Winter, 1963), 83. Haman was influenced by Martin Luther’s disparaging comments concerning the Roman Catholic Church. Luther’s comments on reason were also formative for Hamann, who had little exposure to Roman Catholicism in his daily life. However, in Hamann’s later days he showed much sympathy for Princess Gallitzin and there is uncertainty as to what his opinions

to this concept of the idolatrous nature of philosophy and abstract systems, his language is influenced by a Christian framework upon which his thought is based. As Hamann points to the subjective nature of all thought, he often juxtaposes religious terminology and language to the abstract, conceptual thought of his contemporaries. He does this to highlight what he believes to be the hidden, faith-based foundations of all thought. However, Hamann's emphasis on faith should not be construed or confused with those who believe that he is suggesting a Christian ontology contrasting a secular one.<sup>11</sup>

The answer or correction to the idolatry of his generation is expressed much more subtly, most of the time entrenched implicitly in the critiques themselves. This is not to say that there is no resolution, but only to point out that the solutions Hamann provides are cryptic in comparison to the specificity of his criticism. He does provide more clarity late in life in his correspondence with Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi (1743-1819) and in *Disrobing and Transfiguration*. Insofar as he sees the idolatry of philosophy bound to its misappropriation of faith and the usurpation of one capacity of human knowledge over and above that of others, the correction is to restore, or at least recognize, the organic and communicative nature of human knowing. This consists in a focus on receptivity, response, and historical contingency. This focus was in opposition to the approaches of his contemporaries,

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regarding Roman Catholicism would have been had he had more time to write before his death in Münster. Helene Stöcker, *Palaestra: Zur Kunstanschauung des XVIII. Jahrhunderts*, vol. XXVI, Palaestra: Untersuchungen und Texte aus der Deutschen und Englischen Philologie (Berlin: Mayer & Müller, 1904), 74.

<sup>11</sup> John Milbank attempts to fit Hamann into his overarching scheme of the "ontology of violence" advanced by secular reason and a Christian "ontology of peace". The difficulty lies in the fact that these two categories are so encompassing, and despite Hamann's arguable sympathies with any view that regards reason as grounded in metaphysical claims, Milbank merely places Hamann into a group of counter-secular thinkers. One must only look to Hamann's own large differences between the other thinkers (e.g. Herder) to realize the problem with placing Hamann into such a scheme. Furthermore, Hamann's issues with abstract reason do not stem from its "violence" but rather its presumption of being beyond the trappings of belief in first principles. See, John Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason*, 2nd ed (Oxford, UK ; Malden, MA: Blackwell Pub, 2006), 4.

manifested most clearly in the rationalist use of abstract reason. In regards to the rationalist, one first comes to the world, imposes a view on the world through the intellect according to Hamann. In contrast, he looks first to experience before moving on to the manner in which the subject reasons. However, he should not be understood as an empiricist. One does not first look at the world (i.e. rationalism) but is addressed by it.<sup>12</sup> For Hamann, one is first spoken to, i.e. in nature, through the senses, in tradition, by language. Thereafter one responds, and in this dialogical scheme consists the wealth of human knowing. Knowledge is always something to be further discussed, continuously developing in the relation of one to another; knowledge is always *growing* and *developing*.<sup>13</sup> All this hails a return to concrete nature of thought and the lived experience of individuals, which had been pushed aside in favor of abstract reason. Additionally, Hamann focused on both the historical/transmissional and the eschatological/prophetic. Each of these aspects of human thought were intrinsically linked to his theme of language, the former in the meaning of words being dependent upon both transmission and usage, and the latter by the purposefulness in speaking which creates future – eschatology. This could be spoken of as organic, living, whereas abstractions are static, lifeless.

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<sup>12</sup> The often used idea of a *Weltanschauung* (worldview) would be problematic in Hamann's opinion insofar as a worldview focuses on the attempt to grasp and order the world according to the individual's application of abstract reason. As will be seen over the course of the present study, Hamann held to a highly subjective and interpretive idea of the world. However, this was far from a worldview in the Kantian sense. According to Hamann, one is always first addressed in experience, and from that starting point begins the process of interpretation.

<sup>13</sup> Knowledge about the world should be understood as living, organic; it is not like a machine that might be better ordered and constructed. Elisabeth Emter discusses the relationship between "new" scientific knowledge and the Hamannian *h* (as in the *New Apology of the Letter h*). Her insights help illuminate how one might interpret the statements made here regarding the developing nature of knowledge. She deals particularly in the thought of Ernst Jünger. New knowledge was seen as a type of perception (*Empfindung*) or imagining (*Vorstellung*) that related to a larger development, but not in a positivistic sense. See, Elisabeth Emter, *Literatur und Quantentheorie: Die Rezeption der Modernen Physik in Schriften zur Literatur und Philosophie deutschsprachiger Autoren (1925-1970)*, Quellen und Forschungen zur Literatur- und Kulturgeschichte 2 (Berlin ; New York: De Gruyter, 1995), 138.

## Contribution of this Study

That critique was one of the hallmarks of Hamann's authorship would find little to no rebuttal within contemporary Hamann scholarship. It may, in fact, be one of the only issues which would be affirmed by all interpreters of Hamann. However, most research focuses on isolated elements within the critique itself, e.g. his philosophy of language, his existential emphasis, his aesthetics, his place in the history of thought (e.g. *Sturm und Drang, Frühromantik*), general summaries, or the appropriation of elements of his thought into systematic theology.<sup>14</sup> Although this research has been very worthwhile, what is unique about the present study is that it approaches his corpus from a new vantage point. Namely, this study traces a notion explicitly used throughout his writings in order to expose a driving motivation of his critique. Proceeding in this manner provides a comprehensive reading of Hamann's authorship. In doing so, the present study develops what might be called a *notion* of philosophical superstition and idolatry based on his idea of faith. This concurrently allots for the fragmentary, anti-systematic nature of his thought.<sup>15</sup> One can speak much more definitively about a motivation and disposition towards human knowledge in Hamann than specific ideas which can be further developed by a school of thought. This is because knowledge is always in dialogue, always underway, always informed by faith; and faith is always contingent. Hence there is justification in reading a unity in Hamann's authorship as long as one does not develop philosophical concepts void

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<sup>14</sup> Sven-Aage Jørgensen, "Hamanns Streitkultur," in *Sturm und Drang: Geistiger Aufbruch 1770-1790 im Spiegel der Literatur*, ed. Bodo Plachta and Winfried Woesler (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer, 1997), 67-77. Also, Emerich Coreth, Harald Schöndorf, and Emerich Coreth, *Philosophie des 17. und 18. Jahrhunderts*, 4. Aufl, Grundkurs Philosophie, Bd. 8 (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2008), 223.

<sup>15</sup> This is because Hamann never considers philosophy being able to attain any sense of totality regarding existence. Philosophical systems that either purport or imply a totality or definitiveness regarding knowledge must be superstitious according to Hamann. Consequently Hamann's thought can be not only classified as not only unsystematic, but anti-systematic.

of history, contingency, and subjectivity. This presents a challenge as well, delineating an approach without becoming merely conceptual and abstract.

### **Example: Socratic Memorabilia**

To preface, it will be useful to make some preliminary observations and undertake a cursory explication of the first two pages of the *Socratic Memorabilia* – the first text of Hamann’s self-proclaimed authorship. It provides a concrete example of the philosophical critique of idolatry and will be beneficial in connecting the approach taken up by the present study. Although in its initially stages, these initial pages of the *Socratic Memorabilia* reveal how Hamann began to interpret his age as superstitious, indeed, idolatrous. The same impulse that motivated Hamann to write this first text would continue throughout his authorship.

### **Glimpsing the Issue**

His critique of superstition would increasingly come to address abstract reason. Even in the first text of his self-proclaimed “authorship” the superstitious and idolatrous nature of his enlightened but “blind” contemporaries is front and center. Superstition and idolatry show up in tandem on the very first page of his published authorship. He addresses the Public, whom he accuses his friends Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) and Christoph Berens (1729-1792) of serving. Hamann wishes to free them from their servitude through the writing of the *Socratic Memorabilia*. In addressing the Public he states, “I throw myself, like the philosopher, at the hearing feet of a tyrant. My gift is in nothing but the lumps by which a god, like you, once burst in sunder. So let them be given

to a pair of your worshipers, whom I wish to purge with these pills from devotion to your vanity.”<sup>16</sup> What is of interest here is the nature of the “Public” described by Hamann, which has its origin in superstition (*Aberglaube*). “We know that there is no idol in the world. Neither are you human, yet you must be a human image which superstition has made a god.”<sup>17</sup> Furthermore, the language describing the Public parallels the biblical story of Elijah and the prophets of Baal.<sup>18</sup> “You must know everything, and you learn nothing, you must judge everything, and you understand nothing, ever learning and never able to come to a knowledge of the truth, you are talking, or you are pursuing, you are on a journey, or peradventure you sleep, while your priests lift up their voice, and you should answer them and their mockery with fire.”<sup>19</sup> Hence the Public cannot be understood as anything but an idol. The attributes of this idol are quite insightful for the development of Hamann’s critique of superstition and idolatry. Firstly, the entire section points to the abstract nature of this thing called the “Public”, e.g. “You [the Public] must know all things but never coming to a knowledge of the truth”. Significantly, faith is a precondition, “you find faith and do no miracles to earn it.”<sup>20</sup> Berens and the young Immanuel Kant place their faith in, and consequently serve, this idol in their own respective way. Berens is in service to the

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<sup>16</sup> Johann Georg Hamann, *Writings on Philosophy and Language*, trans. Kenneth Haynes, Cambridge Texts in the History of Philosophy (Cambridge, UK ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 5. N II, 59:23-27: *Socratic Memorabilia*. “Ich werfe mich wie der Philosoph zu den erhörenden Füßen eines Tyrannen. Meine Gabe besteht in nichts als Küchlein, von denen ein Gott, wie *Du*, einst *barst*. Überlaß sie daher einem Paar Deiner Anbeter, die ich durch diese Pillen von dem Dienst *Deiner Eitelkeit* zu reinigen wünsche.” (N II, 59:23-27).

<sup>17</sup> Hamann, 4. N II, 59:9-11: *Socratic Memorabilia*. “*Wir wissen, daß es keinen Götzen in der Welt giebt. Ein Mensch bist du auch nicht; doch must Du ein menschlich Bild seyn, das der Aberglaube vergöttert hat.*”

<sup>18</sup> 1 Kings 18.

<sup>19</sup> Hamann, *Writings on Philosophy and Language*, 4-5. N II, 59:15-19: *Socratic Memorabilia*. “*Du must alles wissen, und lernst nichts; Du must alles richten, und verstehst nicht, lernst immerdar, und kannst nimmer zur Erkenntnis der Wahrheit kommen; Du dchtest, hast zu schaffen, bist über Feld, oder schläfst vielleicht, wenn Deine Priester laut ruffen, und Du ihnen und ihrem Spötter mit Feuer antworten solltest.*”

<sup>20</sup> Hamann, 4. N II, 59:7-8: *Socratic Memorabilia*. “*Du findest Glauben, und thust keine Zeichen denselben zu verdienen.*”



political system of the day; full of “bourgeois virtues” (*bürgerliche Tugenden*) searching for the clarity of a “philosopher's stone” (*Stein der Weisen*), the purpose thereof was to lead to greater wealth.<sup>21</sup> Hamann accuses him of propagating a general system of economics that placed value on commerce and trade to the detriment of other virtues.<sup>22</sup> In Hamann’s mind this is a useless and vain task, and therefore he chooses to address him in, “the mystical language of a sophist, because wisdom will always be the most hidden secret of political economy”.<sup>23</sup> Kant, on the other hand, is accused of supporting this endeavor through his philosophical system, particularly its attempts at universal knowledge – and hence totality – derived through his philosophical system, according to Hamann.<sup>24</sup>

Richard Bauckham (1946\*) defines an aspect of idolatry as, “treating something relative as though it were absolute.”<sup>25</sup> This is akin to Hamann’s view in that some aspects of philosophical idolatry are its absolute and definitive nature. Hence Hamann’s own apprehension of creating any sort of philosophical system as it may in turn become a similar type of philosophical “idol”. Thus, one can catch a glimpse of how Hamann accused his contemporaries of philosophical idolatry.

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<sup>21</sup> Hamann’s employing alchemic terminology for that which would turn base metals into precious metal (i.e. gold, silver). For more on the various aspects and alchemic terminology see, Jörg Völlnagel, *Alchemie: Die Königliche Kunst* (München: Hirmer Verlag, 2012).

<sup>22</sup> Letters to Linder beginning in March, 1759. See, ZH I, 304-312.

<sup>23</sup> Hamann, *Writings on Philosophy and Language*, 5. N II, 59:2-4: *Socratic Memorabilia*. “Ich habe für ihn in der mystischen Sprache eines Sophisten geschrieben; weil Weisheit immer das verborgenste Geheimnis der Politick [sic] bleiben wird.”

<sup>24</sup> It is important to keep in mind that the Kant addressed in the *Socratic Memorabilia* is the pre-critical Kant. Hamann would later address the *Critique of Pure Reason*, but here Kant is representative of “standard” Enlightenment philosophy.

<sup>25</sup> Richard Bauckham, *The Bible in the Contemporary World: Hermeneutical Ventures* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2015), 40. Bauckham’s position does not follow Hamann’s own; indeed, Bauckham is engaged in theology for the modern reader and is specifically speaking of how consumerism can be idolatrous. Yet this concise description accords with aspects of Hamann's own regarding the philosophical idolatry of his age.

# CHAPTER I

## **Review of Scholarship**

Here at the outset it will be helpful to place this study within the already existing Hamann scholarship. This will reveal the uniqueness of the contribution as well as exposing upon which impulses it is based. At the most basic level, despite the variety of interpretations, one can discern two streams in Hamann scholarship at odds with each other.<sup>26</sup> These two opposing streams can be constructed as negative and positive; the present study falling loosely into the category of the latter. What is meant by negative are those who either (a) laud Hamann's historical influence, yet assert that his thought contains too much contradiction to be considered seriously in its own right, or (b) see him as a conservative harkening back to pre-modern thought, not merely archaic but pernicious to modern liberal goals.<sup>27</sup> Contrarily, what is meant by positive – or what might also be called “constructive” thought – are those who tend to either (a) interpret Hamann's authorship as consistent in its own right, only being difficult insofar as he rejects the

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<sup>26</sup> It should be noted that the following analysis deals with Hamann interpretation in the academic sense. The present study locates this beginning in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Of course, during Hamann's lifetime his writings received reviews and the generation thereafter felt his influence (e.g. Herder, Goethe, Schleiermacher). Still, this influence was mostly in relation to each thinker's respective philosophy or theology and therefore does not fall under the category of academic scholarship, but would instead fall under reception. For the early sources see, Karl Hermann Gildemeister, *Johann Georg Hamanns des Magus in Norden Leben und Schriften*, vol. 1–6 (Gotha: F. A. Perthes, 1857).; Rudolf Unger, *Hamann und die Aufklärung: Studien zur Vorgeschichte des romantischen Geistes im 18. Jahrhundert*, vol. 1, 2 vols. (Jena: Eugen Diederichs, 1911).; Friedrich Schleiermacher, *Hermeneutics and Criticism and Other Writings*, ed. Andrew Bowie, Cambridge Texts in the History of Philosophy (Cambridge, U.K. ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 13–14, 73.

<sup>27</sup> Here negative is meant to merely indicate those who are critical to the degree that they primarily see detrimental aspects in Hamann's thought. This is not to be confused with an apophatic approach. Insofar as Hamann is critical of metaphysical propositions regarding God, an apophatic approach could be argued for based upon his ideas of the condescension of God. Hamann does not advocate a “God of the gaps” type of theology such as that criticized by Dietrich Bonhoeffer. See, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison* (Princeton, N.J.: Recording for the Blind & Dyslexic, 2006), 310–12.

systematic nature of his theological and philosophical counterparts, or (b) seek to utilize him in building contemporary philosophical and theological forms of thought.

The central figures on the negative side are Rudolf Unger (1876-1942) and Isaiah Berlin (1909-1997), as they were the primary advocates of reading Hamann as an irrationalist.<sup>28</sup> Unger embodies the first tenant of negative thought as he understands Hamann purely as a historical phenomenon.<sup>29</sup> For Unger, this does not mean that Hamann's thought has no utility, but it does mean that it plays only an influential role rather than a constructive one. Although his intention is to provide a historical explication, Unger ties together the disparate strands of Hamann's authorship in the uniqueness of his personality (*seelische Eigenart*).<sup>30</sup> Hamann is thereby reduced to an eccentric personality, a historical curiosity worth reading yet lacking substance upon which to build. Berlin represents a much more radical interpretation. Hamann's irrationalism is seen as something outside of what is to be considered Enlightenment, founding, as it were, a counter-Enlightenment.<sup>31</sup> It is not only that Hamann's thought is plagued by conflicting impulses but Berlin finds these

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<sup>28</sup> They are not the only ones. Other early twentieth century Hamann commentators were also prone to put Hamann in the camp of irrationalism. However, this form of irrationalism was held as something that still brought some benefit to philosophy. It was not as radical as that which would be later postulated by Isaiah Berlin. Therefore, the understanding of the present study would still reject categorizing Hamann as part of some form of irrationalism; these somewhat dated sources were not seeking to dismiss him in the same way Berlin was. One should keep in mind that those early sources who categorized him as an irrationalist were not necessarily dismissive of his philosophical insights, perhaps only misguided in their use of the word, particularly with the many positive references to reason often overlooked. Cf. Hans-Emil Weber, "Zwei Propheten des Irrationalismus. J. G. Hamann und S. Kierkegaard als Bahnbrecher der Theologie des Christusglaubens," *Neue kirchliche Zeitschrift* 28, no. 1 (1917); Ewald Burger, *J. G. Hamann: Schöpfung und Erlösung im Irrationalismus* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1929).

<sup>29</sup> The title of his monumental work, Unger, *Hamann und die Aufklärung: Studien zur Vorgeschichte des romantischen Geistes im 18. Jahrhundert.*, clearly reveals his interpretation of Hamann as having mere historical importance.

<sup>30</sup> Unger, 1:115.

<sup>31</sup> There are also parallels with Berlin's view and that of John Milbank insofar as they both hold Hamann as representing a conservative reaction to liberalism. Cf. Katie Terezakis, "J. G. Hamann and the Self-Refutation of Radical Orthodoxy," in *The Poverty of Radical Orthodoxy*, ed. Marko Zlomislčić and Lisa Isherwood (Eugene, Or.: Pickwick Publications, 2012), 43.

thoughts detrimental to philosophical and political liberalism that should consequently be read with discretion and even suspicion.<sup>32</sup>

It should be noted that the above figures are quite dated. Unger certainly still carries importance in the furthering of academic research on Hamann, however, his interpretation has received thorough treatment and is largely a point of departure for contemporary historical analysis. Despite few researchers holding critical views of Hamann, keeping these voices in mind can be helpful as the majority of research on Hamann, as pointed out by Robert Sparling, has an overly laudatory tone.<sup>33</sup> The present study sees Hamann's thought as far ahead of its time in many ways, yet does not wish to ignore aspects of his thought often times ignored by contemporary scholarship.<sup>34</sup>

The other and much larger group of Hamann interpreters, nearly unanimously reject the claim of irrationalism in Hamann.<sup>35</sup> The defining characteristic of this line of interpretation is upholding Hamann's thought as constructive and coherent. Many of these

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<sup>32</sup> Dan Smith represents the tendency to read Hamann as a precursor to fascism, particularly due to his influence on Herder. Smith focuses on Hamann's vehemence in arguing against those who did not hold his opinion. Hamann did, indeed, argue in this fashion. However, he consistently argued against compelling others to conform to his position. See, Dan Smith, in *Ethics, Nationalism, and Just War: Medieval and Contemporary Perspectives*, ed. Henrik Syse and Gregory M. Reichberg (Washington, D.C: The Catholic University of America Press, 2007), 264.

<sup>33</sup> Robert Alan Sparling, *Johann Georg Hamann and the Enlightenment Project* (Toronto; Buffalo [N.Y.]: University of Toronto Press, 2011), xiv.

<sup>34</sup> Many aspects of Hamann's thought might nowadays be considered problematic, they can often be explained as corresponding to the main thinking of his time and they should not be ignored. E.g. Hamann's Lutheran influences drove his ideas of the condescension of God, his skepticism of reason, system, and emphasis on faith. However, it was also grounded on a nationalistic understanding of the Lutheran Bible and its juxtaposition to French and English philosophy. It was a grounding for the German people and its denigration meant the denigration of the German people.

<sup>35</sup> A sample of authors representing this line of interpretation can be found in Oswald Bayer, ed., *Johann Georg Hamann: "Der hellste Kopf seiner Zeit"* (Tübingen: Attempto, 1998). Irrationalism is not something isolated to the Enlightenment period, but has received significant philosophical commentary. Cf. Jürgen Mittelstraß, *Enzyklopädie Philosophie und Wissenschaftstheorie. 4: Sp - Z* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1996), 72-74.

approaches seek to explicate a specific aspect found in Hamann: existentialism (Smith),<sup>36</sup> linguistic philosophy (Terezakis),<sup>37</sup> the relationship between nature and history (Veldhuis),<sup>38</sup> etc. Others attempt extrapolations and applications into contemporary issues. How this is done takes on a myriad of forms: the encounter with the author God in Hamann's conversion (Bayer),<sup>39</sup> the use of intuitive reason as a legitimate form of thinking unrepresented by his contemporaries (O'Flaherty)<sup>40</sup>, a profound critic of secularity, providing philosophical and theological ways of overcoming the nihilism of modernity (Milbank, Betz),<sup>41</sup> to spotlight a few.

This overview - albeit in very broad strokes - helps bring the particular contribution of the present study into greater clarity. As can be inferred from the introduction, there is loose agreement between those who assert that there are cohesive elements contained within the tempest that is Hamann's authorship. The ambition of the present study is to make sense of Hamann's thought by dealing strictly with an explication of Hamann's work as a critique of the superstition and idolatry of his century. This furthers the understanding of this opaque and bewildering figure in relation to his historical period and the internal

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<sup>36</sup> Smith, J. G. *Hamann 1730-1788: A Study in Christian Existence*.

<sup>37</sup> Terezakis, "J. G. Hamann and the Self-Refutation of Radical Orthodoxy."

<sup>38</sup> Henri Veldhuis, *Ein versiegeltes Buch: der Naturbegriff in der Theologie J.G. Hamanns (1730-1788)* (Berlin: W. de Gruyter, 1994).

<sup>39</sup> Oswald Bayer, *Zeitgenosse im Widerspruch: Johann Georg Hamann als Radikaler Aufklärer*, Originalausg, Serie Piper, Bd. 918 (München: Piper, 1988), 69. Bayer sees this encounter as the primary motive (*Urmotiv*) behind Hamann's thought. He also seeks to incorporate his insights in building a contemporary, Lutheran theology. Oswald Bayer, *Schöpfung als Anrede: Zu einer Hermeneutik der Schöpfung*, 2., Aufl (Tübingen: Mohr, 1990).

<sup>40</sup> James C. O'Flaherty, *Johann Georg Hamann*, Twayne's World Authors Series, TWAS 527 (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1979). O'Flaherty sees an "intuitive" reason being developed by Hamann - yet existing elsewhere, e.g. some Indian wisdom - and then attempts to advance this thought within contemporary philosophy.

<sup>41</sup> John Milbank, "Knowledge: The Theological Critique of Philosophy in Hamann and Jacobi," in *Radical Orthodoxy: A New Theology*, ed. Catherine Pickstock, Graham Ward, and Milbank, John (London ; New York: Routledge, 1999). And John Betz, *After Enlightenment: The Post-Secular Vision of J.G. Hamann*, Illuminations--Theory and Religion (Malden, MA ; Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell Pub, 2009).

logic of his writings. Prior to dealing with the specifics of his critique of his critical century, one scholar in particular who dealt with Hamann's use of idolatry in his critique should be recognized and his contribution addressed.

### **Faith, Superstition, and Idolatry**

It is not uncommon to find an allusion or brief reference to Hamann's consideration of some positions as superstitious or idolatrous, as Hamann frequently utilized these terms when describing whichever system he happened to be critiquing. However, these comments remain peripheral to most studies, with the exception of W. M. Alexander's book (1966), *Johann Georg Hamann: Philosophy and Faith*.<sup>42</sup> The present study is indebted to Alexander's book in a couple of significant ways. Firstly, he calls attention to the prevalence of Hamann's focus on idolatry, and secondly, for his in depth research in gathering Hamann's specific references to the term.

Despite Alexander's essential contribution, the present study is both unique and well warranted for a number of reasons. Alexander's book was written not long after the publication of Nadler's edition of Hamann's corpus,<sup>43</sup> and Alexander even makes mention of its cursory nature. Alexander primarily sought to give people in the English speaking world an introduction to Hamann.<sup>44</sup> It is not only the introductory nature of his study, but the content itself which differs from the present work. Alexander does not attempt an

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<sup>42</sup> W. M. Alexander, *Johann Georg Hamann Philosophy and Faith* (Springer Science + Business Media B.V., 1966).

<sup>43</sup> Nadler's edition sparked a renewed interest in Hamann research. Until that time, within English language research there existed few in depth studies. Instead, what was available tended to be introductory and of a very cursory nature.

<sup>44</sup> Alexander, *Johann Georg Hamann Philosophy and Faith*, 1. "This study is intended to be only an introduction."

explication of the notion of idolatry in Hamann, but seeks an interpretation of Hamann's ideas of philosophy which Alexander separated into three categories: idololatria, agnosia, and philologia. His book focuses on explicating the content of these three "categories" of philosophy – idololatria being a "false" philosophy, agnosia a philosophy *before* faith, and philologia a philosophy *from* faith. No attempt is made by Alexander to trace or present a cohesive notion of superstition and idolatry in Hamann beyond some cursory remarks.

The present study differentiates itself by taking the notion of superstition and idolatry as a means of understanding Hamann's authorship – as a motivation for, and foundational to, his critique. Moreover, the idea of faith is taken to be a broader faculty of thought than is presented in Alexander's work. In fact, on the empirical, experiential level it would be incorrect to speak of a philosophy before faith insofar as faith permeates all sense experience, covered in depth in Chapter II. Hence, an elucidation and presentation of the notion of superstition and idolatry is necessary.

### **Critique Criticized**

The explication of Hamann's critique of superstition and idolatry helps clarify Hamann's published authorship as its entirety is marked by critique.<sup>45</sup> Amidst the varying emphases (language, faith, revelation, etc.) he nearly always writes in response to something he deemed detrimental. He does not intend to build on a specific line of thought, at least at first appearance.

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<sup>45</sup> This excludes his letters and early unpublished devotional texts, which he did not consider as part of his authorship, but belonging to the broader category of his thought.

This tendency of critique has early foundations in his interaction with Kant and Berens that led to him taking up the figure of Socrates, “I have written about Socrates in a Socratic Way. Analogy was the soul of his reasoning (*Schlüsse*), and he gave it irony for a body.”<sup>46</sup> Irony would permeate much of his authorship.<sup>47</sup> His critique of the dominance of criticism demonstrates this irony. Consider the following, “Nothing could be more ridiculous than to conduct a proof that is the contrary of a truth that has been not only firmly proven but also crowned. Hence I find myself under the pleasant obligation of being able to burn the incense of doubt to the fashionable spirit of my age.”<sup>48</sup> Elsewhere he writes, “I believe, like Socrates, everything that the other person does – and from this starting place disrupt others in their belief.”<sup>49</sup> Therefore, irony was often his weapon of choice. He would use the language of his interlocutor to undo the conceptual development intended by whichever text was under scrutiny. Furthermore, his unwavering conviction in the inability of any abstract system to comprise experience gave him confidence in the pursuit of sowing doubt.

The means whereby Hamann seeks to sow the seeds of doubt, or disturb the belief of others, starts first by accepting the premises of the other’s system and proceeds with

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<sup>46</sup> Hamann, *Writings on Philosophy and Language*, 7. N II, 61:10-13: *Socratic Memorabilia*. “Ich habe über den Sokrates auf eine sokratische Art geschoben. Die *Analogie* war die Seele seiner Schlüsse, und er gab ihnen die *Ironie* zu ihrem Leibe.”

<sup>47</sup> Timo G. Schmidt points out that Hamann’s use of irony was also a way to demonstrate the multiple meanings present in a text. Timo G. Schmidt, *Theologie in Bewegung: Glaube und Skepsis in kritischer Aufnahme von Johann Georg Hamann*, Theologie, Kultur, Hermeneutik, Band 16 (Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2015), 82.

<sup>48</sup> Hamann, *Writings on Philosophy and Language*, 119. N III, 41:16-20: *Philological Ideas and Doubts*. “Es würde allerhöchst lächerlich seyn, wider eine nicht nur fest bewiesene [sic] sondern auch gekrönte Wahrheit einen Gegenbeweis zu führen. Ich befinde mich daher in der angenehmen Nothwendigkeit dem Modegeiste meines Jahrhunderts durch Zweifel räuchern zu können.”

<sup>49</sup> ZH I, 377:26-27. Letter to Kant, July 1759, “Ich glaube wie *Socrates* alles, was der andere glaubt – und geh nur darauf aus, andere in ihrem Glauben zu stöhnen.”



showing the flaws from within. He presents this procedure very clearly in his critique of Mendelssohn's *Jerusalem: On Religious Power and Judaism*.<sup>50</sup>

Since however a great gulf between our religious and philosophical principles has been firmly established, equity demands that the author be compared only with himself and to no standard other than the one which he himself professes. Herr Mendelssohn believes in a state of nature, which he partly presupposes and partly opposes to society (as dogmatists do with a state of grace). I grant him and every dogmatist his belief, even if I am myself incapable of making either a proper concept or use of this hypothesis so familiar to most of the men of letters of our century.<sup>51</sup>

Hamann's aversion to the mainstream of his century is here on display. He goes on to demonstrate how this State of Nature is inconsistent according to the terms set out by Mendelssohn. Hamann seeks to show how the entire premise is based upon certain presuppositions which, when not granted, disrupt the entire endeavor, thereby sowing the seeds of doubt regarding his first principles.

This is not to suggest that Hamann thought critique the highest principle, but that his particular role was one of reproof. So that, like Socrates, his contemporaries would see the poverty of their thought. According to Hamann, to know Socrates required imitation of him: accepting one's lack of knowledge. This involved knowing oneself and a recognition of the piecemeal nature of all knowledge.<sup>52</sup> Although highly critical, the critique found in Hamann's thought is distinct. He did not hold that critique or doubt – in a Cartesian sense –

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<sup>50</sup> Moses Mendelssohn, *Jerusalem, or, On Religious Power and Judaism*, trans. Allan Arkush (Hanover: Published for Brandeis University Press by University Press of New England, 1983).

<sup>51</sup> Hamann, *Writings on Philosophy and Language*, 165, 166.

<sup>52</sup> Cf. To Herder May 8th, 1785. Z V, 432, "Unser Wissen ist Stückwerk – diese große Wahrheit ist kein Dogmatiker recht im stande zu fühlen, wenn er seine Rolle, und noch dazu gut spielen soll." Trans. "Our knowledge is piecemeal – no dogmatician is properly able to feel this, if he is to play his part, and in addition, to play it well."

should be the starting place of thought. For him, starting with the *cogito* was just another presumption of possessing the truth in an absolute, comprehensive sense that concealed prejudices, and lead to the denial and overlooking of the faith commitments of the respective theorists. This adds another layer to the irony: demonstrating the prejudice of a philosophy presuming to be untainted by superstitious prejudices.<sup>53</sup>

As indicated above, the critique that marked Hamann's writings was qualitatively different from the notion of critique held by other Enlighteners. The qualitative difference lies in the nature of critique. For many Enlightenment thinkers, critique was the means whereby the validity of ideas could be secured. They sought to weed out contradiction and thus achieve accurate, true propositions about reality, specifically by employing abstract reason.<sup>54</sup> One of the major flaws in Enlightenment thought was the idolization of critique. In regards to Hamann, critique marked his authorship insofar as his writings addressed and criticized the flaws he saw in his century. It was not used by Hamann to secure a specific philosophical system or absolute. In characteristic fashion, Hamann turns the Enlightenment notion on its head, launching a critique of critique.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Miguel de Unamuno has a similar critique of rationalism and the philosophy of the Enlightenment - and of Descartes in particular - employed by Hamann. Cf. Miguel de Unamuno, *Tragic Sense of Life*, ed. J. E. Crawford Fritch, 2014, 79–115.

<sup>54</sup> Much of this stemmed from the influence of Descartes. Cf. Horst Möller, *Vernunft und Kritik: Deutsche Aufklärung im 17. und 18. Jahrhundert*, Erstausg., 1. Aufl., [Nachdr.], Edition Suhrkamp Neue historische Bibliothek, 1269 = N.F., Bd. 269 (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1997), 43–44.

<sup>55</sup> Understanding the historical specificity is important, namely, Hamann's position in the Enlightenment. However, Garrett Green makes the astute observation that Hamann breaks fully with the foundational premises of many thinkers of his time. This is in opposition to those, Oswald Bayer included, who paint the picture of Hamann taking the Enlightenment to its logical conclusions. Once Hamann points out logical inconsistencies he does not try to fix or enhance them, but juxtaposes an entirely different way of reading the world. Although not an irrationalist, he does represent a sharp break with those he critiques, as opposed to a further development of the ideas critiqued. See, Garrett Green, "Modern Culture Comes of Age: Hamann versus Kant on the Root Metaphor of Enlightenment," in *What Is Enlightenment? Eighteenth-Century Answers and Twentieth-Century Questions*, ed. James Schmidt, Philosophical Traditions 7 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 299–301.

In many instances Hamann speaks of the dangers lurking behind the faith contained in the veracity of critique to garner truth. Consider:

Your lying murderous philosophy has cleared nature out of the way, and why do you demand that we are to imitate her? – So that you can renew the pleasure by becoming murderers of the pupils of nature, too – Yes you delicate critics of art!, you go on asking what is truth, and make for the door, because you cannot wait for an answer to this question –<sup>56</sup>

The methodological critique of many Enlightenment thinkers presumed a position outside of history, itself unsusceptible to critique that was not grounded on abstract reason.<sup>57</sup> It is the means and aim of the criticism of Hamann's time that he saw as most problematic, leading to the superstition present in his age.

The "critique of critique" shows up most clearly in the *Metacritique of the Purism of Reason*, where he declares his age a "critical century."<sup>58</sup> Herein he exposes the lack inherent in elevating critique above all else. The following quote demonstrates Hamann's approach:

Receptivity of language and spontaneity of concepts! – From this double source of ambiguity pure reason draws all the elements of its doctrinairism, doubt, and connoisseurship. Through an analysis just as arbitrary as the synthesis of the thrice old leaven, it brings forth new phenomena and meteors on the inconstant horizon, creates signs and wonders with the All-creator and destroying mercurial caduceus of its mouth or with the forked goose quill between the three syllogistic writing fingers of its Herculean fist.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Hamann, *Writings on Philosophy and Language*, 77. *Aesthetica in Nuce*.

<sup>57</sup> Hamann speaks of skepticism becoming dogma. To Herder, May 8<sup>th</sup> 1785, Z V, 432. "...durch einen unvermeidl. Zirkel der reinen Vernunft wird die Σκεψις selbst zum dogma."

<sup>58</sup> Hamann, *Writings on Philosophy and Language*, 207. *Metacritique on the Purism of Reason*.

<sup>59</sup> Hamann, 208–9. N III, 284:33-285:1-2: *Metacritique on the Purism of Reason*. "Rezeptivität der Sprache und Spontaneität der Begriffe! - Aus dieser (doppelten) (zwiefachen) doppelten Quelle der Zweideutigkeit schöpft

This is, of course, addressing something specific to the Kantian Critique of Pure Reason (i.e. receptivity of speech and spontaneity of concepts); yet the point remains the same for his age as a whole: critique alone is unable to bring one to a knowledge of the truth. Notice his language when addressing a philosophy attempting clarity and universality: ambiguity, doctrinairism, and especially arbitrary. The systems created by abstract reason were viewed as fabrications, idols upon which one must believe. At this point it is important to note the significance of critique in Hamann's authorship. The critique of the Enlightenment was based on the application of abstract reason; consequently both the emphasis on critique and the idolatry of his century are intrinsically linked.<sup>60</sup>

### **Empiricism and the Blind Philosophers**

Another element essential to Hamann's criticism is his reliance on empiricism; how his empiricism contributed to marking critique by its relation to his notion of faith will here be pointed out. Hamann's empiricism leans primarily upon David Hume, whom he considered "Saul among the prophets".<sup>61</sup> Hume's influence bolstered Hamann's skepticism towards the ability of philosophical systemization to attain certainty, not to mention its importance for his language philosophy:

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die reine Vernunft alle Elemente ihrer Rechthaberey, Zweifelsucht und Kunstrichterschaft, erzeugt durch eine ebenso willkürliche Analysin als Synthesin des dreymal alten Sauerteigs neue Phänomene und Meteore des wandelbaren Horizonts, schafft Zeichen und Wunder mit dem Allhervorbringen und zerstörenden mercurialischen Zauberstabe ihres Mundes oder dem gespaltenen Gänse(f)kiel zwischen den drey syllogistischen Schreibefinger(n) ihrer herkulischen Faust –."

<sup>60</sup> Gwen Griffith Dickson, in *Johann Georg Hamann: "der Hellste Kopf Seiner Zeit,"* ed. Oswald Bayer (Tübingen: Attempto, 1998), 242. Although early on he did not describe his work as metacritique, he later referred to it as such.

<sup>61</sup> This phrase indicates how he utilized Hume as ultimately a friend and ally. Truth can come from the most unlikely of sources: King Saul or David Hume. One must be humble enough to not overlook that which is revealed through the unexpected and base. Z I 380:5-6, "Alle[r] seine[r] Fehler ungeachtet ist er wie Saul unter den Propheten."

Still I would ten times rather talk myself out of breath into the wind with a man born blind about the first and fourth days of the Mosaic history of creation, or with a man born deaf about the harmony of a tiny nightingale and a foreign gelding, than fall out any longer with an adversary who is not even capable of seeing that a universal, sound, practical human language, and human reason, and human religion, without arbitrary fundamental principles, are his own furnace of ice.<sup>62</sup>

Hamann's empiricism would lead him to affirm the faith-based foundation of knowledge, which establishes the very foundation of his approach. Furthermore, his empiricism aids in comprehending why he held no quarter for the confidence of his contemporaries, emphasizing instead, an approach based upon humility and receptivity. According to Hamann, leaning on abstract reason closes the eyes to the senses. Hence, philosophers who do this are blind in respect to their philosophical endeavors. In regards to philosophy, although one may have a perfectly consistent system, abstracted from the reality of that which is revealed in the senses leaves one without sight. Blindness is a reoccurring theme in his critique of abstract reason. Hamann sees abstract philosophical systems as having their own respective rules and grounds of reason, yet ostracized from the senses they are like having a conversation with a person blind from birth about light or the stars.

The empirical elements in his thought, while contributing to its critical aspects, support understanding him within the framework of the Enlightenment. This applies, even if this only means that the categories and vocabulary were essentially Enlightenment ones.

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<sup>62</sup> Hamann, *Writings on Philosophy and Language*, 154. N III, 97:31-40: *New Apology of the Letter h*. "Doch ich will zehnmal lieber mit einem Blindgeborenen vom *ersten* und *vierten* Tagewerk der mosaischen Schöpfungsgeschichte, oder mit einem Taubgeborenen von der Harmonie einer winzigen Nachtigall und eines welschen Verschnittenen mich aus dem Othem in den Wind reden als länger mit einem Gegner mich überwerfen, der nicht einmal fähig ist einzusehen, daß eine allgemeine, gesunde, practische Menschensprache, und Menschenvernunft und Menschenreligion ohne *willkührliche* Grundsätze sein eigener *Backofen von Eis* sind."

This is to say – however enigmatic that his thought appears – it remains closely connected to the topics and thought structures of that time.<sup>63</sup>

Despite the profound impact of empiricism on Hamann, it would be a stretch to label his thought as such. Empiricism informs his thought, but only insofar as it supports other elements (faith, revelation, eschatology, etc.). In short, empiricism contributed to Hamann's thought rather than the other way around.

### **Setting the Stage: Hamann's Interlocutors**

Prior to tackling the intricacies of how and why Hamann considered the thinkers of his day superstitious, and as such idolatrous, a brief look at whom he considered his interlocutors will take place.<sup>64</sup> In Hamann's eyes the three general movements which helped constitute Enlightenment thought to be considered in this section are Rationalism, the French Encyclopedists and the Berlin Enlightenment. And it is these three movements that encompassed the interlocutors with whom Hamann engaged.

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<sup>63</sup> See, Michael N. Forster, *After Herder: Philosophy of Language in the German Tradition* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 283–323. One example Forster points to is the dualism shared by Hamann and his contemporaries. Additionally, Socrates was a figure utilized by the Enlightenment as a paradigm for their values and goals. For one example of Enlightenment use of Socrates see, Moses Mendelssohn, *Phädon, oder, über die Unsterblichkeit der Seele*, ed. Anne Pollok, Philosophische Bibliothek, Bd. 595 (Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag, 2013).

<sup>64</sup> The Enlightenment does contain a diversity at times overlooked. See, Dickson and Hamann, *Johann Georg Hamann's Relational Metacriticism*, 1–6.

## A Post-Cartesian Epoch

After the middle of the seventeenth century the Cartesian spirit permeates all fields of knowledge until it dominates not only philosophy, but also literature, morals, political science, and sociology, asserting itself even in the realm of theology to which it imparted a new form.<sup>65</sup> – Ernst Cassirer

Hamann's opinion is similar to the above quote (although negatively conceived, insofar as he interpreted the influence of Descartes as a move in the wrong direction). From his *Biblical Observations* to his final works, this remained unchanged.<sup>66</sup> He viewed his age as indelibly shaped by René Descartes (1596-1650), even going so far as stating that Descartes had become an elementary book (*Elementarbuch*) for his age.<sup>67</sup> Although he considered Descartes outdated for young philosophers, this did not mean that he thought Descartes' influence to have waned.<sup>68</sup> The monumental change brought about by Descartes is represented most vividly in the *cogito* of the famous formula – *cogito ergo sum*.<sup>69</sup> This formula represented a shift in authority and a transition to the search to ascertain certainty of truths based upon his method.<sup>70</sup> The *cogito* symbolized the ascendancy of human reason

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<sup>65</sup> Ernst Cassirer, *The Philosophy of the Enlightenment*, ed. James P. Pettegrove, trans. Fritz C. A. Koelln, Princeton Paperbacks (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton Univ. Pr, 1995), 28.

<sup>66</sup>For an example from his early works see, N 1, 12:12, and from his later works, N 3, 364:17. Worth noting, Newton and Leibniz were also seen as ushering in large changes to thought, however, not to the degree that Descartes did in philosophical thought.

<sup>67</sup> N III, 221:7.

<sup>68</sup> For his comments of Descartes being outdated see, N II, 162:20. For his continuing influence see, N IV, 221:25. "Er verdient die Ehre als ein Großvater der neueren Philosophien angesehen zu werden." (Tran. He deserves the honor to be considered a grandfather to the new philosophers).

<sup>69</sup> See, René Descartes, *Discourse on Method; and, Meditations on First Philosophy*, trans. Donald A. Cress, 4th ed (Indianapolis: Hackett Pub, 1998). See also, Ernst Cassirer, *Die Philosophie der Aufklärung*, Grundriß der philosophischen Wissenschaften (Tübingen: Paul Siebeck, 1932), 1–7, 15–16.

<sup>70</sup> Stefan Majetschak, "Der Stil als Grenze der Methode. Über Hamanns Descartes-'Lektüre'," in *Johann Georg Hamann und die Krise der Aufklärung: Acta des fünften Internationalen Hamann-Kolloquiums in Münster i.W. (1988)*, ed. Bernhard Gajek and Albert Meier, Regensburger Beiträge zur Deutschen Sprach- und Literaturwissenschaft, Bd. 46 (Frankfurt am Main ; New York: P. Lang, 1990), 227.

or, more precisely, the allocation of authority moving completely to abstract reason.<sup>71</sup> This forms the bedrock upon which his age, and consequently his interlocutors, stands. This mentality manifests itself in a variety of ways. Hamann located the nearest appropriation of these seventeenth century developments in the rationalist philosophy of Christian Wolff.

### **The Rationalism of Christian Wolff**

Hamann was appalled by the rampant rationalism of his day and its quest for mathematical certainty.<sup>72</sup> Mathematical certainty was something that could never be attained with the purity hoped for when empirical sense perception was taken into account. Although the age itself was post-Cartesian, one of the specific figures looming over Hamann's intellectual world and often referenced was Christian Wolff (1679-1754). Again, it was not Wolff himself as much as it was his impact on other thinkers, including some of Hamann's university professors that caused Wolff to be considered a leading Enlightenment figure by Hamann.<sup>73</sup> What Descartes was for the transition to the *cogito* as the place of authority, Wolff was to mathematical precision in metaphysics and philosophy.<sup>74</sup> In Hamann's mind, Wolff's approach was taken to an unhealthy and

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<sup>71</sup> Historical developments aside, Hamann did not view Descartes as lacking in value, only that his contributions to thought were limited. See, Oswald Bayer, "Wahrheit oder Methode? Hamann und die neuzeitliche Wissenschaft," in *Johann Georg Hamann und die Krise der Aufklärung: Acta des fünften Internationalen Hamann-Kolloquiums in Münster i.W. (1988)*, ed. Bernhard Gajek and Albert Meier, Regensburger Beiträge zur Deutschen Sprach- und Literaturwissenschaft, Bd. 46 (Frankfurt am Main ; New York: P. Lang, 1990).

<sup>72</sup> Hamann, *Writings on Philosophy and Language*, 72. *Aesthetica in Nuce*. "Blame it on the foolishness of my way of writing, which accords so ill with the original mathematical sin of your writing."

<sup>73</sup> Wollfian as well as Pietistic thought was advanced by some of Hamann's university professors. See, Veldhuis, *Ein versiegeltes Buch der Naturbegriff in der Theologie J.G. Hamanns (1730-1788)*, 34.

<sup>74</sup> For more on the implications of mathematical certainty see, Michael Schulz, *Sein und Trinität: systematische Erörterungen zur Religionsphilosophie G.W.F. Hegels im ontologiegeschichtlichen Rückblick auf J. Duns Scotus und I. Kant und die Hegel-Rezeption in der Seinsauslegung und Trinitätstheologie bei W. Pannenberg, E. Jüngel, K. Rahner und H.U. v. Balthasar*, Münchener Theologische Studien, 53. Bd (St. Ottilien: EOS Verlag, 1997), 92. For the Rationalism and the mathematization of the intellect see, Alberto Burgio, in *Enzyklopädie Philosophie:*



idolatrous level. Wolff emphasized precision and systematic cohesiveness. Wolff's starting place for metaphysics was the principle of non-contradiction, which he held as the "source of all certainty".<sup>75</sup> When Hamann brings up the principle of non-contradiction, he has Wolffian influence in mind. Since Hamann found the humbler approach of the British Empiricists more palatable, it is not difficult to see why that which Wolff embodied would be one of Hamann's adversaries throughout his authorship. Wolff symbolized Hamann's contention with those who belay the concrete and historical. "Nature works through the senses and the passions. But those who maim these instruments, how can they feel? Are crippled sinews fit for movement? – Your lying murderous philosophy has cleared nature out of the way."<sup>76</sup> This tendency pervaded his age, and Wolff happens to serve as the most thorough going of the bunch.<sup>77</sup> In order to demonstrate the manner in which Hamann employs Wolff as a representative of the ideas and ambitions of his age, observe the following quote referring to a scholar arguing for orthographic reform based on modern rationalist ideas:

O you ignorant despiser of divine providence and universal human reason!,  
do not regard as a blind game of chance the fact that the orthography of the  
extraordinary religious teacher [Wolff] is as closely related to the main

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*in Drei Bänden Mit Einer CD-ROM*, ed. Hans Jörg Sandkühler, 2., überarb. und erw. Aufl., vol. 3 (Hamburg: Meiner, 2010), 2895.

<sup>75</sup> Christian Wolff, *Philosophia prima sive Ontologia methodo scientifica pertractata: qua omnis cognitionis humanae principia continentior*, 1736, 23. "Patet adeo principium contradictionis esse fontem omnis certitudinis, quo posito, ponitur certitudo in cognitione humana; quo sublato, tollitur omnis certitudo."

<sup>76</sup> Hamann, *Writings on Philosophy and Language*, 77. N II, 206:1-3: *Aesthetica in Nuce*. "Die Natur würkt durch Sinne und Leidenschaften. Wer ihre Werkzeuge verstümmelt, wie mag der empfinden? Sind auch gelähmte Sennadern zur Bewegung aufgelegt? – –."

<sup>77</sup> In Kant's words, "the illustrious *Wolff*, the greatest among all the dogmatic philosophers. He was first to provide the example (through which he became the originator of the - not yet extinct - spirit of thoroughness in Germany." Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, ed. James W. Ellington, trans. Werner S. Pluhar, Unified ed (Indianapolis, Ind: Hackett Pub. Co, 1996), 35.

subject as to the spirit of his illuminated century...merely because the hoary  
*Wolffian* [italics mine] in his time just wrote in ideas. - -<sup>78</sup>

Mathematical certainty coincided with systematic purity, which was a misplaced goal. Wolff served as a symbol of the rationalist approach which had been favorably taken up by many of Hamann's contemporaries.

Thus, Hamann's world consisted of a post-Cartesian environment wherein reason had been freed from the shackles of tradition and experience. Furthermore, abstract reason was employed to the extreme, seeking to achieve mathematical certainty and precision. The next major interlocutor of Hamann's intellectual world was embodied by the French Encyclopedists.

### **Encyclopedic Knowledge**

Hamann was well aware of the developments regarding the idea of the encyclopedia. To him, encyclopedic was in reference to Denis Diderot's (1713-1784), *Encyclopédie, ou dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers*, as well as the outlook it represented, of which Diderot was himself cognizant.<sup>79</sup>

Josef Nadler gives a concise and precise definition of what the encyclopedia represented to Hamann, "[The Encyclopedia was] the major work of the European Enlightenment. The meaning of the word: comprehensive account (*Darstellung*) of everything worth knowing. Its purpose: beyond special knowledge unto a singular

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<sup>78</sup> Hamann, *Writings on Philosophy and Language*, 157. N III, 101:1-5, 10: *New Apology of the Letter h*. "O du unwissender Schmäher göttlicher Vorsehung und allgemeiner Menschenvernunft! sieh es nicht für ein blindes Spiel des Zufalls an, daß die Orthographie des ausserordentlichen Religionslehrers sich eben so sehr zur Hauptsache paßt, als zum Geiste seines erleuchteten Jahrhunderts...weil der eisgraue Wolfianer damals eben in Gedanken schrieb."

<sup>79</sup> Cassirer, *Die Philosophie der Aufklärung*, 17.

knowledge. Hamann meant the work itself, its spirit, the people involved in furthering its ideas (*Generalstab*).”<sup>80</sup> This opinion makes it an essential element of his understanding of his age and its goals. Important in this definition is the notion of achieving a unity of knowledge (*Einheitswissen*), which involved the continual accumulation of knowledge. Yet the goal of unity, insofar as unity implied a comprehensive knowledge, is where Hamann took issue.<sup>81</sup> Encyclopedic unity was one of totality; contrarily, Hamann praised unity in thought, but not that which implied unity in the sense of universality.

It was his friend Berens’ request that he translate some articles of the *encyclopédie* that served as the catalyst for the beginning of his authorship. In many ways his authorship was the antithesis of the ideas of his interlocutors, represented in titles such as, *Fragments* (Brocken), *Crusades of the Philologist* (Kreuzzüge des Philologisten), not to mention the writings designated by Nadler as “mystery writings”, two of which were composed with an esoteric pseudonym of the sibyl.<sup>82</sup> These titles represented aspects adversarial to the goals of the encyclopedic spirit: clear, comprehensive, systematic knowledge. At times, Hamann utilized the expression “encyclopedic” to describe a comprehensive approach, not necessarily in reference to the specific philosophical approach of the Encyclopedists, but to the spirit of the age (similar to his use of Christian Wolff as representative of a specific tendency in philosophy).

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<sup>80</sup> N VI, 113: *Der Schlüssel*. “Das Hauptwerk der europäischen Aufklärung. Sinn des Wortes: umfassende Darstellung alles Wissenswerten. Ziel: über das Spezialwissen hinaus das Einheitswissen. H. [Hamann] meint bald das Werk selber, bald seinen Geist, bald seinen Generalstab.”

<sup>81</sup>This should not be construed as a rejection of Hamann’s attempt at wholeness, as he was quick to see the inter-relatedness of existence. Instead, it was the absolute nature of this particular unity, one that sought to do away with mystery and contradiction, which was seen as detrimental. For more on Hamann’s holism see, Johannes von Lüpke, “Anthropologische Einfälle: Zum Verständnis der ‘ganzen Existenz’ bei Johann Georg Hamann,” *Neue Zeitschrift für Systematische Theologie und Religionsphilosophie* 30, no. 1 (n.d.): 225–68.

<sup>82</sup> See, N III, 197. *Vesuch einer Sibylle über die Ehe*. Also, N III, 215. *KONXOMPAX. Fragmente einer apokryphischen Sibylle über apokalyptische Mysterien*.

In Hamann's thought, there is a direct connection between the impetus to catalog the world and the moving away from traditional authority to that of abstract reason – both take place under the guidance of abstract reason and view knowledge as something to be compiled, something once and for all, static. That being said, the encyclopedic attitude is not the only expression of post-Cartesian thought, but one of the approaches utilized by his age.

### **The Berlin Enlightenment**

“My hate towards Babel – this is the true key to my authorship.”<sup>83</sup> –

Johann Georg Hamann

In the above quote, Hamann refers to Berlin as Babylon, indicating the arrogance associated with the tower of Babel.<sup>84</sup> The Berlin Enlightenment was the most comprehensive term for his epoch. It represented what Hamann saw as the tyrannical reign of abstract reason propagated by Frederick the Great (1712-1786): the Frenchification of German society and the dominance of abstract reason.<sup>85</sup> Berlin was the location of the

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<sup>83</sup> To Jacobi, January 18th, 1786. “Mein Haß gegen Babel – das ist der wahre Schlüssel meiner Autorschaft”. Johann Georg Hamann and Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi, *Johann Georg Hamann's, des Magus im Norden, Leben und Schriften*, ed. Karl Hermann Gildemeister, vol. 5 (Hamann's Briefwechsel mit Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi) (Gotha: Friedrich Andreas Perthes, 1868), 199.

<sup>84</sup> Genesis 11; The Book of Jubilees 10.

<sup>85</sup> Hans-Joachim Neumann, *Friedrich der Grosse: Feldherr und Philosoph* (Berlin: Edition q, 2000), 31–39, 98–119. Here Voltaire's influence on Frederick the Great is addressed. Additionally, statements from Frederick regarding religion reveal his nearness to the Enlightenment movement. “Humanity is the true religion” (Menschlichkeit ist die wahre Religion), and “One needs neither Luther nor Calvin to love God.” (Man braucht weder Luther noch Calvin Gott zu lieben). Neumann, 36. Frederick was indeed targeted for the above reasons; however, Hamann's relationship to Frederick was nuanced. For a good summary of Hamann's complex relationship to this figure see, James C. O'Flaherty, *Johann Georg Hamann: Einführung in sein Leben und Werk*, Regensburger Beiträge zur deutschen Sprach- und Literaturwissenschaft Reihe B, Untersuchungen 39 (Frankfurt am Main: Lang, 1989), 159–72.

*Allgemeine deutsche Bibliothek* and it was this journal that often served as his representation for Berlin.<sup>86</sup>

The terms “idolatry” and “superstition” profoundly inform Hamann’s interpretation of his age and the Enlightenment coming out of Berlin did not escape his critique. By using the imagery of the city of Babylon he evokes both Old and New Testament sentiments of a place of decadence. Babel – humanity’s attempt to reach heaven – symbolized human pride and ego seeking to put itself on the level of God. It was an idolizing of itself, and analogously, this was what the whole of Enlightenment philosophy was doing through abstract reason.

The academy in Berlin served as a summary of the points above and hence received Hamann’s disdain. For instance, Frederick the Great favored the French language and equally advanced much of the thought purported by the French philosophers that Hamann vehemently opposed.<sup>87</sup>

Alongside this, Frederick was praised by many Enlighteners for advocating tolerance and secularity to a greater degree than had been seen up to that time in German speaking lands.<sup>88</sup> Although there was a greater openness, Hamann perceived a form of despotism couched in philosophical language – a support for what Hamann calls a “Sotadic

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<sup>86</sup> This was not entirely unique to Hamann. In fact, many who fall under the category of “Sturm und Drang” were opposed to the general impetus and philosophical outlook propagated by Nicolai. Ute Schneider, *Friedrich Nicolais Allgemeine Deutsche Bibliothek als Integrationsmedium der Gelehrtenrepublik*, Mainzer Studien zur Buchwissenschaft, Bd. 1 (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1995), 42.

<sup>87</sup> Wolfgang-Dieter Baur, *Johann Georg Hamann als Publizist: zum Verhältnis von Verkündigung und Öffentlichkeit*, Theologische Bibliothek Töpelmann, 49. Bd (Berlin ; New York: W. de Gruyter, 1991), 69.

<sup>88</sup> Kant’s, *What is Enlightenment*, references the great strides that had been made (and needed to be furthered). See, Immanuel Kant, *Perpetual Peace* (London: Penguin, 2009), 6–9.

tolerance”.<sup>89</sup> Suffice it to say that Hamann, perhaps more intuitively than analytically, picked up on the philosophical difficulties of grounding a pluralistic state and society.<sup>90</sup> What some saw as the triumph of reason and tolerance, Hamann saw as the silencing of disparate voices and the propagation, not of reason, but of a cult that used reason as a euphemism for their god (i.e. their idol).

A good example of his view of the Berlin academy appears in his critique of Johann Gottfried Herder (1744-1803). Hamann accuses him of conforming to the philosophical biases of Berlin:

Ought not my friend Herder, in order to chase after the mark, the jewel of the announced prize, within the limits of the academy [referencing the Berlin Academy], ought he not to have run as uncertainly, fought as one that beats the air? Indeed he suffered as a fine soldier and was legally crowned because he strove lawfully. As a clever steward of the mammon of unrighteousness he could take nothing but the revelations and traditions of his age as the basis of his treatise and he could only build his proof on sand, piecework, wood, hay,

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<sup>89</sup> Hamann, *Writings on Philosophy and Language*, 104. N II, 30:12. In the corresponding footnote Haynes points out that this is a reference to the Greek poet, Sotades, and refers to the obscene. Sotades’ poetry was unconventional and the subjects obscene, leading him to be referred to as “Sotades the Obscene” by some. This historical data may have larger implications for the interpretation of Hamann in the present study. With “Sotadic tolerance” Hamann is implying that the Enlightenment thinkers are also developing systems – similar to that of Sotades developing his own type of verse – to fit into their own goals (for Sotades his own “obscene” subject matter). Albeit a cryptic reference today, but with this analogy Hamann is clearly insinuating that they only are willing to tolerate that which fits into the parameters of what they deemed acceptable. Cf. Justin Pollard and Howard Reid, *The Rise and Fall of Alexandria: Birthplace of the Modern Mind* (New York: Viking, 2006), 87–88.

<sup>90</sup>This insight remains pertinent in contemporary philosophy and politics. One need only consider the work of Jürgen Habermas and those engaged in similar projects (e.g. Richard Rorty, Charles Taylor, John Rawls) to see how this is a continually relevant concern in philosophy. In terms of politics one might look to the recent attempt at drafting a European Constitution and the issue of whether the Christian Tradition should be given reference. Cf. Jan Schmidt, *Religion, Gott, Verfassung: Der Religions- und Gottesbezug in der Verfassung pluralistischer Gesellschaften*, Europäische Hochschulschriften. Reihe XXIII, Theologie = Publications Universitaires Européennes. Série XXIII, Théologie = European University Studies. Series XXIII, Theology, Bd./Vol. 905 (Frankfurt am Main ; New York: Peter Lang, 2010).

stubble - - but of course: everything in accordance with the latest model of his age.<sup>91</sup>

The Berlin Academy held the keys to knowledge and in order to gain recognition, one had to play according to the rules established by the Enlightenment thinkers in Berlin. Any perceived monopoly on knowledge was viewed as a superstitious allegiance to whichever form of knowledge was given credence above others.

At times, Frederick symbolized the Berlin Enlightenment.<sup>92</sup> Scattered throughout Hamann's corpus are slights and satirical references to Frederick represented by the following:

All the inhabitants of the New Prussia will seek to Solomon (Friedrich), to hear his wisdom, which God has put in his heart. Each one will bring his present, and all hearts, Sire, will burn with love for the immortality of your name, the glory of your kingdom, and the fulfillment of your will, with a love stronger than death and more envious than the grave is for treasure".<sup>93</sup>

Frederick was not Hamann's only target when he spoke of Berlin; others such as the Publicist Nicolai represented Enlightenment factions that did not relate directly to

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<sup>91</sup> Hamann, *Writings on Philosophy and Language*, 132. N III, 50:9-18: *Philological Ideas and Doubts*. "Muste [sic] nicht mein Freund Herder um in den akademischen Schranken dem vorgestreckten Ziel, dem Kleinode des verkündigten Preises nachzujagen, muste [sic] er nicht laufen als aufs Ungewiße, fechten als der in der [sic] Luft streicht? Ja er hat als ein *schöner* Streiter gelitten und ist von Rechtswegen gekrönt worden, weil er gesetzmäßig gekämpft hat. Als ein *kluger* Haushalter eines *ungerechten* Mammons hat er nicht anders als die Offenbarungen und Ueberlieferungen seines Jahrhunderts zum Grunde seiner Abhandlung legen und seinen Beweis auf Sand, Stückwerk, Holz, Heu, Stoppeln bauen können - - aber freylich: alles nach der neuesten Bauart seines Zeitalters."

<sup>92</sup> Frederick the Great was himself clearly a prominent member of the Enlightenment. This was by no means an invention by Hamann. One must only look to Frederick's support and friendship with Voltaire. See, Christian von Krockow, *Friedrich der Große: ein Lebensbild*, Orig.-Ausg (Köln: Lübbe Ehrenwirth, 2012), 141-42.

<sup>93</sup> Hamann, *Writings on Philosophy and Language*, 144. N III, 59:28-60:1-3: *To the Solomon of Prussia*. "Tous les habitans de la *Nouvelle Prusse* rechercheront de voir la face de Salomon pour entendre sa Sagesse, que Dieu a mise dans son coeur. Chacun lui apportera son present et tous les coeurs Sire, bruleront d'amour pour l'*immortalité* de votre *nom*, la *gloire* de votre *regne* et l'*accomplissement* de votre *volonté*, d'un amour plus fort que la mort et plus jaloux que le sepulcre d'un Tresor."

Frederick's politics, yet were complicit in advocating abstract reason.<sup>94</sup> The reign of Frederick the Great and the academy in Berlin were a converging of forces of that which Hamann found superstitious and idolatrous.

The aforementioned influences provide a good overview of the major intellectual movements that consistently informed Hamann's view of the intellectual landscape of his day. The figures involved in these movements are intermittently referenced when dealing with the specifics of his notion of superstition and idolatry.

### **Idolatry, Superstition, and Atheism**

In Hamann's thought there are good grounds for interpreting atheism as one of the variant forms of superstition and idolatry. In the prelude to the *Biblical Observations*, he makes a direct connection between atheism and the occult. "The height of atheism and the great magic of unbelief is, therefore, the blindness to recognize God in revelation, and the sacrilege of distaining this means of grace."<sup>95</sup> One sees Hamann draw attention to revelation, which always has faith-based elements. Hamann pays close attention to etymological details. As noted by Nadler, Hamann's notion of atheism stems from the Greek, "gr. átheos = gottlos".<sup>96</sup> Despite it being "godless", one must keep in mind that for Hamann, knowledge cannot be attained outside of faith. "Because faith belongs to the natural conditions of our capacity for knowledge and basic instincts of our soul; every

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<sup>94</sup> "Berliner Aufklärung - Die Geschichte Berlins - Verein für die Geschichte Berlins e.V. - Gegr. 1865," accessed April 11, 2017, <http://www.diegeschichteberlins.de/geschichteberlins/berlinabc/stichworteag/545-berliner-aufklaerung.html>.

<sup>95</sup> Johann Georg Hamann, *Londoner Schriften*, ed. Oswald Bayer (München: Beck, 1993), 59:15-18. "Der Gipfel der Atheisterei und die größte Zauberey des Unglaubens ist daher [die] Blindheit, Gott in der Offenbarung zu erkennen, und der Frevel, dies Gnadenmittel zu verschmähen." When Hamann speaks of disdaining revelation he reveals again the influence of empiricism on his thought. By focusing on the *cogito*, the rationalists are shunning an important aspect of what Hamann considers revelation.

<sup>96</sup> N VI, 37: *Der Schlüssel*.



general proposition rests upon good faith, and all abstractions are, and must be, arbitrary.”<sup>97</sup> It is in this connection between faith and knowledge that Hamann views atheism as idolatry, being based on arbitrary faith. He would not contend the fact that atheism rejects the idea of a metaphysical deity. Nevertheless, he concludes that atheism, in its rejection of a god, is still caught up in making absolute claims based on arbitrary principles.

Hamann connected atheism or godlessness to Attic philosophy: sophistry. Hamann makes this abundantly clear in *Golgotha and Sheblimini!*:

An Egyptian priest chided the Greeks for being children. One of their games – they made a name for themselves in inventing and practicing it – is the *global aspirant* of philosophy. Although the ignorance of their epoch is neither suitable nor appropriate to our century, the little foxes and masters of Greek wisdom still affect the sheer nakedness and amateurism of pagan ignorance with such naiveté of taste that as the prophet says they ‘know neither their own nor the crib of their master.’ Systematic atheism thus is an Atticism par excellence, the means by which the common sense of some of the spermologues distanced itself from the universal and unavoidable superstition of popular idolatry, without however being able to supply the phenomena of indefinite objects with anything better than some transcendental whims, which more often than not have no other credentials [*Creditiv*] or sufficient reason than the *relationes curiosae* of oriental legends

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<sup>97</sup> N III, 190:16: *Zweifel und Einfälle über eine vermischte Nachricht der allgemeinen deutschen Bibliothek*. “Da der Glaube zu den natürlichen Bedingungen unserer Erkenntniskräfte und den Grundtrieben unserer Seele gehört; jeder *allgemeine Satz auf guten Glauben* beruht, und alle *Abstractionen willkürlich* sind und seyn müssen [sic].”

and rumors, homegrown folktales, premonitions, dreams, puzzles, and more childishness of that sort.<sup>98</sup>

On one hand, Hamann compliments atheism for being more sophisticated than other vulgar forms of superstition. On the other hand, he criticizes atheism for falling prey to the very same traps as other forms of superstition. Only the object thereof is different. Although atheistic claims reach a different conclusion than their deistic counterparts, the deity is substituted for faith in an absolute non-deity.

Furthering the idea of atheism's connection to sophistry in *Golgotha and Sheblimini!*, he elucidates the deception involved in sophistic thought:

Every sophist is therefore not only a liar but also a hypocrite, and makes use of language as mere puppetry, in order to pass off his idol, the vain fabrication of human art, as the overflow of divine reason and the daughter incarnate of its voice, to deceive superstitious readers by the snare of a golden hip or golden calf, and to insinuate himself like a thief and a killer into their confidence at the cost and risk of unrecognized living truths.<sup>99</sup>

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<sup>98</sup> Hamann, *Writings on Philosophy and Language*, 190. N III, 309:27-310:6. *Golgotha and Sheblimini!*. "Ein ägyptischer Priester schalt die Griechen für Kinder. Zu ihren *Spielen*, durch deren Erfindung und Übungen sie sich einen Namen gemacht, gehört auch der *Globe aspirant* der *Philosophie*. Obschon die Unwissenheit ihres Aeons unserm Jahrhunderte weder anpassend noch anständig ist: so affectiren doch die kleinen Füchse und Meister griechischer Weisheit die reine Blöße und Liebhaberey heidnischer Unwissenheit mit solcher Naivetät des Geschmacks, daß sie, wie der Prophet sagt, 'weder ihren HERR noch die *Krippe* ihres HERRN kennen'. Der systematische *Atheismus* gehört also verzüglich zu den Atticismis, wodurch sich die gesunde Vernunft einiger ihrer *Spermologen* von dem so allgemeinen als unvermeidlichen Aberglauben des populären [sic] Götzendienstes unterschied, ohne daß sie im stande [sic] waren die Erscheinungen der unbestimmten Gegenstände durch etwas besseres als einige transcendente Grillen zu ergänzen, welche öfters kein anderes Creditiv noch zureichenden Grund hatten, als *relationes curiosas* morgenländischer Sagen und Gerüchte, einheimische Volksmärchen, Ahnungen, Träume, Rätzel und dergleichen Kindereyen mehr."

<sup>99</sup> Hamann, 176. *Golgotha and Sheblimini!* N III, 301:3-10. "Jeder Sophist ist also nicht nur ein Lügner, sondern auch ein Heuchler, und bedient sich der Sprache, als eines leeren Puppenspiels, sein Idol, das eitele Gemächte menschlicher Kunst, für einen Ausfluß göttlicher Vernunft und eine leibhafte Tochter ihrer Stimme auszugeben, abergläubige Leser durch das Blendwerk einer gülden Hüfte oder gülden Kalbes hinters Licht zu führen, und ich ihre Überzeugung auf Kosten und Gefahr unerkannter lebendiger Wahrheiten, als ein Dieb und Mörder, zu erschleichen."

The primitive forms of idolatry take on a more simplistic and readily apparent form, whereas serving the “vain fabrication of human art” is more deceptive. From Hamann’s perspective it might well be said that it is indeed more sophisticated, that is, more deceptive: a sophistic, rather than a vulgar form of superstition.

Even Moses Mendelssohn (1729-1786) was accused of atheism by Hamann. This further bolsters the point that Hamann does not work within traditional metaphysical philosophical paradigms – e.g. Mendelssohn wrote a book attempting to prove the existence of God.<sup>100</sup> Because of the affinities shared by vulgar superstition and atheism, the terms are at times used interchangeably. In the case at hand, Hamann viewed Mendelssohn’s philosophy of the state as atheistic, and therefore this assertion did not directly pertain to Mendelssohn’s personal assent to particular theological or religious concepts and propositions. The connection between idolatry and the fabrication of human art is significant. The systems of abstract reason were interpreted as creations of whichever philosopher thought them up and were, in Hamann’s eyes, comparable to artistic fabrication, for they were not accessing absolute truth. Based on the above evidence, Hamann’s concept and critique of atheism falls under the umbrella of his critique of idolatry. For Hamann, all systems of thought are engaged in some form of faith and therefore one cannot sharply distinguish between abstract viewpoints about the potential of a deity.

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<sup>100</sup> Moses Mendelssohn, *Morgenstunden oder Vorlesungen über das Daseyn Gottes Erster Theil* (Berlin: Contumax GmbH & Co. KG, 2011), <http://nbn-resolving.de/urn:nbn:de:101:1-201109028274>.

Having covered the major elements making up Hamann's intellectual world alongside the necessary linguistic and conceptual background, the stage is now set for moving on to the specifics of the notions of faith, superstition, and idolatry.

## **CHAPTER II**

### **Turning Things on Their Head: The Superstition of His Century**

In both Roman Catholic and Protestant theology, idolatry and superstition are closely related. Idolatry is the worship of an idol;<sup>101</sup> superstition is the corresponding faith or belief in the idol. Broadly speaking, for Hamann superstition is the prerequisite for idolatry; it lays the groundwork for the idolatry which follows. Due to this, the concept of superstition should be understood before dealing specifically with idolatry. However, in order to understand Hamann's notion of superstition, the attitude towards it from the side of the "mainstream" Enlightenment will first be taken under consideration. As Hamann entrenches himself in the language and categories of those he criticizes in attempting to expose the often hidden motivations and inconsistent suppositions, understanding to what Hamann is responding is essential.

As referenced in the first chapter of the present work, Hamann's thought did not take place in a vacuum. In fact, once a grasp of the Enlightenment's views of superstition come into greater light, the subversive nature of Hamann's critique of his century as superstitious will be undeniable. Furthermore, he was not merely reacting to his contemporaries, but effectively turning their thought on its head in his attempt to expose its superstitious elements – revealing how those who's thought purported the removal of

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<sup>101</sup> Walter A. Elwell, ed., *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, 2nd ed, Baker Reference Library (Grand Rapids, Mich. : Carlisle, Cumbria, U.K: Baker Academic ; Paternoster Press, 2001), 588.

prejudice through the use of abstract reason were engaging in their own faith commitments and presuppositions, i.e. superstition.<sup>102</sup>

Without building on the foundation of the concept of superstition, the very notion of philosophical idolatry is nonsensical, because the concept of idolatry lies within the broader concept of the superstitious. This chapter explicates the notion of the superstition of the Enlightenment as found in Hamann. This lays the foundation for the assertion that the Enlightenment's application of abstract reason was idolatrous. The chapter proceeds in the following manner. First, attention will be given to Enlightenment conceptions of superstition and the attempts to rid society of it. Thereafter, the understanding of Hamann's notion of faith will be discussed: particularly its foundation in Empiricism, his notion of history, contingency, and subjective experience. The difference between the general philosophical idea of faith and religious faith will receive adequate attention before moving on to the specificity of the Christian faith. The framework of the condescension of God – which was the foundational aspect of Hamann's theology – will also receive

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<sup>102</sup> Although to be treated in greater detail elsewhere, it is here worth mentioning a few insights that should be kept in mind regarding Hamann's at times harsh comments when attempting to turn the arguments of his interlocutors in on themselves. Rarely, if ever, is Hamann advocating a regression to antiquated modes of society or thought. For instance, Hamann's condemnation of Mendelssohn's advocating for political and religious tolerance has led to some false conjectures as to the nature of his thought. Isaiah Berlin is one such interpreter who has a tendency of reading Hamann's authorship as one long diatribe lamenting modern development, while providing scattered insights relevant for the history of philosophy. It is the understanding of the present study, and hence will be conveyed within the argumentation, that in most cases Hamann was not advocating a regression, but rather an even more diverse and open future, both in thought and society. Additionally, there are some issues of which Hamann was either ambivalent or conflicted. Hamann's disdain for the reign of Frederick the Great was not always straightforward. There are other passages which demonstrate Hamann's conflicted opinion regarding Frederick. This is only to say that some of Hamann's reactions should be regarded as confined to a specific issue and not broadly applied. Again, at times Hamann was not entirely opposed to the societal changes, but the spirit driving the changes, which fell into many of the tropes and problems of the past that were considered to be primitive by the intellectuals of his time. These statements are necessary so that one does not jump to conclusions regarding the nature of Hamann's critique. Regarding Berlin's stance referenced above see, Isaiah Berlin, *The Magus of the North: J.G. Hamann and the Origins of Modern Irrationalism*, ed. Henry Hardy, 1st American ed (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1994), 119–20.

comment. This framework is significant as these ideas informed his linguistic insights. From here, the chapter will move more directly to the notion of philosophical superstition. Addressing why this is essential to be understood as a philosophical critique, Hans Blumenberg's *Metaphorology* will be utilized and briefly juxtaposed to Hamann's thought. Abstractions and the systems derived from them will be explicated in light of Hamann's notion of superstition. Finally, an example of superstition from Immanuel Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* and Moses Mendelssohn's *Jerusalem, or on Religious Power and Judaism* will each be given attention.

### **The Enlightenment Critique of Superstition**

“Liberation from superstition is what Enlightenment means.”  
– Immanuel Kant<sup>103</sup>

For all of the Enlightenment's championing of the freedom of thought, the careful application of reason to socio-political problems and the natural sciences, there was an implicit, and at times explicit, polemic. This was directed at earlier forms of thought which was seen as succumbing to prejudice and emotion as well as being based upon superstition. In fact, anything not grounded in abstract reason was liable to be accused of superstition. Martin Pott summarizes this well in *Enlightenment and Superstition (Aufklärung und Aberglaube)* – to which this section is heavily indebted:

Still before the important program ideas were formulated and the movements' general good was claimed, without question the legitimacy of the combat of ideas came to be. In the process of Enlightenment the

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<sup>103</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Kritik der Urteilskraft*, ed. Gerhard Lehmann, Nachdr., Reclams Universal-Bibliothek 1026 (Stuttgart: Reclam, 2011), 215. “Befreiung vom Aberglauben heißt Aufklärung.”

programmatic topoi of 'betterment of the understanding', 'maturity', 'thinking for oneself' and 'perfecting the human being' were closely linked to the prior historical orientation on 'the idea of enemy' (*Feindbildern*) - the images of the enemy as prejudices, enthusiasm and fanaticism, melancholia, political arbitrariness (etc.) and even superstition. Stronger than other movements in cultural history, the Enlightenment was at the same time a combative community, which garnered its coherence through particular the idea of an enemy.<sup>104</sup>

Despite the great strides in thought throughout intellectual history, the Enlightenment embraced a more decisive break with the past. Even the language used by this epoch of itself reveals this break: compare Renaissance (a re-birth) and Enlightenment (to give light). Renaissance implies huge developments, yet retaining and drawing from the past. Enlightenment carries the connotation of bringing light to darkness. As referenced earlier, Hamann employs the polemic of blindness against his contemporaries. One sees how Hamann's accusing his contemporaries of blindness in thought was not something randomly employed to make a point, but directly connected to the Enlightenment's understanding of itself as bringing light to a world darkened by religion, tradition, and superstition.

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<sup>104</sup> Martin Pott, *Aufklärung und Aberglaube: die deutsche Frühaufklärung im Spiegel ihrer Aberglaubenskritik*, Studien zur deutschen Literatur, Bd. 119 (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1992), 2. "Noch bevor die wichtigsten Programmideen formuliert und Allgemeingut der Bewegung geworden sind, steht bereits die Gültigkeit der Kampfideen außer Frage. ‚Verbesserung des Verstandes‘, ‚Mündigkeit‘, ‚Selbstdenken‘ und ‚Vervollkommnung des Menschen‘ als programmatische Topoi sind im Prozeß der Aufklärung eng verklammert mit der historisch vorgängigen Orientierung an ‚Feindbildern‘, - den Feindbildern der Vorurteile, der Schwärmerei (Fanatismus und Enthusiasmus), der Melancholie, der politischen Willkür (usw.) und eben des Aberglaubens. Stärker als andere Bewegungen der Kulturgeschichte ist die Aufklärung zugleich auch eine Kampfgemeinschaft, die ihre Geschlossenheit nicht zuletzt durch bestimmte Feindbilder gewinnt." Although Pott describes this quite drastically, it is not without support elsewhere. Not only was this taking place on the intellectual level, but as the Enlightenment matured, and its cultural influence spread into Eastern Europe, it was employed in utilitarian fashion by leaders who were less interested in philosophical ideas but attacking their own enemies by employing these ideas. Robin Okey, *Eastern Europe, 1740-1985: Feudalism to Communism*, 2nd ed (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), 35-36.



## Purging Religion of Superstition

The employment of abstract reason by the Enlightenment was not anti-religion but a movement away from the concrete, historical, and revelatory. Apart from an assortment of dissenting voices,<sup>105</sup> the varieties of deism as well as atheism shared the tendency of moving away from the historical and concrete. Philosophers such as Voltaire and Spinoza were unabashedly critical of revealed religion for its neglect of reason, as religion pulled from sources such as miracles, divine interaction, and other such dubious (i.e. superstitious) things. Consequently, the traditional Christian faith did not fare well in their eyes. The majority of thinkers were not anti-Christian, in fact, many sought to bring Christianity into accord with the natural religion of the Enlightenment.<sup>106</sup> Because these tendencies permeated the thought at that time, two examples will be given in order to illustrate both the widespread shifts in thought and the rejection of superstition present in society and its institutions.

Voltaire (1694-1778) looms over the Enlightenment period as a philosophical example of the developments of that time. He had brought back ideas from his time in England that would not only indelibly affect the intellectuals of his day, but the entirety of French society.<sup>107</sup> His skepticism had widespread influence, not only in France but

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<sup>105</sup> Hans Joas provided a superb analysis of the German appropriation of David Hume, particularly, how Hume provided concrete Christianity a new foundation. Specifically Hamann, Herder, and Jacobi are referenced. Hans Joas, "Naturgeschichte der Religion als Religionskritik? David Hume und die Folgen," in *Religion und Aufklärung: Studien zur neuzeitlichen "Umformung des Christlichen,"* ed. Albrecht Beutel and Volker Leppin, *Arbeiten zur Kirchen- und Theologiegeschichte*, Bd. 14 (Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2004), 14–16.

<sup>106</sup> Albrecht Beutel, *Kirchengeschichte im Zeitalter der Aufklärung: ein Kompendium*, UTB Theologie, Religion 3180 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2009), 89–111.

<sup>107</sup> Manfred Geier, *Aufklärung: Das europäische Projekt*, 1. Aufl (Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt, 2012), 103–17.

throughout Europe.<sup>108</sup> He advanced critical ideas regarding revealed religion – one might say condemning it to the realm of superstition. Alternate political inclinations were contained therein – this would culminate, albeit shortly after Hamann’s death, in the French Revolution, and deism would briefly become the state religion manifest in the *Culte de l’Être suprême*.<sup>109</sup> This example demonstrates a mood in the late eighteenth century to break free from the shackles of the past: shackles of superstition which might be loosened by the proper application of abstract reason. Accompanying this, and synonymous to many, was a move away from confessionalism in the church.<sup>110</sup>

The German scholar Johann August von Stark (1741-1816) is a theological example of the changes in thought in Hamann’s time. Stark argued that some early pagan cults exemplified the “natural religion” of the Enlightenment. He attempted to demonstrate that the same elements of natural religion were also present in the Christian religion. Stark’s interpretation of the origin of Christianity served as the catalyst for Hamann’s defense of revealed religion.<sup>111</sup> For Hamann, the application of Enlightenment methodology upon Christianity in order to uncover the “truth” behind the shell of history and revelation (read: superstition) was an abomination. Hamann never advocated the blind acceptance of dogma out of pure obedience to tradition. Yet, tearing away the historical in order to get to the

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<sup>108</sup> Norman L. Torrey, “Voltaire, François-Marie Arouet de,” *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (U.S.A.: Crowell Collier and MacMillan, 1972), 262.

<sup>109</sup> The *Culte de l’Être suprême* was implemented by Maximilien Robespierre, and certainly is to be differentiated from Voltaire’s philosophy, but at the same time, it is difficult to imagine these developments apart from Voltaire’s influence.

<sup>110</sup> Eduard Winter, *Frühaufklärung: der Kampf gegen den Konfessionalismus in Mittel- und Osteuropa und die deutsch-slawische Begegnung*, Beiträge zur Geschichte des religiösen und wissenschaftlichen Denkens 6 (Berlin: Berlin Akademie Verlag, 1966), 20–32.

<sup>111</sup> Betz, *After Enlightenment*, 200.

true “reasonable” parts of Christianity – the parts which accord with abstract reason – was just as superstitious as the doctrines critiqued.

### **Foundation of Faith: the Foundation of Knowledge**

Since Hamann's understanding of faith serves as the basis of his claims regarding superstition, some crucial points regarding his ideas of faith will be elaborated. In so doing, it will become increasingly clear of how he was able to criticize thinkers who were explicitly against superstition as being engaged in their own type superstition. Furthermore, understanding his idea of faith is critical for the argument of the current study's reading of the critique of superstition and idolatry being the guiding line of thought in Hamann's authorship.

Hamann's assertion that his contemporaries were indeed engaging in a form of superstition is held up by his notion of faith. As supported by a statement from the *Socratic Memorabilia*; “Our being (Dasein) and the existence (Existenz) of all things outside of ourselves must be believed and cannot by any other means be accounted for.”<sup>112</sup> Faith was intrinsic to knowledge for Hamann. Whatever role that reason and the intellect might play, there was no denying that they were tied to foundations resting upon faith.

The quote above, stating that existence must be believed, is certainly thought provoking, yet shy on details. One thing is clear: faith is not solely the property of religion. In part, the reason for this was Hamann's appropriation of Hume's concept of belief into his own notion of faith. As Hamann mentions on various occasions, Hume needed faith to even

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<sup>112</sup> N II, 73:21-22, *Socratic Memorabilia*. “Unser eigen Daseyn und die Existenz aller Dinge ausser uns muß geglaubt und kann auf keine andere Art ausgemacht werden.”

eat an egg or drink water. Yet perhaps because Hamann blurred the lines between Hume's concept of belief and the faith requisite of religion, he was able to approach the thought of his day with a unique critique.<sup>113</sup> Despite seeing the connection in what others sought to divide, he struggled nonetheless in tying together the immense category of "faith". Hamann's notion of faith embraced a very broad definition containing multiple layers. In his latter days, in a letter to Jacobi he said, "I still know neither what Hume nor what both of us understand by faith – and the more we would speak or write about it, the less we would manage to hold on to this quicksilver."<sup>114</sup> In the context of the letter he is not only unsure of faith, but was wrestling with the idea that all concepts are contained in words (reason, faith, being, etc.). These words were seen as constructs used to further knowledge, but only had reality in relation to one another, i.e. they were not the things in themselves. It is clear that despite the ambiguity he felt, faith was intrinsic to all knowledge.

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<sup>113</sup> Erwin Metzke gives a good analysis of Hamann's appropriation of Hume's empiricism, particularly his principle of belief. Metzke points out how Hamann uses Hume opposite to how Hume himself employed his own ideas. Erwin Metzke, *J. G. Hamanns Stellung in der Philosophie des 18. Jahrhunderts* (Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1967), 195–98.

<sup>114</sup> ZH VII, 176. To Jacobi, April 30, 1787. "Noch weiß ich weder was Hume noch was wir beide unter Glauben verstehen – und je mehr wir darüber reden oder schreiben würden, je weniger wird uns gelingen diesen Quecksilber fest zu halten."

## The Empirical Starting Place of Faith

“The senses and passions speak and understand nothing but images. All the wealth of human knowledge and bliss consists in images.”<sup>115</sup> - *Aesthetica in Nuce*

In the introductory remarks regarding empiricism it was mentioned that Hamann’s thought was influenced by empiricism but itself remaining something other. His notion of faith is one of the reasons why his thought does not fall under the rubric of empiricism. The influence of empiricism on Hamann is twofold. As can be seen in the above quote, everything starts in the senses. He takes this to a very radical extreme, even tying mathematics to an empirical starting point. “Without mathematical figures there is no mathematical method; and this is to me a mathematical truth, the same as that each quantity is equal to itself.”<sup>116</sup> Since numbers are symbols that must be perceived they are dependent upon perception. As such, even mathematical generalities have an empirical foundation. For Hamann, everything is based in the concrete; nothing can be entirely abstract because the abstract always relies on some form of empirical sensation. Even the concepts of philosophical schools of thought are dependent on language.<sup>117</sup>

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<sup>115</sup> Hamann, *Writings on Philosophy and Language*, 63. *Aesthetica in Nuce*. N II, 197:22-24. “Sinne und Leidenschaften reden und verstehen nichts als Bilder. In Bildern besteht der ganze Schatz menschlicher Erkenntniß und Glücklichkeit.”

<sup>116</sup> Letter to Scheffner 11 Feb. 1785. ZH V, 359-360. “Ohne mathematische Figuren findet keine mathematische Methode statt; und es ist für mich eine mathematische Wahrheit, gleich der, daß jede GröÙe sich selber gleich ist: Aus Wörtern u[nd]] Erklärungen läßt sich weder mehr noch weniger herausbringen, als jeder darinn [sic] legen will, oder gelegt hat. Die ganze Gewißheit der Mathematik hängt von der Natur ihrer Sprache ab, und ihrer Schreiberey. Die nothwendigkeit aller Beweise aber, von der poetischen Lizenz metaphysische Punkte, Linien und Flächen zu denken, die physich unmöglich sind. Was Demosthenes *Actio* – Engel Mimik – Batteux nachahmung der schönen Natur nennt, ist für mich Sprache – das *Organon* und *Criterion* der Vernunft, wie Young sagt. Hier liegt reine Vernunft und zugl. Ihre Kritik – und die weigen Gränzstreitigkeiten werden so lange währen, bis die Sprachen aufhören mit Weißsagungen und Erkenntnis.”

<sup>117</sup> ZH VII, 173. To Jacobi, April 29, 1787.

When speaking of nature there is usually an implicit reference to empiricism in Hamann's writings. Nature has a linguistic quality for Hamann. It is a type of speech which addresses the subject and must be "read" or interpreted. This reinforces and upholds his idea of nature being a form of revelation. For example, in one of his many criticisms of rationalism, he states:

Behold! the large and small Masorah of philosophy has overwhelmed the text of nature, like the Great Flood...You make nature blind, that she might be your guide! or rather, with your Epicureanism you have put out the light of your own eyes, that you might be taken for prophets who conjure inspiration and expositions out of the empty air.<sup>118</sup>

Here, one can gain a better grasp of Hamann's assertion that the existence of things (in nature) and one's own existence (expressed in the passions) must be believed. His empiricism is an epistemological disposition insofar as it leads to skepticism, thereby necessitating faith. Instead of pessimistic doubt, Hamann responds with a hopeful dependency, rooted in faith.

Of significance for the condemnation of superstition is the dependent nature of human knowledge on faith. One does not decipher atemporal laws of nature, but reads nature; therefore there is less certainty than can be provided by rationalism. Faith and skepticism, then, share a very close relationship. Faith permeates throughout the human faculties of knowledge; even sense perception is grounded in faith.

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<sup>118</sup> Hamann, *Writings on Philosophy and Language*, 80. N II, 207:19-20-208:3-7, *Aesthetica in Nuce*. "Seht! die große und kleine Masore der Weltweisheit hat den Text der Natur, gleich einer Sündfluth, überschwemmt...Ihr macht die Natur blind, damit sie nämlich eure Wegweiserin seyn soll! oder ihr habt euch selbst vielmehr durch den Epikurismus die Augen ausgestochen, damit man euch ja für Propheten halten möge, welche Eingebung und Auslegung aus ihren fünf Fingern saugen."

Essentially, all that is perceived and felt, that is, experienced, is revealed. A decisive difference between Hamann and Hume (Hamann's primary source for the philosophy of empiricism) is in their notions of revelation. In a later passage in the *Socratic Memorabilia* Hamann reveals how his interpretation of the origin of perceptions from that of Hume is made clear. "The first outburst of creation, and the first impression of its chronicler; - - the first manifestation and the first enjoyment of nature are united in the words. 'Let there be light!' Here begins the perception of the presence of things."<sup>119</sup> Although everything begins in the senses, that which is perceived is understood as revelation. And revelation must be taken on faith.

What led Hume to a radical skepticism helped lead Hamann to his understanding of faith. In a letter to Jacobi, Hamann wrote, "Experience and revelation are the same, and indispensable wings or crutches of our reason, if it is not to remain paralyzed. The senses (*Sinn*) and history are the foundation and ground (*Boden*), - that one might yet deceive, and that the other might be so simple, I favor them before all castles in the air."<sup>120</sup> Since it has already been established that experience and sense perception are grounded by faith, faith is then the foundation of Hamann's thought. Whenever he approaches the notions of reason, language, or any subject for that matter, he takes faith into account. His notion of faith is broad and far reaching, going on to comprise both language and history, which will be discussed next.

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<sup>119</sup> Hamann, 63-64. N II, 197:24-27, *Aesthetica in Nuce*. "Der erste Ausbruch der Schöpfung, und der erste Eindruck ihres Geschichtschreibers; -- die erste Erscheinung und der erste Genuß der Natur vereinigen sich in dem Worte: Es werde Licht! Hiemit fängt sich die Empfindung von der Gegenwart der Dinge an."

<sup>120</sup> To Jacobi 1784, November 14, 1784. "Erfahrung und Offenbarung sind einerlei, und unentbehrliche Flügel oder Krücken unserer Vernunft, wenn sie nicht lahm bleiben und kriechen soll. Sinn und Geschichte ist das Fundament, und der Boden, - jene mögen noch so trügen, und diese noch so einfältig sein: so zieh ich sie allen Luftschlössern vor." Hamann and Jacobi, *Johann Georg Hamann's, des Magus im Norden, Leben und Schriften*, 5 (Hamann's Briefwechsel mit Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi):16.

## Empiricism, Language, Reason

Hamann greatly expands Hume's concept of belief (which, lacking a superior cognate in German, was translated as "faith").<sup>121</sup> This is owed to Hamann's view of language. Words contain meaning and are tools to express meaning – yet remain tied to experience:

Words, therefore, have an aesthetic and logical faculty. As visible and audible objects they belong with their elements to the sensibility and intuition; however, by the spirit of their institution and meaning, they belong to the understanding and concepts. Consequently, words are pure and empirical intuitions as much as pure and empirical concepts. Empirical, because the sensation of vision or hearing is effected through them; pure, inasmuch as their meaning is determined by nothing that belongs to those sensations.<sup>122</sup>

Once one begins to speak of the meaning of the words themselves, the empirical level is left behind. Language is the means of transmitting history and human intention (not to mention its relation to reason), both of which require faith. Words are not only empirical elements, but are in fact *a priori*. "Sounds and letters are therefore pure forms *a priori*, in which nothing belonging to the sensation or concept of an object is found; they are the true,

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<sup>121</sup> In his biography of Kant, Manfred Kuehn points out that the ambiguity of faith and belief in German allowed Hamann, as well as a few other thinkers, to interpret the skepticism of Hume as both the undoing of Enlightenment thought and a defense of Christian faith. See, Manfred Kuehn, *Kant: A Biography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 119–20.

<sup>122</sup> Hamann, *Writings on Philosophy and Language*, 215. *Metacritique on the Purism of Reason*. N III, 88:1-22. "Wörter haben also ein ästhetisches und logisches Vermögen. Als sichtliche und lautbare Gegenstände gehören sie mit ihren Elementen zur Sinnlichkeit und Anschauung, aber nach dem Geist ihrer Einsetzung und Bedeutung zum Verstand und Begriffen. Folglich sind Wörter so wol reine und empirische Anschauungen, als auch reine und empirische Begriffe; empirisch, weil Empfindung des Gesichts oder Gehörs durch sie bewirkt; rein, in so fern (in) ihre(r) Bedeutung durch nichts, was zu jenen Empfindungen gehört, (angetroffen) bestimmt wird."



aesthetic elements of all human knowledge and reason.”<sup>123</sup> The content of this *a priori* meaning derives from history and its transmission through language. One is able to accept meaning in language only through faith. The intellect can innovate and create; yet the intellect alone cannot come to meaning on its own. These views have far reaching repercussions. Having faith that language is capable of communicating the inner-convictions of another person is linked to that which is communicated in history, revealed by language in sense experience. Things such as religious truth claims may not make sense from the point of sense experience alone, but are conveyed in history through language.

### **Language and Communication**

Language contains both the repository of the past as well as the means whereby people might express their thoughts and intentions. The ability of language to convey inner intentions and convictions was very important to Hamann. Language (*Sprache*) means much more than the alphabet and the words created by it. To Hamann it contains the revelations of nature, written documents, and the speech of one to another. It is the foundation of all social life, showing up very clearly in a poignant passage of *Golgotha and Sheblimini!* Language is that which comes through the senses and the reception of it contains a faith-based element. From the starting place of language, all actions and reasons in social interactions base themselves in one way or another:

“All social contracts derive, according to the law of nature, from the moral capacity to say Yes! Or No!, and from the moral necessity to make good the word that had been given. The moral capacity to say Yes! Or No! is based on

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<sup>123</sup> Hamann, 211. *Metacritique on the Purism of Reason*. N III, 286:14-17. “Laute und Buchstaben sind also reine Formen a priori, in denen nichts, was zur Empfindung oder zum Begriff eines Gegenstandes gehört, angetroffen wird und die wahren, ästhetischen Elemente aller menschlichen Erkenntnis und Vernunft.”

the natural use of human reason and speech; the moral necessity to fulfill the word that has been given is based on the fact that our inward declaration of will can be expressed, revealed, or known only in speech or writing or action, and that our words like our deeds must be regarded as the natural signs of our convictions. Reason and language are therefore the inner and outer band of all social life.”<sup>124</sup>

Notice that reason and language are tied together in this passage concerning the ability of the individual to utilize and receive speech. All social interactions are therefore based on a good faith in the ability of language to communicate the inner intentions, convictions, and reasonings of another human being. To highlight the essential role of faith in communication, in the same passage, he addresses the problems which arise when language is not respected. “If that which nature, through having been established, has joined together is divorced or divided, then faith and fidelity are annulled.”<sup>125</sup> He goes on to quote Cicero’s *De officiis* where Cicero speaks of justice being grounded in *iustitiae FIDES* (good faith), which concerns our truth and fidelity to promises. Hence, faith upholds all social life insofar as reason and language are dependent upon it.

Up to this point, the focus of Hamann’s notion of faith has remained in areas more philosophical than religious. It is clear how the notion of faith underlies an array of philosophical points of inquiry; in fact, it underlies virtually all points of philosophical

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<sup>124</sup> Hamann, 175. *Golgotha und Scheblimini!*. N III, 300:22- 32. “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 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 also [sic] das innere und äußere Band aller Geselligkeit.”

<sup>125</sup> Hamann, 175. N III, 300:33-35. *Golgotha und Scheblimini!*. “durch eine Scheidung oder Trennung desjenigen, was die Natur durch ihre Einsetzung zusammengefügt hat, wird Glaube und Treue aufgehoben.”

inquiry in Hamann's thought. This notion of faith is the basis from which he launches his critique of superstition. That being said, there is a religious, Christian conception of faith that should not be overlooked.

### Religious Faith

Although for Hamann one is always already engaging in faith commitments of one sort or another, religious faith can be differentiated from the faith present in perception or social interaction: "All religions [must] have a relationship to a faith in one, independent and living truth, which, the same as our existence, must be older than our reason."<sup>126</sup> Because religious faith is not concerned with the outward relationship of things but our whole existence, all religions have a "mythical and poetic strand" from the perspective of reason.<sup>127</sup> Religion contains more than just the intellectual analysis of sense perception, and therefore the faith contained therein is of a different quality: a mythical one. Notwithstanding, this does not imply that religion is a mere human creation, but that it is connected to existence which precedes our reason.<sup>128</sup>

The previous paragraph contains a working definition of religious faith, but it lacks a connection to the Christian faith, which was a defining characteristic of Hamann's authorship and biography.<sup>129</sup> He differentiates the Christian faith from other faiths in at least two aspects. One of these aspects is the accepting of historical truths particular to the

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<sup>126</sup> N III, 291:22-25, *Zweifel und Einfälle*. "so müssen alle Religionen eine Beziehung auf den Glauben einer einzigen, selbständigen und lebendigen Wahrheit haben, die, gleich unserer Existenz, älter als unsere Vernunft seyn muß."

<sup>127</sup> N III, 291:34, *Zweifel und Einfälle*. "mythische und poetische Ader aller Religionen."

<sup>128</sup> N III, 291, *Zweifel und Einfälle*.

<sup>129</sup> The biographical significance can be seen most prevalently in his *Gedanken über meinen Lebenslauf*, Hamann, *Londoner Schriften*, 313-49.

Christian faith, transmitted through the Scriptures and its interpretation. The other aspect is the Christological, theological structure of his entire thought, finding clear expression on numerous occasions but lucidly given at the start of his *Biblical Observations*.<sup>130</sup>

### **The Singularity of the Christian Faith**

*Golgotha and Sheblimini!* contains some of the most explicit defense of and differentiation of the Christian faith from that of the faith present in all human existence and other religions, as presented in the last subsection. The faith present in all religions is insufficient for understanding why Hamann argued from the perspective of Christianity. In keeping with Hamann's tendency, his view of religion was in stark contrast to those of his contemporaries, particularly with the deists and those who sought truths of reason apart from historical revelation. His argument is found in a work criticizing the thought of Moses Mendelssohn – who was harshly criticized by Hamann. Since Mendelssohn's book, *On Religious Power and Judaism*, dealt with the relationship of church and state and at the same time established Judaism on Enlightenment foundations, Hamann was compelled to counter Mendelssohn's ideas. Consequently, this text provided one of the clearest accounts of Hamann's understanding of Christianity and that of revealed religion.

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<sup>130</sup> Karlfried Gründer provides a good analysis of the theological underpinnings in the *Biblical Observations* in his book, *Figur und Geschichte: Johann Georg Hamanns "Biblische Betrachtungen" als Ansatz einer Geschichtsphilosophie*. However, despite his good analysis of the *Biblical Observations*, its weakness is in only looking to this early work for a philosophical approach in Hamann. The considerations are interesting, but seem limited in scope insofar as providing a more comprehensive interpretation of Hamann's approach. Due to the content matter, Hamann is generally treated as a theologian by Gründer. By broadening the scope of looking at Hamann's authorship, one quickly discerns a more concrete philosophical approach that is not present in Gründer's interpretation. For instance, in Gründer's attempt to find the philosophical problems presented by condescension (p. 92), he still concludes with the idea of Hamann as theologian engaged with philosophy (p. 192). Karlfried Gründer, *Figur und Geschichte: Johann Georg Hamanns "Biblische Betrachtungen" als Ansatz einer Geschichtsphilosophie* (Freiburg: Alber, 1958).

## Faith and Historical Revelation

In *Golgotha and Sheblimini!*, Hamann defends revealed religion, be it Judaism or Christianity, against the subsumption by abstract reason. Hamann affirms with Mendelssohn to knowing of, “no eternal truths save as incessant temporality.”<sup>131</sup> One receives both “direct revelation through word and script” and “indirect revelation through things (nature) and concepts.”<sup>132</sup> He is clear that it is not the nature of revelation which differentiates them (i.e. religions), but the content therein – the uniqueness of direct (read: historical) revelation. In his own terms what differentiates Judaism and Christianity is:

...solely a matter of temporal truths of history, which occurred once and never come again – of facts which have become true at one point in time and place through a coherence of causes and effects, and which, therefore, can only be conceived as true in respect to that point in time and space, and must be confirmed by authority.<sup>133</sup>

The point regarding authority is not to condone an authoritarian ecclesiology or institutions, but to recognize dependence of history being handed down by authority lest it cease to exist.<sup>134</sup> The idea of transmission is connected to authority. Authority (which can be derived in a number of ways) is the means whereby specific things are deemed worthy of transmission.<sup>135</sup>

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<sup>131</sup> Hamann, *Writings on Philosophy and Language*, 180. *Golgotha and Scheblimini!*

<sup>132</sup> Hamann, 180,181. *Golgotha and Scheblimini!*

<sup>133</sup> Hamann, 182. *Golgotha and Scheblimini!*

<sup>134</sup> Hamann, 182. *Golgotha and Scheblimini!*

<sup>135</sup>This applies to the case of the meaning of words. For one reason or another, words derive a meaning which can be located in an authority. In cases where the meaning of a word gained more prominence just due to its prevalence might at first seem to indicate that meaning it not derived by an authority. However, one could interpret this as a democratic authority that is imparting the meaning. Meaning can also be imparted by the aristocracy or priests who serve in the role of defining specific terms. What all have in common is that it is by authority which meaning is transmitted.

Interestingly, historical truths pertain not only to the past but to the future as well. “This characteristic difference between Judaism and Christianity is a matter of historical truths, not only those of past times but also of times to come, which are proclaimed in advance and prophesied through the spirit of providence as universal as it is particular, and which can, according to their nature, not be accepted in any other manner than on faith.”<sup>136</sup> Therefore the concrete religions have both an historical and eschatological element. It is the religious aspect of faith, the mythical, which orients one in the world. However, the specifics are based upon definite revelations in history, which cannot be derived outside of revelation in language – outside of the experience of natural phenomena. This is beyond the confines of reason. Hamann utilizes Hume in his own defense when writing to Kant:

Mere reason is insufficient to convince us of its [Christianity] veracity. And whoever is moved by *Faith* to assent to it, is conscious of a continued miracle in his own person, which subverts all the principles of his understanding, and gives him a determination to believe what is most contrary to *custom* and *experience*.<sup>137</sup>

If taken in isolation, statements like this can be read as a rejection of reason in matters of religion. Hence, his other statements regarding the role of reason in keeping faith in check must constantly be kept in mind to fully grasp the entirety of Hamann’s view of faith. He does not look to abstract reason to ground the Christian faith – not because he is against reason – but because of his understanding of its limitations in matters of faith.

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<sup>136</sup> Hamann, *Writings on Philosophy and Language*, 182. *Golgotha and Scheblimini!*.

<sup>137</sup> ZH I, 380. To Immanuel Kant, July 27, 1759. Arnulf Zweig’s translation of this letter will be used. Immanuel Kant, *Philosophical Correspondence, 1759-99*, trans. Arnulf Zweig (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), 42.

This discussion has demonstrated the manner in which Hamann regarded the specificity of Christian revelation. Namely, that the temporal revelations in history were not something that were accessible to abstract reason, and as such, were not something that might be encompassed in a general, objective philosophical approach. This applied to all concrete religions, as well. (e.g. Hamann defended the historical nature of Judaism in the face of Mendelssohn's attempt to bring it under the rule of Enlightenment reason.) Notwithstanding, Hamann did not hold that all religions were equal, but only that their foundations were not something to be tried before the court of abstract reason.

His approach to persuading others to Christian faith was of an aesthetic nature. Hamann does not defend his Christian faith in an *argumentative* manner, but perhaps the word *assertive* might better describe his stance. Due to the abutting relationship between faith and skepticism, he relies more on aesthetics than creating his own philosophical system. It is not hard to see why his insights were examined by Hans Urs von Balthasar (1905-1988) in his theological aesthetics, where beauty comes through revelation and can only be responded to by the individual.<sup>138</sup> This circumvents the dependency of faith on abstract reason.<sup>139</sup> For Hamann, Christian faith, indeed, any religious faith for that matter must be based on revelation. Hence, Hamann's approach is assertive insofar as religion transcends the scope of abstract reason and offers something which must be accepted; it is

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<sup>138</sup> Michael Schulz – in his article on Balthasar's theology within the framework of religious pluralism – highlights elements in Balthasar's thought that parallel some of Hamann's insights. Some of these are the specificity of the Christian revelation in Jesus Christ, as well as the condescension of God playing a significant role in considerations of religious plurality. See, Michael Schulz, "Das Christentum und die Weltreligionen im Gespräch Mit Hans Urs von Balthasar," in *Weltentfremdung, Weltoffenheit, Alternativen der Moderne: Perspektiven aus Wissenschaft, Religion, Kunst*, ed. Hartmut Böhme and Hartmut Schröter, *Zeitansage*, Bd. 3 (Berlin: Lit, 2008).

<sup>139</sup> Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Studies in Theological Style*, ed. John Kenneth Riches, vol. 3, *Glory of the Lord / Hans Urs Balthasar*, v. 2-3 (San Francisco: New York: Ignatius Press; Crossroad, 1984), 239–78.

not merely something to which one must assent. As the particularities of his Christian faith provided a framework for his philosophical approach, the essential particularities will receive attention below.

### **Christian Faith: a Framework for Philosophy**

Hamann's idea of faith might at first glance be compared to that of Jacobi or Soren Kierkegaard (1813-1855).<sup>140</sup> Despite some of the similarities and parallels,<sup>141</sup> one must keep in mind that Hamann grounded his thought in the concrete, historical, and linguistic. He remained ever at the crossroads of faith and skepticism, allowing for a greater tension in knowledge than either Jacobi or Kierkegaard. This tension was part of the very fabric of faith to Hamann. R. G. Smith (1913-1968) put it well when he stated that Kierkegaard, "reaches a point beyond the world, the point of religious passion, in which the individual faces God, God alone, in the decision of inwardness, of pure subjectivity...For Hamann there is no stage beyond the indirectness of faith, which is grounded in the whole life of the world and history."<sup>142</sup> Christian faith is mediated (Smith's "indirect") in accordance with the nature of revelation. Hence, faith always mediates revelation; words, being part of revelation, are always mediated by faith. In reference to the quotes from *Golgotha and Sheblimini!*, one must believe that the words spoken reflect the inner conviction of the speaker (be it God or one's fellow person).

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<sup>140</sup> For a good comparison of Jacobi and Kierkegaard see, Jon Stewart, ed., "Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi: Two Theories of the Leap," in *Kierkegaard and the Renaissance and Modern Traditions*, Kierkegaard Research, v. 5 (Farnham, Surrey, England; Burlington, VT: Ashgate Pub. Ltd, 2009), 33-50. Additionally, there are instances where Hamann is casually lumped in with Jacobi's fideistic ideas of faith and misrepresents Hamann's thought. E.g. Samuel Fleischacker, *What Is Enlightenment?*, Kant's Questions (London; New York: Routledge, 2013), 43.

<sup>141</sup> They all had an emphasis on the limitations of reason and a focus on faith.

<sup>142</sup> Smith, J. G. *Hamann 1730-1788: A Study in Christian Existence*, 19.



Still, Hamann recognized that for one to come to his position required an abrupt and entire change. To come to a specific faith of a particular religion, in this case Christianity, one has to accept and experience these particular truths revealed in history. His conversion serves as one example which indelibly affected his life and thought.<sup>143</sup> While reading through the Scriptures, Hamann embraced a Christian framework for his thought.<sup>144</sup> John Betz distinguishes between the natural faith required by all and a “supernatural faith” in Hamann’s thought.<sup>145</sup> Hamann does not use this distinction himself. However, it helps make sense of instances where Hamann seems to clearly speak of Christian faith and not in the broad sense to which he frequently refers. One instance of this is in a letter to Jacobi, where he states that, “Faith is not everyone’s thing, and is not communicable like goods.”<sup>146</sup> In another instance, in the *Socratic Memorabilia*, he speaks of his offerings needing to be swallowed not chewed, thereby insinuating that what was presented was an entirely alternate view incompatible with current modes of thinking.<sup>147</sup> Presumably the faith required to make this complete change in rationality is qualitatively different, warranting the differentiation made by Betz. From the perspective of the present study, the term supernatural might lead to an incorrect understanding of Hamann’s authorship, as he tends

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<sup>143</sup> Although it is nearly a requirement to at least discuss Hamann’s conversion as it proved such a decisive turning point for his thought, Fritz Blanke provides a good analysis. See, Fritz Blanke, *Hamann-Studien*, Studien Zur Dogmengeschichte und Systematischen Theologie 10 (Zürich: Zwingli Verlag, 1956), 99–104.

<sup>144</sup> There has been some disagreement over the nature of his conversion; whether it was predominately Reformed or Pietistic. However, there is no question as to its influence on Hamann’s life and thought. For a discussion of these differences see, Harry Sievers, *Johann Georg Hamanns Bekehrung. - Ein Versuch, sie zu verstehen*, Studien zur Dogmengeschichte und systematischen Theologie 24 (Verlag Zwingli, 1969), 9–26.

<sup>145</sup> Betz, *After Enlightenment*, 64.

<sup>146</sup> ZH VII, 176. To Jacobi, April 30, 1787. “Glaube ist nicht Jedermanns Ding, und auch nicht communicable, wie eine Waare, sondern das Himmelreich und die Hölle in uns.”

<sup>147</sup> Hamann, *Writings on Philosophy and Language*, 6. N II, 61, *Socratic Memorabilia*.

to veer away from the abstract, be it metaphysical or supernatural.<sup>148</sup> Although at times Hamann uses this type of language, it is normally used analogously. Consequently, a better term for supernatural faith would be simply “Christian faith”, insofar as it reflects the concrete and historical. This provides for the potential of the supernatural, while containing a sense of epistemological reserve.

Hamann’s notion of faith was very broad. Faith was understood as being intrinsic to any step beyond the apprehension of revelation which comes through the senses. To what degree this related to a universal, Christian truth warrants discussion. When Hamann makes statements concerning the faith involved in receiving sense experience there is an underlying theological referent. Hamann believes that revelation of the senses corresponds to the creator God of the Bible for him *personally*. Yet his assertions boast a clearly philosophical element which does not require a specifically Christian correlate. This perspective is at variance with other Hamann scholars who interpret his authorship as primarily a theological critique of secularity or philosophy.<sup>149</sup> One should not infer conjectures of his personal faith into his philosophical assertions. This is not to say that Hamann can be read without taking Christianity into account, indeed, it is not the sole referent but the primary one. However, it is difficult to retain the Hamann-as-a-theologian

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<sup>148</sup> Hamann's turn to language is itself a rejection of the "castles in the air" of supernatural and metaphysical speculation. Additionally, on the difference between Christianity and other religions Hamann only goes back to historical truths revealed in history. Cf. Hamann, 182. *Golgotha and Sheblimini!*.

<sup>149</sup> One example – but far from the sole example – of this tendency is represented in Fritz Lieb’s interpretation of Hamann’s idea of faith. Lieb resists placing Hamann in a similar category as Herder, namely, a secularizing of the notion of revelation. In stark contrast to this, Lieb argues that Hamann’s idea of revelation is solely for those who believe in God’s word and divine plan. The problem with this interpretation is that it takes exegetical liberties with Hamann’s broad comments regarding revelation. Furthermore, insofar as Hamann’s critique could be employed without reverting to its theological underpinnings, conversion of his contemporaries cannot be seen as the only application of his thought. Fritz Lieb, “Glaube und Offenbarung bei J. G. Hamann,” in *Johann Georg Hamann*, ed. Reiner Wild, *Wege Der Forschung*; Bd. 511 (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1978), 141.

opinion, particularly when looking at his published authorship. Certainly the breadth of his writing should be taken into account when attempting an interpretation of it. Yet, specifically how he engaged publicly with the prominent ideas of his time supports a philosophical interpretation of his critique. It cannot be denied that his Christianity informed his thinking but his utilization of Christian terminology had specific philosophical purposes when critiquing his philosophical interlocutors. These philosophical insights can be applied without proffering some version of Protestant Christianity as his solution to all philosophical problems.<sup>150</sup> This is not to berate studies concerning his Lutheranism, as they are important to better understand him. To treat Hamann as a theological response to modernity is too narrow a view and is even misleading as this view overlooks his philosophical insights.

### **Condescension of God**

From statements made by Hamann, one might be able to extrapolate various post-modern insights regarding the inability of philosophy to grasp metaphysical truth, the influence of language on rationality, etc.<sup>151</sup> However, Hamann's thought is strongly Trinitarian and Christological. These elements are manifest in the idea of condescension (*Herunterlassung*) and the *Logos*.

The condescension of each member of the Trinity has considerable bearing on the theological structure of Hamann's thought.<sup>152</sup> It is fairly uncommon to carry the concept of

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<sup>150</sup> The superstition and idols of his age were critiqued for their philosophical deficiencies.

<sup>151</sup> One example of this can be found in, Terezakis, "J. G. Hamann and the Self-Refutation of Radical Orthodoxy."

<sup>152</sup> Walter Liebrecht argues that in the *Biblical Observations* the humility or condescension of God is the precondition upon which people can come into contact with God. Walter Liebrecht, *Gott und Mensch bei*

condescension of God over to each member of the Trinity. It is, of course, commonly used in reference to the incarnation and crucifixion, but is intrinsic to all members of the Godhead according to Hamann. Particularly significant to the idea of humility is the conception of God as author. In reference to the Father, he states, “‘God an author’ – The creator of the world and the father of humanity is denied and reprehended.”<sup>153</sup> Here the idea of humility is paramount, “How has God the Father humbled (*gedemüthigt*) himself, for he not only formed a clod of dirt, but also animated it through his breath.”<sup>154</sup> From these quotes one can extract a precursor to Hamann’s later attacks on the superstition of the Enlightenment, which included an attack on its arrogance regarding knowledge.<sup>155</sup> The act of creation does not at first appear to be an act of humility; however, in regards to creation, humility is the means of revelation to humanity. God reveals himself indirectly in nature, mediated through experience and sense perception. Insofar as the individual is not compelled to respond to this revelation, it is indeed the self-lowering of God.

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*Johann Georg Hamann* (Gütersloh: Bertelsmann, 1958), 20. Since God can only be experienced in his self-lowering – mediated through people, history, and experience – one can better grasp Hamann’s statement that for him “every book is a bible” ZH I, 396. This is his way of saying that revelation is to be found everywhere. A more detailed article on the topic of Hamann’s idea of the condescension of God is contained in, Matthew Cierzan, “The Condescension of God as Found in Hamann’s Biblical Meditations: A Foundation for Hamann’s Thought and Its Significance within the Dialogue Surrounding Religious Plurality,” in *In Pluribus Unum: Jednota v Mnohosti* (Prešov: Prešovská univerzita v Prešove Gréckokatolícka teologická fakulta, n.d.).

<sup>153</sup> Hamann, *Londoner Schriften*, 59:3-4. “Gott ein Schriftsteller! - - (Der Schöpfer der Welt und der Menschen ist gelegnet und getadelt worden.”

<sup>154</sup> Hamann, 151:37-39. *Londoner Schriften*. “Wie hat sich Gott der Vater gedemüthigt, da er ein[en] Erdtenkloß nicht nur bildete, sondern auch durch seinen Othem beseelte.”

<sup>155</sup> Hamann’s attack on the confidence of Enlightenment thought might seem counter-intuitive. For one, it was a time which moved from truth to probability. It would appear that he did not properly understand his age. However, Enlightenment thinkers’ claim to truth was at times a methodological one. Yet the methodologies themselves were dependent on language and experience, meaning that they were still based on faith. This made these positions contingent; a fact that was not broadly acknowledged by the Enlightenment. The words “superstition” and “idolatry” were used in order to offend the taste of the times and in so doing hoped to awaken some to their own contingency. For the move from truth to probability see, Annette Meyer, *Von der Wahrheit zur Wahrscheinlichkeit: die Wissenschaft vom Menschen in der schottischen und deutschen Aufklärung*, Hallesche Beiträge zur europäischen Aufklärung 36 (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 2008), 1–92.

Likewise, the Spirit also lowers himself, “How has God the Holy Spirit humbled himself, that he would be a historian of the smallest, most disdainful, inconsequential occurrences on the earth, to reveal to man in his own language, in his own history, along his own paths, the counsel, secrets, and ways of the Godhead?”<sup>156</sup> Here one of the primary points of Hamann’s authorship arises: not only in the fact that history is a revelation to humanity, but also in the emphasis on the small, disdainful, and inconsequential. In this way, faith is indirect in that God does not speak directly (e.g. even using a donkey on one occasion, a point not lost on Hamann).<sup>157</sup>

Finally there is Christ’s self-lowering – becoming a man. There are elements which echo traditional Christian doctrine, “How the Son of God has humbled himself, he was a man, he was least among men, he took the form of a servant.”<sup>158</sup> The doctrine of the incarnation quickly takes on a broader significance for Hamann. Upon his return from London, Hamann wrote to Linder, “Freely he [Christ] created us in his image – because we had lost it, he took on our own image – flesh and blood, like children have, learned to cry – babble – speak – read – write like a true son of man; imitated us that we might be

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<sup>156</sup> Hamann, *Londoner Schriften*, 152. “Wie hat sich Gott der heil. Geist erniedrigt, da er ein Geschichtschreiber der kleinsten, der verächtlichst[en], der nichts bedeutendsten Begebenheit[en] auf der Erde geworden[en] um d[em] Menschen in seiner eigenen Sprache, in seiner eigenen Geschichte, in seinen eigen[en] Wegen die Rathschlüsse, die Geheimnisse und die Wege der Gottheit zu offenbaren?”

<sup>157</sup> The story of God speaking through Balaam’s donkey is found in Numbers 22:21-39. Hamann references this rather humorously in *The Last Will and Testament of the Knight of the Rose-Cross: Concerning the Divine and Human Origin of Language*, Hamann, *Writings on Philosophy and Language*, 100. N III, 27:22.

<sup>158</sup> Hamann, *Londoner Schriften*, 151–52. *Biblische Betrachtungen*. “Wie hat sich Gott der Sohn gedemüthigt, er wurde ein Mensch, er wurde der geringste unter den Menschen, er nahm Knechtsgestalt an...”.

encouraged to imitate him.”<sup>159</sup> The image of the word made flesh serves as the foundation of Hamann’s philosophical impulses and insights,

All philosophical contradiction and the entire historical riddle of our existence, the impenetrable night of their *termini a quo* and *termini ad quem* are resolved in the record of the word made flesh. This testimony is the spirit of prophecy, and the reward of its promise a new name which he commends.<sup>160</sup>

Therefore this Christology, which is laden throughout much of his work, undergirds Hamann’s linguistic insights as well as his emphasis on the concrete and organic.<sup>161</sup> Much of the above quoted content was written for either family or friends and was composed shortly after his conversion. Because of the much more lucid nature of these early devotional writings compared to his published works (i.e. his authorship), it can be tempting to use them as the clearer expression of his ideas. Importantly, Hamann did not consider these early texts part of his “authorship” as he did not intend them for publication.<sup>162</sup> Therefore, it is the opinion of the present study that the early devotional writings can be helpful in better understanding the man Hamann and his thoughts, but should not be taken as the representation of his philosophical thought as a whole. Through his admission of the historical contingency of his own Christian faith, it is not an extrapolation to read his critique as unrelentant on theology. That being said, one can see that

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<sup>159</sup> ZH I, 394:4-9. To Linder August 9, 1759. “Freylich schuf er uns nach Seinem Bilde – weil wir dies verloren, nahm er unser eigen Bild an – Fleisch und Blut, wie die Kinder haben, lernte weinen – lallen – reden – lesen – dichten wie ein wahrer Menschsohn; ahmte uns nach, um uns zu Seiner Nachahmung aufzumuntern.”

<sup>160</sup> N III, 192, “aller philosophische Widerspruch und das ganze historische Rätzel unserer Existenz, die undurchdringliche Nacht ihres *Termini a quo* und *Termini ad quem* sind durch die Urkunde des Fleisch gewordenen Worts aufgelöset. Dies Zeugnis ist der Geist der Weißagung, und der Lohn seiner Verheißung, ein neuer Name, welchen niemand kennt, denn der ihn empfäht.”

<sup>161</sup> E.g. ZH V, 177. To Herder, April 6, 1784. “Reason is language - *Logos*.”

<sup>162</sup> Hamann, *Londoner Schriften*, ix.

Hamann considered *authorship* to be a mirror of the condescension of the Trinity found in these early works.<sup>163</sup> It is this framework of condescension which Hamann came to incorporate following his conversion. Indeed, this influenced his philosophical approach, and went on to inform his subsequent view of language.

The next section will discuss Hamann's views regarding the relationship between faith and reason. Particularly, showing how he did not see a contradiction between the two of them, but rather, he saw them as alternate, interdependent faculties, which, when working in unison, helped to make up the content of human knowledge.

### **Faith and Reason: Two Interdependent Faculties of Human Knowledge**

In this section faith and reason will be juxtaposed. Here it will be demonstrated that faith and reason are two separate faculties in Hamann's thought. This is not to suggest that there is no relationship between the two faculties; quite to the contrary, they are both present in the thought processes of the human being. In fact, they are considered relationships more than entities (this will receive more treatment in the final chapter). Notwithstanding, the convoluting of these two, or worse yet, one usurping the other, leads only to philosophical malaise. In reference to this state of affairs, Hamann frequently utilized the metaphor of a tree which is organic, living, and gives nourishment. The improper usurpation of faith or reason over the other is compared to sterility or death. In his words, "to what end is such a violent, unjustified, willful divorce of that which nature has joined together! Will not both stems wither and be dried up through a dichotomy and

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<sup>163</sup> Christina Reuter makes a great case for reading Hamann's authorship as a mirror of his own understanding of divine condescension. See, Christina Reuter, *Autorschaft als Kondeszendenz: Johann Georg Hamanns erlesene Dialogizität*, Theologische Bibliothek Töpelmann, Bd. 132 (Berlin ; New York: De Gruyter, 2005).

rupture of their common root?"<sup>164</sup> The perversion present in the elevation of one of these faculties over the other is one of the grounds for Hamann's interpretation of his contemporaries as idolatrous, based upon a latent superstition bolstering their respective philosophies.

Hamann speaks of reason quite often, but in order to ascertain his understanding of it demands more attention than a mere glance. Clearly, in his comments on reason he refers to his interlocutors' application of abstract reason.<sup>165</sup> However, when it comes to his own assertive claims, there lies a greater ambiguity. This is due to his uncompromising stance when it comes to conforming to the spirit of his age. Generally this means he insists on speaking of these things (i.e. reason, being, etc.) from a holistic perspective. Therefore a clear definition becomes problematic without an explication of his entire thought. Since the task at hand is that of distinguishing between the faculties of faith and reason, a few comments will be made in order to aid in understanding why Hamann held that distinguishing the difference between faith and reason paramount.

What is apparent is that reason is the human capacity to order that which is received through revelation – because of the individual nature of revelation one cannot think of reason as singular; in fact, one might better speak of various “reasonings”. Yet, even with reason losing its purity, the fact remains that it is the inner ability of the mind to order that which is received through the senses. Therefore reason is a different faculty than

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<sup>164</sup>Hamann, *Writings on Philosophy and Language*, 212. Here Hamann is referring to the sensibility and understanding, which are closely related to the faculties under consideration.

<sup>165</sup>This is to say, to take one example, Hamann does not seek to redefine the notion of reason in Mendelssohn, but seeks to work from within the system itself in order to reveal its own deficiencies. In fact, Hamann recommended this approach to Jacobi upon his response to Mendelssohn in the pantheism controversy. See, ZH VII, 174, To Jacobi, April 30, 1787.



faith, as it always follows that which is revealed in immediacy and whose principles are dependent on faith. Whereas some Enlightenment philosophers limited faith to that which was not understood, Hamann held these two faculties (faith and reason) of the human mind equal in importance and interdependent upon each other.<sup>166</sup> In reference to the above sketch, Hamann states, “Why should only uncertain faith be named? – what are not – grounds of reason? Is knowledge (*Erkenntnis*) without grounds of reason possible just as little as *sensus sine intellectu*?”<sup>167</sup> Here the connection between the senses and faith is present as well as the intellect and reason. Hamann regularly convolutes the faculties of human knowledge – reason, language, faith – in order to emphasize their malleability, to keep their interdependency in focus, while still recognizing a difference.

In the second section of the *Socratic Memorabilia* – preceding a discussion of Socratic ignorance and Socrates’ daemon – reason and the intellect are contrasted with faith. Initially, this may present itself as a strange example of contrasts; however, it underscores the different faculties wonderfully. He begins with the consideration of mortality, “What is more certain than the end of man, and from which truth is there a more general and reliable knowledge?”<sup>168</sup> The knowledge that one will die is fully supported by the intellect, through accumulating data, observing the world, and ordering it accordingly.

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<sup>166</sup> In this section Hamann includes a very interesting footnote: *Fidei hoc crepusulo commune obtigit, quod ad utrumque tenebrarum admixtio necessaria sit, quum alias copiosiori accedente luce, illa in scientiam, hoc in diem transeat. Quaedam mysteria – in quibus Fides intellectui felicius facem praeferre solet – quam hic ad procreandam fidem viam munire. Johann Georg Hamann, *Sokratische Denkwürdigkeiten*, ed. Sven-Aage Jørgensen, Bibliogr. rev. Ausg, Reclams Universal-Bibliothek 926 (Stuttgart: Reclam, 2004), 53. What is suggested here is that faith has an element of the unknown which can later pass into knowledge. This is to say there is a base understanding that is not completely foreign to that of some of his contemporaries, only Hamann emphasizes its necessity and not its hindering of knowledge.*

<sup>167</sup> ZH VII, 165. To Jacobi, April 27, 1787. “Warum soll bloß die ungewiße Glaube genannt werden? – Was sind nicht – Vernunftgründe? Ist Erkenntniß ohne Vernunftgründe möglich, eben so wenig als *sensus sine intellectu*.”

<sup>168</sup> N II 73:22-24. *Sokratische Denkwürdigkeiten*. “Was ist gewisser als des Menschen Ende, und von welcher Wahrheit gibt es eine allgemeinere und bewährtere Erkenntnis?”

Yet, the fact that one will die cannot be fully comprehended – in Hamann’s understanding – and appropriated in life. In reference to this, he comments further, “There are proofs of truths, which are so little suited for the application; yes, one can believe in the proof of a proposition without giving the proposition itself approval.”<sup>169</sup> His point is that the acceptance of principles is not based entirely upon consistent proofs. Hamann’s skepticism is essential for this position. There can be an assent to proofs of propositions, but not a faith in the respective propositions. Put differently, the proofs of propositions are not the foundation of faith; and faith is always connected to the concrete, it is never purely in the intellect. It comes back around to the immediacy of the senses. “Faith is not a work of reason and also, therefore, cannot be subjected to its attacks; because *faith* happens so little through grounds as by *tasting* and *seeing*.”<sup>170</sup> Faith, then, cannot be subjected to the critique of abstract reason but works in conjunction with reason.

Some have interpreted Hamann’s authorship as a tirade against reason.<sup>171</sup> Critical comments on abstract reason surface frequently in his authorship. Although faith and reason play different roles, they are neither opposed to each other, nor does the recognition of their separate functions solve the problem of philosophical knowledge. Firstly, they are inter-dependent, “Faith is as in need of reason as it is in need of faith .”<sup>172</sup> Later in a letter he gives further insights into his thoughts, as well as reveals that he is not on a crusade against reason as such. “Sensation cannot be as easily separated from human

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<sup>169</sup> N II, 73:30-33. *Socratic Memorabilia*. “Es giebt Beweise von Wahrheiten, die so wenig taugen als die Anwendung, die man von den Wahrheiten selbst machen kann; ja man kann den Beweis eines Satzes glauben ohne dem Satz selbst Beyfall zu geben.”

<sup>170</sup> N II, 74:2-5. *Socratic Memorabilia*. “Der Glaube ist kein Werk der Vernunft und kann daher auch keinem Angriff derselben unterliegen; weil *Glauben* so wenig durch Gründe geschieht als *Schmecken* und *Sehen*.”

<sup>171</sup> Cf. Isaiah Berlin, *Three Critics of the Enlightenment: Vico, Hamann, Herder*, ed. Henry Hardy, Second Edition (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013), 317–443.

<sup>172</sup> ZH VII, 165, To Jacobi, April 27, 1787. “Glaube hat Vernunft eben so nöthig, als diese jenen hat.”

nature as reason, nor can reason be separated from the senses [*Sinnlichkeit*]. The affirmation of identical propositions includes the denial of contradictory propositions at the same time. Identity and contradiction come from the same certainty, yet are often based on an optical or transcendental appearance, thought-shadows, and wordplay...sensation must be limited by grounds of reason. Knowledge from faith is essentially identical with the *nil in intellectu*.<sup>173</sup> Here we begin to see the role that reason has to play, that is, a regulatory one.

A brief note should be made regarding the veracity of faith. Just because history, experience, and language – and thereby reason – are dependent on faith to a certain extent, it should not be equated with truth. “Faith is likewise the source of unbelief and false belief or superstition.”<sup>174</sup> This has its origins in language itself, “The *adiutorium*, the help, language, is the seducer of our understanding.”<sup>175</sup> This observation demonstrates that there should not be a unilateral acceptance of the content of faith. What is critical to note in the above quote is that faith might not only be the source of false belief but of superstition as well. Therefore when Hamann critiques his age for failing to acknowledge the role of faith, he is not referring to the lack of acknowledgement but the superstition that may be present. Furthermore, the failure to acknowledge the faith-based commitments makes one more susceptible to superstition; it is to the explication of the superstition of his age which will now be addressed.

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<sup>173</sup> ZH VII, 165-166, To Jacobi, April 27, 1787. “Empfindung kann in der menschl. Natur eben so wenig von Vernunft, als diese von der Sinnlichkeit geschieden werden. Die Bejahung identischer Sätze schließt zugleich die Verneinung widersprechender Sätze in sich. Identität und Widerspruch sind von ganz gleicher Gewisheit, beruhen aber oft auf einem optischen oder transcendentellen Schein, Gedanken-Schatten und Wortspiele...Empfindung muß durch Vernunftgründe eingeschränkt werden. Erkenntnis aus dem Glauben ist im Grunde identisch mit dem: Nil in intellectu.”

<sup>174</sup> ZH VII, 173, To Jacobi, April 29, 1787. “Glaube eben so die Quelle des Un- wie des Aberglaubens...”

<sup>175</sup> ZH VII, 173, To Jacobi, April 29, 1787. “Das *Adiutorium* der Sprache ist die Verführerin unseres Verstandes.”

## Philosophical Superstition

That Hamann's work has larger philosophical connotations extending beyond his critiques, in the view of this study, will become clearer presently. Hamann considered himself as little a philosopher as a theologian, most likely due to his narrow view of the parameters of philosophy. He expressed this in a letter, "For if those who are fools deny in their heart the existence of God, it appears to me even more nonsensical to want to prove that very thing. If this is what reason and philosophy are, then it is hardly a sin to blaspheme these things."<sup>176</sup> To reiterate, the present study understands his critique of superstition as a philosophical one because today the term philosophy carries far more variations and ambiguities than it did for Hamann. Even his insistence on being a philologist can be interpreted as a philosophical stance.<sup>177</sup> Hamann's "philologist" is a "lover of the word."<sup>178</sup> As explained previously, the Word (i.e. language, *Logos*) comes through revelation in history through experience. Language is his philosophical starting place of knowledge. Furthermore, language is the basis of reason itself. Only through language can one receive the revelation of God; therein the idea of the lowering of God into history mediated by language.

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<sup>176</sup> ZH VI, 277, To Jacobi, February 18, 1786. "Denn wenn die Narren sind, die in ihrem Herzen das Daseyn Gottes leugnen; so kommen mir die noch unsinniger vor, die selbiges erst beweisen wollen. Wenn das Vernunft u. Philosophie heißt: so ist es kaum eine Sünde, selbige zu lästern."

<sup>177</sup> Elfriede Büchsel correctly connects Hamann's philology to his "mimic style", that is, his taking up the position of the other to demonstrate its weaknesses from within. Elfriede Büchsel, *Biblisches Zeugnis und Sprachgestalt bei J.G. Hamann: Untersuchungen zur Struktur von Hamanns Schriften auf dem Hintergrund der Bibel*, Monographien und Studienbücher (Giessen: Brunnen Verlag, 1988), 188–92. Hence, there are times when Hamann does not employ clear arguments against his interlocutor, but simply works to make it look ridiculous by exposing the faith-based principles upon which it stands.

<sup>178</sup> N II 263:50-53. *Beurteilung der Kreuzzüge*, "Erstlich deutet sein Name einen Liebhaber des lebendigen, nachdrücklichen, zweyschneidigen, durchdringenden, markscheidenden und kritischen Worts an."

The term, “philosophical superstition” at first appears problematic from the perspective of Hamann’s authorship, insofar as he interpreted philosophy as always involved in abstractions. However, he held to a rather narrow conception of philosophy that was normally confined to his contemporaries and was not referring to the ancients as superstitious.<sup>179</sup> However, with the expanded boundaries of philosophy since the Enlightenment and his critique of theological abstractions, today one can well speak of a philosophical superstition that does not contradict Hamann’s own stance toward philosophy and reason, despite his instance on being a philologist.<sup>180</sup>

The present study has thus far primarily addressed the Enlightenment’s own understanding of superstition and Hamann’s notion of faith. Hamann’s notion of philosophical superstition will receive explication of its own in the proceeding. Its contents will better clarify the idea of how the critique of superstition is philosophical through a comparison of Hamann’s work to the work of Hans Blumenberg (1920-1996).

### **Hamann's Critique of Superstition and Hans Blumenberg's Metaphorology**

The metaphorology of Hans Blumenberg will be taken up as a paradigm that will serve as an analogy for Hamann’s concept of superstition. Through this lens, how a critique of superstition can be classified as philosophical will come into greater focus.<sup>181</sup> In his book,

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<sup>179</sup> Hamann was more than willing to appropriate the ancients. Also, his use of Latin and Patristic sources – which most contemporary readers would include in the history of philosophy – demonstrate his narrow view of philosophy.

<sup>180</sup> Alexander, *Johann Georg Hamann Philosophy and Faith*, 158.

<sup>181</sup> In this analysis one could have utilized the idea of *episteme* of Foucault or a paradigm in the sense of Thomas Kuhn insofar as they are also examples of foundations of knowledge accepted by a society. However, Blumenberg’s thought lends itself better to bringing out Hamann’s philosophical approach insofar as it deals more closely with theology and philosophy as opposed to science. Cf. Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*, Vintage books edition (New York NY: Vintage Books, 1994); Thomas S.

*Paradigms for a Metaphorology (Paradigmen zu einer Metaphorologie)*,<sup>182</sup> Blumenberg acknowledges the inability of the Cartesian project to provide the grounds for philosophical reflection. He postulates that in order for thought to grasp at any notion of an All (or an absolute), metaphor is required. Even when unacknowledged, metaphors undergird thought and the corresponding concepts of philosophy. A controlling metaphor may dominate a specific historical period; however, they can also exist alongside one another in history. Hamann, in speaking of his “critical century”, similarly interprets different epochs as having controlling impulses, paralleling some of Blumenberg’s ideas. There are two absolute metaphors postulated by Blumenberg that will be useful for developing the idea of philosophical superstition in the context of Hamann, namely, “the powerful truth” and “the naked truth.”<sup>183</sup> The former will be applied to Hamann’s comments regarding some forms of theology (e.g. Roman Catholic theology of the Middle Ages) and the latter Enlightenment philosophy, both of which were accused of superstition and idolatry due to their abstractions.

### **Foundations of Philosophy beyond Reason: Blumenberg's Absolute Metaphors**

Absolute metaphors embody modes of thought – fundamental positions towards reality taken to be true. Some of these answers to fundamental questions were deemed superstitious in Hamann’s mind and are therefore useful for the present study. The broad and theoretical nature of absolute metaphors make the philosophical aspect of even

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Kuhn and Ian Hacking, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, Fourth edition (Chicago ; London: The University of Chicago Press, 2012).

<sup>182</sup> Hans Blumenberg, *Paradigmen zu einer Metaphorologie*, ed. Anselm Haverkamp, Dirk Mende, and Mariele Nientied, Erste Auflage, Suhrkamp Studienbibliothek 10 (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2013).

<sup>183</sup> Blumenberg has many absolute metaphors, but these two correspond most closely to Hamann’s critique. They are also the two closest to Hamann’s time period.

theological thought structures – at least in the process of analysis – part of a philosophical project.<sup>184</sup> The boundary between theology and philosophy was considered either non-existent or irrelevant in regards to absolute metaphors. Blumenberg’s philosophy seeks to delve deeper into the constructs driving thought. In reference to the pursuit of truth and reality, Blumenberg asserted that there was a need to develop concepts such as the *visio beatifica*. He writes:

These are all questions that barely a philosophical school has attempted to answer with systematic means; we nonetheless maintain that everywhere in the language of philosophy, *indications* can be found that answers to these questions have always already been given in a subterranean stratum of thought, answers that, although they may not be contained in the systems in propositional form, have never ceased to pervade, tincture, and structure them.<sup>185</sup>

When Hamann references the superstition of his contemporaries he is referencing something of this nature. Namely, that his age had specific answers to fundamental questions and one was not supposed to question these underlying answers. Hamann’s authorship focused on questioning the underlying presupposition of his age (e.g. his critique of the supremacy of critique or the paradigmatic nature of Enlightenment utilization of abstract reason as presiding over all other forms of thought). Hence Hamann treats many philosophical propositions as subterfuges, distracting from what Blumenberg

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<sup>184</sup>Blumenberg never gives a clear definition of the metaphor within his book, and later abandons some of the language utilized in the *Metaphorology*, perhaps due to ambiguity of the terminology. Cf. Anselm Haverkamp, “Prolegomena: Das Skandalon der Metaphorologie,” in *Paradigmen zu einer Metaphorologie*, Erste Auflage, Suhrkamp Studienbibliothek 10 (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2013), 200.

<sup>185</sup> Hans Blumenberg, *Paradigms for a Metaphorology*, trans. Robert Savage (New York: Cornell University Press, 2016), 7.

would call the absolute metaphor of a specific epoch. One of these was the metaphor of the mighty truth.

***The Absolute Metaphor of the Mighty Truth and Hamann's Critique of the Superstition of Theology***

Blumenberg's absolute metaphor of the "mighty truth" (*mächtige Wahrheit*) parallels Hamann's critique of the theology of the Roman Catholic Church in the Middle Ages. The underlying notion of truth is what is under scrutiny, not theology per se. The mighty truth metaphor is the description of a group of truth metaphors (*Wahrheitsmetaphern*) that share a similar foundation. "Although it does not constitute a legitimate object of theology, a fundamental conviction of this kind can also assume a theological guise [*kann sich theologisch einkleiden*]."<sup>186</sup> Articulated differently and much more obscurely, Hamann has a similar idea of a getting below the surface of dogma and theology – the "object" underneath the philosophical, dogmatic framework so to speak – in an attempt to reveal that they were based on abstractions.

The mighty truth has to do with the ability of truth to make itself clear, analogous to the function of light in darkness.<sup>187</sup> The mighty truth metaphor held that truth was something which would continue to advance and could not be hindered. Truth would become known; it would make itself known. Hamann allows for the ability of truth to be revealed; this is even a necessity for him. Yet to him, how revelation manifests itself is quite different from that suggested by the mighty truth metaphor. According to Hamann, truth is

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<sup>186</sup> Blumenberg, 7. In this sentence the word "guise" is a fine word but misses the original meaning to a degree. The original German alludes to the idea of being "theologically clothed".

<sup>187</sup> Blumenberg, 9.



always dependent on faith and the concrete events of experience in history – including all of the philosophical uncertainties which come along with this position.

According to Blumenberg the mighty truth is a paradigm that demands adherence, and in so doing upholds a social and political order legitimized entirely on its basis. Blumenberg upheld that the mighty truth was the underlying metaphor of thought in a Christian era, nothing more. “Christianity arose from a self-surrender, in that it ‘equipped itself with a theology only when it wanted to make itself possible in a world that, strictly speaking, it denied.’”<sup>188</sup> Hamann had a similar opinion. He considered that much of what Roman Catholic theology had turned into was a system of human speculation meant to legitimize despotism.<sup>189</sup> This is not a rejection of its Christian foundations, but what he saw as a distorted system, itself founded upon dubious intentions. Take for example, “System is already in itself a hindrance of the truth” and, “You must expect the same way of thinking from each systematician as a Roman Catholic thinks of his own church.”<sup>190</sup> These quotes demonstrate that his critique is not a theological one as it is not concerned with the object of the theology of the Church (i.e. God), but in the abstractions and their inconsistencies and repercussions.

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<sup>188</sup> Hans Blumenberg, *The Legitimacy of the Modern Age*, trans. Robert M. Wallace, First MIT Press paperback ed, Studies in Contemporary German Social Thought (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1985), 119.

<sup>189</sup> Blumenberg does not construe this negatively as in the case of Hamann. Rather, he seeks to expose these underlying absolute metaphors as a means of understanding the bases of thought in different epochs, even providing an argument for speaking of epochs at all.

<sup>190</sup> ZH VI, 276. To Jacobi, February 18, 1786 and April 9, 1786. “System ist schon an sich ein Hinderniß der Wahrheit.” And to Jacobi, April 8, 1786. “ Von jedem Systematiker müssen Sie eben die Denkkungsart erwarten, daß er von seinem System wie ein römisch Katholischer von seiner einzigen Kirche denkt.” Hamann and Jacobi, *Johann Georg Hamann's, des Magus im Norden, Leben und Schriften*, 5 (Hamann's Briefwechsel mit Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi):285.

### *The Absolute Metaphor of the Naked Truth*

The truth did not want to let bandits come too near to her; she wore dress upon dress that one doubted her body could be found. How frightened they were when they had their way and saw the terrible specter before them, the truth.<sup>191</sup> – Johann Georg Hamann

Following Blumenberg's analysis of the metaphor of the mighty truth (present primarily in the Middle Ages and corresponding to Hamann's critique of the Roman Catholic Church), the metaphor of the naked truth (*nackte Wahrheit*) will here receive treatment. "The metaphor of the 'naked truth' pertains to the self-awareness of enlightened reason and its claim to mastery."<sup>192</sup> It is built upon the idea that the clothing of truth (in culture, theology, society, etc.) was in fact a disguise that needed to be removed. "As soon as clothing [of truth] begins to be understood *as* a disguise to be cast aside, ripped off, or seen through, the existing state of society loses its quality of self-evidence."<sup>193</sup> Furthermore, this was used by the changing politics and social-economic situation. "In the modern age, talk of the 'naked truth' has mainly figured in bourgeois diatribes against the sartorial world of the First and Second Estates, but it could equally be adopted by every up-and-coming class that thought itself naked and wanted to strip others of their vestments as so many disguises."<sup>194</sup> This point is particularly relevant for Hamann's critique of the idols of abstract reason,

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<sup>191</sup> ZH I 381:8-11 Letter to Kant, July 27, 1759. "Die Wahrheit wollte sich von Straßenräubern nicht zunahe kommen lassen, sie trug Kleid auf Kleid, daß man zweifelte ihren Leib zu finden. Wie erschacken [sie], da sie ihren Willen hatten und das schreckl. Gespenst, die Wahrheit, vor sich sahen." This is not a one-to-one comparison with Blumenberg's absolute metaphor of the naked truth. The statement comes at the end of a long letter to Kant seeking to explain and defend himself against the attempt to convert Hamann back to Enlightenment ideals following his conversion in London. Particularly pertaining to his friend Berens' disdain for Hamann's newfound perspective was in view. The affinity it shares with Blumenberg is the desire of the Enlighteners to wrest truth from anything not in accordance with abstract reason.

<sup>192</sup> Blumenberg, *Paradigms for a Metaphorology*, 47.

<sup>193</sup> Blumenberg, 42.

<sup>194</sup> Blumenberg, 43.

specifically that there was no getting down to the "truth" in an absolute sense but only an exchange of fundamental faith-based presuppositions. Blumenberg also locates the move from *sapientia* to *scientia* in the metaphor of the naked truth.<sup>195</sup> Significant for Hamann's critique of superstition is its emphasis on pointing to the Enlightenment's attempt of overcoming the clothing of truth in the past. This became, and is noted by Blumenberg, significant difficulty for Enlightenment thought. "The discovery of *history* within the Enlightenment and against its semantic current is the discovery of the illusion of the 'naked truth' or the illusoriness of nakedness."<sup>196</sup> Its metaphorical nature is revealed and its legitimacy called into question by the discovery of history. This brought about a new orientation, namely, "the 'disguises' of truth now no longer issue from the poetic imagination and the need for rhetorical ornamentation – they do not represent fashion accessories, so to speak, that could be cast off without further ado – but are themselves constitutive of the way in which truth manifests itself."<sup>197</sup> From this point of view the naked truth is a form of 'clothing' whereby one might approach reality – there is no getting out of an underlying metaphor (contingency). Ironically, those who sought to do away with a "clothing" of truth were only upholding another form of clothing. The recognition of this is paramount for Hamann, as he saw his contemporaries ignorantly assuming methodological superiority without recognizing the contingent nature of their systems. Moreover, it was that their systems ascribed to fundamental answers to questions of truth without acknowledgment - or even awareness - of the contingent nature of their undertakings. Blumenberg would frame this in the language of an absolute metaphor to which

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<sup>195</sup> Blumenberg, 46.

<sup>196</sup> Blumenberg, 48.

<sup>197</sup> Blumenberg, 48.

Enlightenment philosophers were ascribing, whereas Hamann would employ the language of faith – that all philosophy grounds itself in faith by certain principles which cannot be secured through the use of abstract reason.

### ***Blumenberg's Metaphorology and Hamann's Condescension of God***

Blumenberg's project is not tied to the rhetoric of Hamann, but it does provide the modern reader an excellent framework for processing Hamann's application of highly religious language in a philosophical manner. Here a brief excursus considering Hamann's thought from the vantage point of the Metaphorology will be given in order to demonstrate how the theological opinion of the condescension of God had significant bearing on his philosophical approach.

The God of condescension could be seen as Hamann's absolute metaphor. Hamann demonstrates a strong belief in that metaphor and yet acknowledges that its superiority could not be definitively proven by reason. Because the framework (or metaphor in the terms of a metaphorological approach) of Hamann's thought is very Christian – not to mention the importance of his conversion experience in the development of his thought – there is a tendency to conflate his personal religious convictions with his critique of abstract reason.<sup>198</sup> This is not to suggest that his personal and public life can be separated, a point Hamann would have vehemently opposed,<sup>199</sup> but only to say that the metaphor of condescension, be it applied personally or publicly, can be considered philosophical as it contains the architecture for a philosophical approach. The arguments he employed when

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<sup>198</sup> Lieb, "Glaube und Offenbarung bei J. G. Hamann," 129.

<sup>199</sup>A point of which he explicitly critiques others is in their "belief" in reason being outside of one exercising one's own reasoning.

critiquing his contemporaries stand on their own; they are not tied to a contrasting system.<sup>200</sup>

### **Hamann's Notion of History**

There are difficulties presented by the historical and contingent nature of existence, and these bring to light the differences Hamann has with others in the modern era. The modern could be characterized by suspicion, founded on the idea of one's own limited access to, or the absence of, metaphysical grounding.<sup>201</sup> In describing the tension of the modern age, Blumenberg states, "The modern age was the first and only age that understood itself as an epoch and, in so doing, simultaneously created the other epochs. The problem of legitimacy is latent in the modern age's claim to carry out a radical break with tradition, and in the incongruity between this claim and the reality of history, which can never begin entirely anew."<sup>202</sup> Abstract reason did not adequately regard historicity in seeking to get to the "naked truth" but was limited by a historical consciousness in its attempts at knowledge. Hamann was one of the figures to stress this weakness in Enlightenment philosophy. The dilemma of contingency would lead later thinkers towards a suspicious and even nihilistic view of humanity being historically situated. If the modern reaction to contingency is suspicion, then Hamann's is one of trust. There is no "latent

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<sup>200</sup> In consulting Jacobi's response to Mendelssohn in the controversy surrounding Lessing's potential pantheism, Hamann provided the following advice that reveals his own approach. "Why do you [addressing Jacobi] contrast your own philosophy to that of others?... you should have taken their philosophy as your own and make all its own disagreement (Misstimmung) evident." ZH VII, 175. To Jacobi, April 30, 1787. "Warum setzt Du Deine eigene Philosophie entgegen?...Du hättest Dir ihre Philosophie zu eigen machen sollen, und ihre Misstimmung augenscheinlich machen."

<sup>201</sup> Richard Rorty, *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 3-22. In this first chapter Rorty provides a good summary of a philosophy void of metaphysics in the traditional sense.

<sup>202</sup> Blumenberg, *The Legitimacy of the Modern Age*, 116.

break” as noted in the above quote, but a complete embrace of the tension of historical contingency.<sup>203</sup>

Moreover, for Hamann, knowledge is always historically situated. The consciousness of one’s own historicity makes up part of the modern construct and, as noted above, was already present in Hamann’s authorship. On the one hand, his understanding of humanity as historically situated changed the way humanity approaches reality, modifying how philosophy should be done. On the other hand, his notion of history is directly connected with the Christian faith and does not consist in the break with the past sought by his contemporaries.<sup>204</sup>

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<sup>203</sup> This is a position in opposition to the ethos of the post-modern embodied by Lyotard’s, albeit cursory, description of the post-modern as, “incredulity towards meta-narratives”. Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge, Theory and History of Literature*, v. 10 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984).

<sup>204</sup> Hamann interprets the ancients from the perspective of a greater revelation in Christ, which harkens back to a Christian age. This has led to the discussion by some, of whether Hamann’s thought is “pre-modern”. Oswald Bayer, *A Contemporary in Dissent: Johann Georg Hamann as a Radical Enlightener* (Grand Rapids, Mich: W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co, 2011), xvi. However, some of Hamann’s comments concerning language have led others to place him in a post-modern corner. Heinzpeter Hempelmann, *Prämodern - Modern - Postmodern: warum “ticken” Menschen so unterschiedlich?: Basimentalitäten und ihre Bedeutung für Mission, Gemeindegarbeit und Kirchenleitung* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Theologie, 2013), 43. However, much contemporary scholarship has taken its cue from leading scholar, Oswald Bayer, who finds both categories unfitting (discussed in Bayer citation above.) Undoubtedly Hamann sees the ultimate resolution of history within the *Logos*, Christ. Yet how he understands Christianity fits within a post-modern sensibility, because his thought is always qualified by the uncertain certainty of faith. So while situated between pre- and post-modern Hamann’s thought is nevertheless conscious of a contingent historical factor which allows for its own existence alongside that of other competing belief systems, relying on the appeal of its own aesthetic and not by asserting a greater access to “truth” in an objective sense this study does not wish to delve into the tedious discussion of what post-modernism is, or if one should understand it as a part of the modernism). What this approach offers is not the rejection of a larger narrative, but regulating it to the personal rather than the abstract.

### *Atemporality of Enlightenment Reason*

Hamann focused on the implicit break with history attempted by his contemporaries. The presumption of Enlightenment thought to find truth in nature or reason apart from history is a fundamental aspect of Hamann's notion of their superstition. The initial pages of Hamann's *Metacritique of the Purism of Reason* deal precisely with the lack of addressing and dealing with the historical basis in the thought of Immanuel Kant. Hamann begins the text by drawing attention to Hume's indebtedness to Berkeley, "First of all, the recent skepticism seems to me to owe infinitely more to the older idealism than this single and fortuitous occasion would have us superficially understand, and that without Berkeley, Hume would hardly have become the great philosopher that the Critique, with a similar indebtedness declares him to be."<sup>205</sup> His point is to implicate Kant's thought as an historical phenomenon. This is not meant to trivialize Kant's thought itself, but to humble it. Commenting on Berkeley's great insights in this passage he states, "But as for the important discovery itself: it lies open and uncovered, without any special profundity, in the very use of language of the most common perception and observation of the *sensus communis*."<sup>206</sup> In pointing this out, Hamann is indirectly accusing Kant of ignoring the historical contingency of reason. He further argued that to lean too heavily on abstract reason without taking historical revelation into account, was nothing other than a superstitious belief in the efficacy of abstract reason.

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<sup>205</sup> Hamann, *Writings on Philosophy and Language*, 206. *Metacritique on the Purism of Reason*.

<sup>206</sup> Hamann, 206. *Metacritique on the Purism of Reason*.

## The Road to Superstition: Its Causes

One of the causes engendering superstition was the failure to acknowledge philosophical faith commitments, as this often led to a misplaced faith in a system or method. Misplaced conveys a negative reading of his contemporaries, yet faith (*Glaube*) is not itself sufficient grounds of truth. Additionally, that which was negated or overlooked was only part of the issue. Hamann was most concerned with the outworking, the potential effect of this superstitious faith. "A confusion of ideas is not without practical consequences."<sup>207</sup> Hamann's comments qualifying faith (he did not give it a *carte blanche*) can be lost in the midst of his hostile comments on reason. He saw the application of abstract reason as the most detrimental element and driving force of his epoch, thus warranting it being targeted. These concerns will be elaborated on presently.

### Limitations of Abstract Reason

When philosophy is regulated to the use of abstract reason it fails to comprehend its own limitations. To Hamann, it neglects to recognize what it is "doing", that it was not a higher form of thought or somehow closer to an absolute than poetry or painting.<sup>208</sup> "A

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<sup>207</sup> Hamann, 180. *Golgotha and Sheblimini!*.

<sup>208</sup> One of Hegel's largest critiques of Hamann is that he focuses on the subjective to the detriment of the absolute. Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Hegel on Hamann*, trans. Lisa Marie Anderson, *Topics in Historical Philosophy* (Evanston, Ill: Northwestern University Press, 2008), 20. It is in Hamann's emphasis on the concrete whereby he falls short of transcending religious thought. But for Hamann it is this very point which vouchsafes his Christianity, and philosophical insight, from becoming subsumed by an idolatrous philosophy. In a discourse on art, Gianni Vattimo makes a statement on Hegel's philosophy which can be brought to bear on the subject of Hegel's evaluation of Hamann. "It is possible that if Hegel can be said to sum up the whole tradition of modern philosophy (at least that part of tradition that Hegelian philosophy, in its historical self-awareness, recognizes as its own) and to be the prophet of our epoch, it is because he recognized and theorized as the center of his philosophy the *Aufhebung*, the mediation, that is, the overcoming and abolition of what is 'mediated.'" Gianni Vattimo, *Art's Claim to Truth*, ed. Santiago Zabala, *Columbia Themes in Philosophy, Social Criticism, and the Arts* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 2010), 108. For Hamann there is



demonstration of the relationship and agreement of concepts is the same as relation and symmetry of figures (*Zahlen*) and lines, sounds (*Schallwürbel*), and colors in musical composition and painting. The philosopher is just as subjugated to the law of imitation as the poet. For the latter, his muse and its hieroglyphic shadow theater is as true as reason and its system of doctrine (*Lehrgebäude*) is for the former.<sup>209</sup> Hamann does not make these comments to trivialize sound reasoning, but types of philosophy undertaken by his contemporaries that neglected its faith-based foundations by focusing on abstract reason. Hamann deems this to be creating conceptual “castles in the sky”.<sup>210</sup> The philosopher, being compared with the poet, can be found in various passages of Hamann's authorship. When speaking of system as the fabrication of human art serves as another demonstration of this conviction, emphasizing that reason was limited when removed from human existence (experience). Furthermore, the systems created by abstract reason - insofar as they lacked the dynamic of considerations of history and contingency - were only passing innovations like the work of art.<sup>211</sup> Significant in this regard is his statement, “Tremble, deceived mortals, who make the nobility of your intentions your justification! The system of this

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no getting out of that which is mediated insofar as all things are grounded in language. Due to this, access outside of mediated truth remains an impossibility.

<sup>209</sup> N II, 74:6-12, *Socratic Memorabilia*. “Die Beziehung und Uebereinstimmung der Begriffe ist eben dasselbe in einer Demonstration, was Verhältnis und Symmetrie der Zahlen und Linien, Schallwürbel und Farben in der musikalischen Composition und Malerey ist. Der Philosoph ist dem Gesetz der Nachahmung so gut unterworfen als der Poet. Für diesen ist seine Muse und ihr Hieroglyphisches Schattenspiel so wahr als die Vernunft und das Lehrgebäude derselben für jenen.”

<sup>210</sup> Smith, J. G. *Hamann 1730-1788: A Study in Christian Existence*, 249. Hamann's contemporaries' failure to acknowledge their faith-based commitments can be difficult to understand without first having dealt with the broad idea he had of faith, since many regulated faith to the field of religion and the occult.

<sup>211</sup> Hamann's critique of the use of reason resembles Hilde Domin's (1909-2006) analysis and defense of poetry and art in a modern society located in *Wozu Lyrik Heute*. Particularly in that the judgment and criteria for poetry cannot be proven in the sense of mathematics or the natural sciences. This is not to say that one does not give reasons for poetry, but that the reasons provided are intrinsically tied to social and historical developments. Furthermore, Domin's assertion that the work of art is always at the crossroads of the past and the future, with an eye to the future, mirrors Hamann's emphasis on the eschatological elements present in philosophy. Hilde Domin, *Wozu Lyrik heute: Dichtung und Leser in der gesteuerten Gesellschaft*, Fischer-Taschenbücher 12204 (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer-Taschenbuch-Verl, 1993), 47, 67.

year, which you use to degree the proofs of your premises, will be the fairytale of tomorrow.”<sup>212</sup> Any system of philosophy based on abstract reason was bound to the fate of being a passing consideration. This furthers Hamann's idea that abstract reason was not something outside of the subjective.<sup>213</sup>

### **Reason, Knowledge, and Eschatology**

Beg your friend that it becomes him least to laugh at the eyeglasses of my aesthetic imagination, for I must arm the naked eyes of my reason with those same glasses.<sup>214</sup> – Johann Georg Hamann

Hamann thought the Enlightenment philosophers also limited in their thinking due to their narrow view of knowledge. When knowledge is equated with the use of abstract reason in the search for mathematical certainty or access to an absolute it (a) ignores a whole facet of human knowing. “Reason and language are therefore the inner and outer band of all social life. If that which nature, through having been established, has joined together is divorced or divided, then faith and fidelity are annulled, and lies and deceit, shame and vice, are confirmed and stamped as a means to felicity.”<sup>215</sup> And (b) loses historical orientation. An example can be found in the second essay of his *Cloverleaf of Hellenistic Letters* when he speaks of the field of history, “like that open valley that was full of bones - - and, lo, they were very dry. No one but a prophet can prophesy of these bones that sinews and flesh will

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<sup>212</sup> N II, 140:16-19. *Die Magi aus Morgenlande*. “Zittert, betrogne Sterbliche, die ihr den Adel eurer Absichten, zu eurer Gerechtigkeit macht! Das System des heutigen Jahres, das euch den Beweis eurer Vordersätze erläßt, wird das Märchen des morgenden seyn.”

<sup>213</sup> Hamann even speaks fondly of Descartes’ “method” insofar as it was a history of Descartes’ own reason, N IV, 221-27-29.

<sup>214</sup> ZH I, 380. To Immanuel Kant, July 27, 1759. Arnulf Zweig provides a good interpretation in his book on Kant’s philosophical correspondence. Kant, *Philosophical Correspondence, 1759-99*, 42.

<sup>215</sup> Hamann, *Writings on Philosophy and Language*, 175. *Golgotha and Sheblimini!*.

be brought up upon them and skin will cover them.”<sup>216</sup> So it is prophecy, eschatology, that gives orientation - not only to history, but the present, as well, “The future determines the present, and the present determines the past, as the purpose determines the nature and use of the means.”<sup>217</sup> One can infer from the above thoughts that for Hamann it is not possible to avoid eschatology in thought, regardless of how much one might attempt to ignore its role.<sup>218</sup> This is because language always points towards the future. For this reason, Hamann often points out the troublesome consequences unperceived by the intellectuals of his day. Hamann viewed philosophical opinions more like interpretations, shedding light on why Hamann reacts to Enlightenment thought and furthermore justifies why he can declare that it leads to superstition.

### **Contingency of Reason and Faith**

The failure to acknowledge the element of faith in human knowledge can lead to troublesome foundations for philosophical methods and systems. Acknowledging this alone would not suffice for the construction of healthy thought – more is required. Of course, faith and reason are essential, but in and of themselves must be tested. For Hamann, reason not only needs faith, but it is the tool that humanity possesses to investigate truth. Concurrently, reason is also the source of falsehood. “Reason is the source of all truths and all falsities. It is the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Therefore both [Reason and Faith] have parts that are right and parts that are wrong, that deify and

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<sup>216</sup> Hamann, 46. *Cloverleaf of Hellenistic Letters*.

<sup>217</sup> Hamann, 46. *Cloverleaf of Hellenistic Letters*.

<sup>218</sup> Eschatology is fundamentally connected to faith – faith in future things. Hence, whenever future is postulated there is an eschatology according to Hamann: truths of history are understood through the belief one has of the future. This can also be extrapolated to the field of moral convictions and actions. The grounding for moral action cannot be derived from abstract reason alone, but is informed by one’s belief in a type of future, i.e. eschatology.

blaspheme the same.”<sup>219</sup> However, faith is not a simple solution of this dilemma. “Faith [is] likewise the source of un-faith and superstition.”<sup>220</sup> Of importance here is that although abstract reason may be an idol of his century, reason itself is not the source of Enlightenment superstition. The faulty faith upon which abstract reason is grounded - the faith-based preconditions upon which the emphasis on abstract reason is based - is the source of Enlightenment superstition. Since reason and faith constitute all thought, the lines between the two can easily become blurred. One instance of this convolution is pointed out by Hamann when he criticizes the attachment to system itself. Although a system itself may be largely a construct of reason, it is the belief in the system which falls under the critique of superstition. It is particularly the abstract nature of system that incites Hamann’s ire.

It has already been demonstrated that reason and faith are not faculties of human thought which must only be properly balanced to achieve true knowledge.<sup>221</sup> If it were only the proper combination of these two faculties, one would end up with a similar disposition as that of the rationalists: the human being in the position to achieve ultimate truth regarding reality by one’s own devices. Since all thought, whether known or unbeknownst, is caught up in the application of both reason and faith, they intrinsically cannot be separated. The following quote reveals Hamann’s opinion of the propensity towards abstraction in systematic thought:

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<sup>219</sup> ZH VII, 172-173. To Jacobi, April 29, 1787. “Vernunft ist die Quelle aller Warheiten und aller Irrthümer. Sie ist Baum des Erkenntnißes Gutes und Böses. Also haben beide Theile Recht, beide Unrecht, die selbige vergöttern und selbige lästern.”

<sup>220</sup> ZH VII, 173. To Jacobi, April 29, 1787. “Glaube eben so die Quelle des Un- wie des Aberglaubens.”

<sup>221</sup> Alexander, *Johann Georg Hamann Philosophy and Faith*, 44.

Metaphysics has its school and court languages; both are suspicious to me, and I am neither capable to understand them, nor to serve them myself. Hence I am nearly able to assume that our entire philosophy consists more of language than of reason, and the misunderstandings of innumerable words, the prosopopoeia of arbitrary abstractions, the antitheses τῆς ψευδωνύμου γνώσεως [of pseudo-knowledge, quoting 1 Timothy, 6:20], yes the most base figures of speech of the *sensus communis* have produced an entire world of questions that have as little reason to be posed as to be answered. We are still missing a grammar of reason, like writing and their collective elements that go through each other, like strings on a psaltery muddle together and yet together sound.<sup>222</sup>

In this quote Hamann's linguistic critique of reason receives some of its clearest explication. What is relevant is the broad assertion of philosophy squabbling over things that do not exist. He saw much of philosophical language as merely constructing concepts unrelated to life. These comments align with his idea that the philosophical systems of individual philosophers are only a "fabrication of human art" (see, pages 26 and 42). Moreover, the arbitrary abstractions based on the confusion of language only serve to distract and mislead. This adds further explanation as to why his critique tends to focus on foundational issues as he interpreted much of philosophy being more involved in logomachy than in addressing fundamental problems. His reference to music, in particular strings playing in unison, hints at his understanding of reason and how it is interdependent

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<sup>222</sup> To Jacobi December 1, 1784. "Die Metaphysik hat ihre Schul – und Hofsprache; beide sind mir verdächtig, und ich bin weder im Stande sie zu verstehen, noch selbst mich ihrer zu bedienen. Daher ich beinahe vermuthete, daß unsere ganze Philosophie mehr aus Sprache als Vernunft besteht, und die Mißverständnisse unzähliger Wörter, die Prosopopöien der willkürlichsten Abstractionen, die Antithesen τῆς ψευδωνύμου γνώσεως, ja selbst die gemeinsten Redefiguren des *sensus communis* haben eine ganze Welt von Fragen hervorgebracht, die eben mit so wenig Grund aufgeworfen, als beantwortet worden. Es fehlt uns also noch immer an einer Grammatik der Vernunft, wie der Schrift und ihrer gemeinschaftlichen Elemente, die durch einander gehen, wie die Saiten auf dem Psalter durcheinander klingen, und doch zusammen lauten." Hamann and Jacobi, *Johann Georg Hamann's, des Magus im Norden, Leben und Schriften*, 5 (Hamann's Briefwechsel mit Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi):21–22.

on other faculties of knowledge. To carry the musical analogy, the faculties of knowledge should all harmonize together as out of the psaltry.

He expresses the danger of the abstractions of his contemporaries in the *Aesthetica*, “Oh for a muse like a refiner’s fire, and like a fuller’s soap! - - She will dare to purify the natural use of the senses from the unnatural use of abstractions, by which our concepts of things are as maimed as the name of the Creator is suppressed and blasphemed. I speak with you, oh Greeks! For you deem yourself wiser than the chamberlains with the gnostic key.”<sup>223</sup> The reference to Gnosticism is important, insinuating that the abstractions of his contemporaries are able to achieve not just greater knowledge but a higher knowledge, not of God in this case but of truth.

### **System as the Worst Form of Abstraction**

Hamann’s distaste for abstraction has already been noted in the present study and is a conspicuous tenant of his thought. His aversion to the abstractions of his contemporaries makes up a significant portion of his authorship. Abstraction is a direct correlate of systemization. This fact alone would warrant a discussion of the relationship between the concept of superstition and abstract system. However more specifically, it will be argued that Hamann’s distaste of abstraction and system is based on his critique of superstition. The notion of the superstition permeating his century was actually its faith in systems constructed by abstract reason.

The worst form of abstraction, and a major instance of Enlightenment superstition, was attachment to system, “Every devotion to a system is a leaven for the pure, sincere

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<sup>223</sup> Hamann, *Writings on Philosophy and Language*, 79. *Aesthetica in Nuce*.

truth, which is not tolerated by one reliant on milk-food. We must be weaned from system; and for babes strong wine is not good.”<sup>224</sup> This point corresponds directly with Hamann’s statement, “Our knowledge is patchwork – no dogmatician is able to properly feel this great truth, if he is to play his role, and play it well. And through an unavoidable circle of pure reason Σκεψις itself becomes dogma.”<sup>225</sup> Skepticism, becoming a form of dogma, relates back to the idea of a critical century and criticism as an atemporal stance. His contemporaries, despite the appearance of searching more intensely for the truth through their use of reason, had fallen into that which they sought to avoid: allegiance to a historically contingent approach.

The tenants of Hamann’s understanding of faith covered in the first part of this study establish how and why he conceived of attachment to system as superstition. A philosophical system that is naturally abstract is bound to language with its historical and empirical foundations. Insofar as it is attached to language, one only comes to a system through faith. To impose that system on the conditions of existence is essentially a false faith. Whether acknowledged or not, every philosophy has conditions of faith that cannot be avoided, yet these conditions can be put to the test. This state of affairs does not necessitate Hamann’s harsh reaction to his contemporaries at first glance; however, one must see this in light of Hamann’s notion of faith. This notion does not allot for the permanent or absolute alongside his age’s attempt to do away with the superstition of

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<sup>224</sup> To Jacobi, April 9, 1786. “Jede Anhänglichkeit eines Systems ist ein Sauerteig für die reine, lautere Wahrheit, welcher sich mit ihrer Milchspeise nicht verträgt. Entwöhnt vom System müssen wir werden; und für Säuglinge taugt kein starker Wein.” Hamann and Jacobi, *Johann Georg Hamann’s, Des Magus im Norden, Leben und Schriften*, 5 (Hamann’s Briefwechsel mit Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi):284–85.

<sup>225</sup> ZH V, 432. To Herder, May 8, 1785. “Unser Wißen ist Stückwerk – diese große Wahrheit ist kein Dogmatiker recht im stande zu fühlen, wenn er seine Rolle, und noch dazu gut spielen soll, und durch einen unvermeidl. Zirkel der reinen Verunnft wird die Σκεψις selbst zum dogma.”

religion, which leans upon faith. Since all knowledge is based upon revelation and a corresponding faith, any attempt to get beyond faith is futile. This was a driving force behind Hamann's approach of sowing "the seed of doubt", to reveal disunity – replacing one contingency for another resolves nothing. His critique of the dependency of systems on language was not only applied to his Enlightenment contemporaries' approach to abstract system, but was at the core of his critique of theology, as well (e.g. both Roman Catholicism or Deism). To take one example, the common denominator of Rationalism and Roman Catholicism is each one's dedication to system, which was placed upon experience in order to conform experience to the will of the respective system. This is inherently a violence upon experience and limiting in its ability to unfold human existence in history.

He encapsulates his attitude towards system in his statement on Apollo (who represented order and system), "[Hamann desires] to destroy the despotism of Apollo, who fetters truth and freedom through demonstrative proofs , grounds, and conclusions."<sup>226</sup> Taken together with Hamann's positive comments regarding reason, here he is targeting the basis of the proofs of his contemporaries. These thoughts help to explain why Hamann was so interested in exposing the (false) faith in Enlightenment thought that led to abstract systems, which are despotic in their very nature. This further clarifies Hamann's style of writing that essentially sought to circumvent systematization.

### **Abstraction Relativized**

Commonly found in Hamann's authorship alongside his hostile, critical rhetoric – in this case, of abstraction – one finds other passages which nuance his position. In a letter to

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<sup>226</sup> N II 272:8-10. *Beurtheilung der Kreuzzüge des Philologen*. "den Despotismus des Apolls zu zerstören, der in demonstrativischen Beweisen, Gründen und Schlüssen Wahrheit und Freiheit fesselt."



Jacobi, Hamann expresses an acceptance of some abstraction in order to make revelation more visible, “[as] nature is revelation, not of itself but of a higher object, not their vanity, but his glory, which is not visible without illuminated and properly armed eyes, but can be made visible under new terms, instruments, and institutions, abstractions and constructs, which must just as well be given and cannot be created out of the air even as old [terms, instruments, etc.]”<sup>227</sup> Insightful here is his emphasis on the historical precedent of new institutions and abstractions. Hence, it is actually the amount of certainty and worth placed upon (or belief in) a particular abstraction from which the condemnation of superstition stems. It is particularly in the construction of systems by means of abstractions – systems which would then be given jurisdiction over knowledge – which led to despotism. It is not abstraction, which is present in linguistic expression, but rather a dogmatic belief in the system itself that leads to despotism. This is closely related with the metaphysics of the Greeks and the despotism of Roman Catholic theology in the Middle Ages insofar as they sought to impose abstract systems upon the concrete, historical human existence.

Before moving to the explication of idolatry and the analysis of the various idols that Hamann identifies, it will be helpful to take up concrete examples of superstition in specific Enlightenment thinkers.

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<sup>227</sup> ZH VII, 173. To Jacobi, April 29, 1787. “Wie die Natur Offenbarung ist, nicht ihrer selbst, sondern eines höheren Gegenstandes, nicht ihrer Eitelkeit, sondern Seiner Herrlichkeit, die ohne erleuchtete und bewaffnete Augen nicht sichtbar ist, noch sichtbar gemacht werden kann, als unter neuen Bedingungen, Werkzeugen und Anstalten, Abstractionen und Constructionen, die eben so gut gegeben werden müssen und nicht aus der Luft geschöpft werden können als die alten Elemente.”

## Examples of Superstition

Hamann takes elements of Kant's and Mendelssohn's theories that do not seem too problematic at first glance, but after further inspection reveal a latent superstition. Hamann points to assertions by Kant and Mendelssohn as 'the way things are', or are regarded as a peripheral or even procedural remarks; where in fact Hamann sees the entirety of the respective system susceptible to doubt.

### Superstition in Kant's System of Pure Reason

"The Critique of Pure Reason, which could have justifiably called mystic..."

– Johann Georg Hamann<sup>228</sup>

The first example of superstition in the thought of Hamann's contemporaries comes from his metacritique of Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*. Hamann views Kant's thought beginning on faulty, superstitious grounds. In fact, where Kant might take something at face value, Hamann points to the dependency on faith, in this case a faulty one (i.e. a superstitious one). In three cases this can be clearly observed: the transcendental object, antiphrasis, and Kant's assertions regarding space and time as foundational aspects of sensibility. Important to these three cases is that they are more than a mere acceptance of a certain line of argumentation, but rather are foundational elements based on a belief in that asserted by the philosopher.<sup>229</sup>

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<sup>228</sup> ZH IV, 330. To Johann Friedrich Reichardt, August 25, 1781. "...Kritik der reinen Vernunft, welche ebenso füglich Mystik hätte heißen können..."

<sup>229</sup> It should be stated that despite Hamann's harsh criticism, he also acknowledged Kant taking revelation into greater account than other of his contemporaries. There are numerous times when Hamann speaks positively of Kant; not only of his personal demeanor and actions towards him and his family, but also of his philosophical abilities. A specific example of this was Kant taking revelation into account to a greater degree than others critiqued by Hamann. To Jacobi, April 9, 1786. "Er [Kant], wie ich vermuthe, ohne Heuchelei von der Offenbarung bescheidener redet und selbige mit in sein Interesse zu ziehen scheint." Hamann and Jacobi,

### *Transcendental Object*

Speaking on the transcendental object, Kant states, "All our representations are, it is true, referred by the understanding to some objects; and since appearances are nothing but representations, the understanding refers them to a something, as the object of sensible intuition. But this something, thus conceived, is only the transcendental object; and by that is meant a something = x, of which we know, and with the present constitution of our understanding can know, nothing whatsoever."<sup>230</sup> Hamann singles this out, stressing that it rejects, through a prejudice for mathematical certainty, the *real* contact with reality through experience. "Yet the synthesis of predicate with subject (the proper object of pure reason) has for its middle term nothing more than an old, cold prejudice for mathematics....metaphysics abuses the word-signs and figures of speech of our empirical knowledge by treating them as nothing but hieroglyphs and types of ideal relations."<sup>231</sup> Further to the point of the dubious nature of the transcendental object, Hamann singles out the famous formula, something = x, which is nothing more than a type of superstitious belief propping up Kant's philosophy in his eyes. He viewed this not as an attempt at a more humble philosophy regarding the ability of reason to access metaphysical truth, but a subterfuge distracting from the shaky foundations of Kant's system. Despite Kant's attempt at a critique of reason, Hamann finds Kant in a similar position as the rationalist. "Through this learned troublemaking it works the honest decency of language into such a meaningless, ruttng, unstable, indefinite something = x that nothing is left but a windy

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*Johann Georg Hamann's, des Magus im Norden, Leben und Schriften*, 5 (Hamann's Briefwechsel mit Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi):285.

<sup>230</sup> The references to Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* follows, in accordance with Kenneth Haynes, the translation by Norman Kemp Smith. Immanuel Kant, *Immanuel Kant's Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Norman Kemp Smith (Place of publication not identified: publisher not identified, 2010), A 250.

<sup>231</sup> Hamann, *Writings on Philosophy and Language*, 210.

sough, a magic shadow play, at most, as the wise Helvétius says, the talisman and rosary of a transcendental superstitious belief in *entia rationis*, their empty sacks and slogans.”<sup>232</sup> Hence, in terms of Hamann’s notion of superstition, Kant’s thought has superstitious foundations insofar as it reaches conclusions based upon elements which are not founded on reason but prerequisite to it and are based on faith. Hamann sees the weakness of Kant’s system in that it fails to take faith and language into full account.

### ***Antiphrasis***

A related passage from the *Metacritique* demonstrates how superstitious elements are not merely regarded as an alternative perspective but are problematic and even unhealthy. This is present when Hamann speaks of the interrelated nature of the sensibility and understanding, which are joined together in nature, “from one common root.”<sup>233</sup> Yet Kant’s philosophical system seeks to divorce them from each other. In so doing they become convoluted, which does not lead to a purer philosophy but to a problematic metaphysics. “These [knowledge and sensibility] have been made so dark, confused, and desolate by a pure reason, christened *per antiphrasin*, and its metaphysics which serve the prevailing indifferentism.”<sup>234</sup> The key here is *per antiphrasin*, “antiphrasis”: the system of pure reason using words opposite their proper meaning. Specifically, “pure reason” is an antiphrasis insofar as reason is never pure, according to Hamann. It is a misleading use of language insofar as it denies the common root - language - and in so doing does not take proper account of these two “stems” of human knowledge. Hamann states that it is a, “metaphysics which serves the prevailing indifferentism (that ancient mother of chaos and

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<sup>232</sup> Hamann, 210. *Metacritique on the Purism of Reason*.

<sup>233</sup> Hamann, 212. *Metacritique on the Purism of Reason*.

<sup>234</sup> Hamann, 212–13. *Metacritique on the Purism of Reason*.

night in all sciences of morals, religion, and law-giving!).”<sup>235</sup> Again Hamann juxtaposes that which is intended by the Enlightenment and its outcome, based in part on their antiphrasis. Indifferentism brings chaos not order; night signifies obscurity rather than the proposed enlightening. This closely relates to the common motif of his contemporaries’ denial, in this case by duplicitous language, of their faith-based presuppositions (read: superstition). What is clear, however, is that Hamann resolves the aforementioned issues through language, as language contains both “sensible and intelligible nature[s]”, having “aesthetic and logical faculty.”<sup>236</sup> Language is then, that which ties together the different types of human knowledge, but can itself be abused (i.e. antiphrasis).

### ***Space, Time, and Sensibility***

Hamann exposes what he sees as another superstitious element of Kant’s conjectures regarding space and time and their place in a transcendental method of instruction (*transcendentale Methodenlehre*). In particular, Hamann brings to the fore their unquestioned status as a foundation of the human sensuousness (sensibility). “In the first section of the doctrine of elements, space and time as the pure forms of sensuousness *ab extra sicut ab intra*, whose empirical reality and transcendental ideality in the transcendental aesthetic were so certain and undoubtedly presented and elucidated ‘as ever might be claimed by a theory, which might serve as its organon.’”<sup>237</sup> Space and time were held by Kant as, “two pure forms of sensible intuition, serving as principles of *a priori*

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<sup>235</sup> Hamann, 212–13. *Metacritique on the Purism of Reason*.

<sup>236</sup> Hamann, 215. *Metacritique on the Purism of Reason*.

<sup>237</sup> N III, 278:30-35. *Kritik der reinen Vernunft* [Hamann’s review of the *Critique of Pure Reason*], “Raum und Zeit, als die reinen Formen der Sinnlichkeit *ab extra sicut ab intra*, ihre empyrische Realität und transcendente Idealität werden in der transcendentale Ästhetik, als dem ersten Theil der Elementarlehre, so gewiß und unzweifelhaft dargestellt und erläutert.”

knowledge.”<sup>238</sup> This helped form a transcendental method of instruction, wherein space and time played an essential part. Hamann interpreted Kant’s entire system being based upon this. “The transcendental method of doctrine determines the formal conditions of a complete system of pure reason.”<sup>239</sup> Hamann counters this viewpoint in his assertion that it is sounds and letters which are the “pure forms *a priori*”, thereby seeking to show that they are the foundation of the concepts of space and time (they are *a priori* according to Hamann insofar as they receive part of their meaning prior to perception, i.e. passed down in history).<sup>240</sup> Not only does Hamann disagree on this point, but he further rejects Kant’s presumption that his *transcendentale Elementare Methodenlehre* is not susceptible to the same criticism of any faith-based theory. Furthermore, since this upholds the entire system, Kant’s project can be placed under suspicion. In his characteristically bombastic fashion, Hamann speaks of the “aesthetic lies of transcendental writings”,<sup>241</sup> which further point to Hamann’s estimation of the misplaced faith (superstition) present in Kant’s philosophy. This reiterates Hamann’s charge of antiphrasis, the duplicitous use of language leading to a weak and superstitious philosophy. Where Kant runs into issues, as far as Hamann is concerned, is the systematic and therefore absolute nature of his philosophy. In Hamann’s perception, the primary problem is, namely, the inability of system to capture reality. It is Hamann’s consideration that it is the misplaced faith in the foundations of Kant’s philosophical system which makes up the superstitious elements of his thought. This drove Hamann’s critique of the *Critique of Pure Reason*.

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<sup>238</sup>Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, A 22, B 36.

<sup>239</sup> N III 279:18-19. *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*. “Die transcendente Methodenlehre bestimmt die formalen Bedingungen eines vollständigen Systems der reinen Vernunft.”

<sup>240</sup> For his argument Cf. Hamann, *Writings on Philosophy and Language*, 211–12.

<sup>241</sup> N III, 280:9. *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, “ästhetische Lüge transcendentaler Schriften”.

## Superstitious Elements in the Thought of Moses Mendelssohn: “The State of Nature”

*Golgotha and Scheblimini!* contains Hamann’s critique of Mendelssohn’s *On Religious Power and Judaism*, wherein Mendelssohn argues for religious tolerance and a secular state. Mendelssohn’s approach involves the concept of a state of nature upon which much of his argumentation depends. Mendelssohn’s “first principles” were attacked by Hamann as elements requiring faith. In fact, the detrimental consequences of antiphrasis are again at work here. The first part of *Golgotha and Scheblimini!* addresses the fabricated state of nature and the problematic issues that arise from it. Later in the text he seeks to answer Mendelssohn’s assertions regarding the difference between Christianity and Judaism. Presently, the focus will remain on the concept of the state of nature and the consequences of accepting it as a basis for one’s political philosophy.

Making a strong entrance on the first page of *Golgotha and Scheblimini!*, Hamann does not accept the claims of a state of nature *prima facie*. “Herr Mendelssohn believes in a state of nature, which he partly presupposes and partly opposes to society... I grant him and every dogmatist his belief, even if I am myself incapable of making either proper concept or use of this hypothesis.”<sup>242</sup> His reference to “dogmatism” supports the argument that Hamann’s critique was driven by the totalizing element of the Enlightenment’s superstitious adherence to abstract system. Where Enlightenment philosophers sought to get away from the naive beliefs of the past, Hamann points to what he sees as their own naive beliefs. Mendelssohn employed his idea of the state of nature to help establish the rationality of some rabbinical statements.<sup>243</sup> Specifically, he attempted to demonstrate how

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<sup>242</sup> Hamann, *Writings on Philosophy and Language*, 165–66. *Golgotha and Sheblimini!*.

<sup>243</sup> Hamann, 166. *Golgotha and Sheblimini!*.

some assertions condoning coercive elements in the Torah were connected to the state and not religion.<sup>244</sup> The more intensely Hamann investigated these first principles - which established his state of nature - the more nebulous they became.

*Jerusalem: on Religious Power and Judaism*, was a response to one of Mendelssohn's critics who accused him of negating first principles.<sup>245</sup> In response, Mendelssohn wrote, "Must one never doubt principles? If so, men of the Pythagorean School could dispute forever how their teacher happened to come by his golden hip, and no one would dare to ask: did Pythagoras actually have a golden hip?"<sup>246</sup> He wanted to express his willingness to question even the most foundational elements of his philosophy. In his perfunctory, ironic fashion, Hamann plays on this comment, saying that Mendelssohn's first principles are his golden hip.<sup>247</sup> Although Mendelssohn attempted to put his state of nature under the scrutiny of abstract reason, Hamann found its foundation to be inherently faith-based.

What follows in Hamann's critique is a meticulous analysis of the definitions of the first principles, concluding with how they amount to little more than Hobbes' emphasis on external tranquility and safety. Certainly Mendelssohn would not have appreciated the comparison with Hobbes. Indeed, he specifically argues against Hobbes' conception of the state of nature as "war of all against all" and that "right is grounded in power."<sup>248</sup>

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<sup>244</sup> Mendelssohn, *Jerusalem, or, On Religious Power and Judaism*, 130.

<sup>245</sup> Mendelssohn, 81. For the text that instigated Mendelssohn's writing of *Jerusalem* see, Daniel Ernst Mörschel, "Das Forschen nach Licht und Recht in einem Schreiben an Herr Moses Mendelssohn auf Veranlassung seiner merkwürdigen Vorrede zu Manasseh Ben Israel." (Berlin : Mauer, 1782).

<sup>246</sup> Mendelssohn, *Jerusalem, or, On Religious Power and Judaism*, 81.

<sup>247</sup> Hamann, *Writings on Philosophy and Language*, 166. *Golgotha and Sheblimini!*.

<sup>248</sup> Mendelssohn, *Jerusalem, or, On Religious Power and Judaism*, 35.



Mendelssohn sought to derive rights from natural law through reason.<sup>249</sup> John Betz has a poignant passage relating to the problems pointed out by Hamann in Mendelssohn's attempt to ground rights in a state of nature based solely on reason.<sup>250</sup> "Hamann's more proto-Nietzschean point, however, is that Mendelssohn's language of rights is ultimately indistinguishable from a language of power...Mendelssohn grounds human rights on the 'laws of wisdom and goodness,' but since these laws are given no further explanation, not further grounding in divine revelation...any set of rights founded upon them cannot help but appear as an arbitrary self-interested positioning."<sup>251</sup> Therefore, the attempt to establish equality on atemporal abstract reason was only shifting around the meaning of words whose foundational concepts must be taken on faith before moving forward. Consequently, these concepts betray themselves as they were unable to overcome the Hobbesian power struggle (the *bellum omnium contra omnes*).

Indeed, if the above reconstruction of Mendelssohn's position is correct, it is both antithetical to its proposed intentions as well as problematic in its own right. Rather than creating philosophical legitimacy for political and religious tolerance, it ends up sanctioning Hobbes to a degree. This is in itself problematic in that it is contradictory with regards to its own ambitions. However, this is not the only issue; because it severed the convictions and actions of individuals, Hamann considered it an abomination. In Hamann's view, the faulty foundation upon which this thought was constructed was based on a faulty

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<sup>249</sup> Betz makes an important observation when dealing with Hamann's critique. "Hamann was profoundly suspicious of the language of rights in general – *not whether they should be conferred*, but whence they should be derived" [italics mine] Betz, *After Enlightenment*, 261.

<sup>250</sup> It is not that Mendelssohn rejects faith altogether, but for him faith can never contradict the conclusions of reason. Alexander Altmann, "Commentary," in *Jerusalem, or, On Religious Power and Judaism* (Hanover: Published for Brandeis University Press by University Press of New England, 1983), 207.

<sup>251</sup> Betz, *After Enlightenment*, 275.

faith in a “state of nature”, which was only another form of dogmatism. This supports the thesis that Hamann’s authorship is motivated by critiquing the superstition of his contemporaries and undergirded by his notion of faith.<sup>252</sup> In sum, the faith in spontaneous foundational elements of a system, which must be assented to in order to hold to the veracity of the respective system, led to what Hamann considered superstition. The superstitious element, to Hamann, is that which forms the groundwork of philosophical, political, or religious systems based on abstract reason. It is the object of their systems which would become the idols of Hamann's contemporaries.

Up to this point the primary focus of this work has been on Hamann’s notion of superstition and how this is essential for understanding the motivation of his authorship. However, this is only one side of the coin, as superstition needs an object: the idol.

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<sup>252</sup> The intention is not to evaluate the veracity of Hamann’s critique of Mendelssohn’s idea of a state of nature. Mendelssohn scholarship has a more critical reception of Hamann’s critique. E.g. Cord-Friedrich Berghahn points out that Hamann was addressing generalities whereas Mendelssohn was responding to a particular concrete situation. Also, Berghahn argues that the questions being answered by the respective thinkers were not the same. See, Cord-Friedrich Berghahn, *Moses Mendelssohns “Jerusalem”: ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der Menschenrechte und der pluralistischen Gesellschaft in der deutschen Aufklärung*, Studien zur Deutschen Literatur, Bd. 161 (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 2001), 257, 271–73.

## Chapter III

### **From Superstition to Idolatry**

Idols are the object of faith, an object upon which worth and even truth is placed. With the term “idol”, Hamann meant the false objects in which one’s faith might be placed. In this chapter the various idols, as perceived by Hamann, will be discussed.

Philosophy has the propensity – in its use of abstract reason in generating concepts – to create systems to explain the world. It is these systems which were the object of superstition and were the philosophical idols that his contemporaries were serving. Hamann’s entire authorship appears purposefully unsystematic, and as such is a rejection of his contemporaries.<sup>253</sup> Hamann’s idea of a philosophical system is that it is an abstraction and as such, static – an attempt to ascertain the absolute, atemporal truth (which might manifest itself in the form of a comprehensive methodology.<sup>254</sup> It is not that he condemns the attempt to clarify the world or one’s own existence in the world through careful analysis.<sup>255</sup> Yet, when the system becomes paramount (abstract system most of all),

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<sup>253</sup> Andreas Pangritz, in a discussion on Karl Barth and the relationship between objectiveness (Sachlichkeit) and the scientific character, notes that Hamann was used as an example of one who was unscientific but highly objective. Andreas Pangritz, *Vom Kleiner- und Unsichtbarwerden der Theologie: Ein Versuch über das Projekt einer “impliziten Theologie” bei Barth, Tillich, Bonhoeffer, Benjamin, Horkheimer und Adorno* (Tübingen: Theologischer Verlag, 1996), 36.

<sup>254</sup> Stefan Majetschak addresses Hamann’s critique of Descartes, in particular the methodology postulated by Descartes. Majetschak points out the boundaries that Hamann placed on any type of method that would seek to generalize the use of one’s reason. Seeing, as it were, that individuality was the boundary of any general idea of reason (p. 231). See, Stefan Majetschak, “Der Stil als Grenze der Methode: über Hamanns Descartes-‘Lektüre’.”

<sup>255</sup> Hamann’s critique of systems and abstract reason notwithstanding, he does not reject the need for rigor when it comes to ideas. Hamann works to reveal the underlying problems with Enlightenment prejudice built upon its own superstitious faith in abstract reason. Yet he seeks to continually work to provide explanations of the world. He even stated once that his thought contained “a stricter logic and are more closely glued together (*geleiterte Verbindung*) than in the concepts of livelier heads.” ZH I, 378. “eine strengere Logic und eine geleiterte Verbindung als in den Begriffen lebhafter Köpfe.”

life is forfeited. System, once set in place, is lifeless; it is closed to the organic unfolding of historical existence, incessantly trying to fit the myriad of human experience into its form. System effectually becomes out of date the moment the system is set in place, or it is nothing more than the representation of a thinker at one point in time.<sup>256</sup>

An additional aspect making philosophical systems idolatrous in the eyes of Hamann is in the attempt of a respective system to be all encompassing. When there are emerging factors that have not been explained, the system must utilize its already-in-place logic to justify the new factors hitherto unknown. To reject new factors which arise in the course of time would be willful ignorance. The other alternative would be to recognize the system as false or lacking. Because of this, systems vary in their complexity; often becoming ever more complex, insofar as ahistorical systems try to encompass historical reality.

The ahistorical element of abstract systems is a further frustration for Hamann. Ahistoricity is not only due to the static nature of systems – created at a point in history and amended during the course of life – but its abstract nature as well.<sup>257</sup> These systems of thought are entirely in the intellect governed by abstract reason, specifically the systems of the rationalist and the Enlightenment thinkers whom Hamann was addressing. The

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<sup>256</sup> Reiner Wild, in his explication of Hamann's critique of the natural sciences, indirectly speaks to this issue. In the discussion regarding certainty derived from faith, Wild notes that Hamann realizes that his certainty in matters of faith is something that cannot be forced upon another to agree to (beipflichten), but is a subjective description of reality. Reiner Wild, "Überlegungen zu Hamanns Kritik der Naturwissenschaften," in *Johann Georg Hamann und die Krise der Aufklärung: Acta des fünften Internationalen Hamann-Kolloquiums in Münster i.W. (1988)*, ed. Bernhard Gajek and Albert Meier, Regensburger Beiträge zur Deutschen Sprach- und Literaturwissenschaft, Bd. 46 (Frankfurt am Main ; New York: P. Lang, 1990), 152. Working off of this understanding, in the context of the present study, Hamann would not accept propositions based on principles that were faith-based. They were merely the description of the faith of the subject. The certainty of these claims could be argued for, but not forced on others.

<sup>257</sup> The systems based on abstract reason must be ahistorical according to Hamann, insofar as abstract reason wanted to make itself independent of "tradition, custom and belief in them". Hamann, *Writings on Philosophy and Language*, 207. For some brief but good comments of the importance of history for Hamann see, Mary Anne Perkins, *Christendom and European Identity: The Legacy of a Grand Narrative since 1789*, Religion and Society, v. 40 (Berlin ; New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2004), 119–22.

abstract nature of systems only added to their lifelessness; hence he thought of them as life-denying (Hamann would attempt to be life-affirming). Herein lies an essential element to understanding Hamann's harsh critique of how most Enlightenment thinkers utilized reason. Essentially Hamann saw himself as advocating a disposition that promoted life.

In Hamann's mind, the origins of the turn towards abstract systemization, that is, the supremacy of system manifest in the Enlightenment had its origin in Descartes' *cogito*. Here, the intellect superseded experience and history. The abstract presided over existence. Indeed, humanity had used reason to solve problems and organize society, government, and religion throughout history; what changed was its dominance. The dominance of abstract reason permeated nearly every level of thought. As previously discussed, there was an understanding – at times explicit and often implicit – that reason was capable of finally ridding humanity of superstitious prejudice latent in tradition. The *cogito ergo sum* was the perfect example of the change which marked his age from that of past generations. It elevated reason to nearly godlike status, while helping rid society of superstitious elements that had encouraged violence and ignorance; yet all the while failed to see its own shortcomings. Hamann relentlessly sought to point out these shortcomings.

Hamann's conviction that reason, instead of seeking the usurpation of the other elements of human knowing (experience, history, etc), must work in relationship with the other faculties of human knowledge (e.g. faith, experience, etc.). It is in fact reason's usurpation of the other elements of human knowing that leads to arbitrary systems. And this led Hamann to take aim at speculative thought.<sup>258</sup>

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<sup>258</sup> Some of Hamann's most pointed language regarding abstract can be found in his, *Zweifel und Einfälle*, See, N III, 191.

## Philosophical Idols Specified

“System is in itself a hindrance to the truth.” – Johann Georg Hamann<sup>259</sup>

The idolatrous nature of specific systems will receive greater explication, all of them having a close connection to and a high esteem for abstract reason. Abstract reason was addressed by Hamann in his early writings but would become more and more a focus throughout the course of his authorship. The following will commence with an analysis of the system of economics represented by his friend, Berens. It was the clash of thought between these two men that instigated Hamann’s authorship; therefore it warrants initial explication. Berens’ service to the spirit of his age (Enlightenment abstract reason and new political and cultural changes) was less conceptual than the other *idols* treated in this chapter.<sup>260</sup> Notwithstanding, one can clearly reconstruct from Hamann’s own writings as to how he understood Berens and the problem this viewpoint posed. Secondly Hamann’s critique of the attempt to bring German orthography into accordance with abstract reason will be explicated. This critique is found in the essay, *New Apology of the Letter h*. This essay is practical in that it demonstrates the breadth of Hamann’s concerns, and also provides some of the clearest statements on the idolatry of his century. Thirdly, Mendelssohn’s political system will be discussed. Hamann attempts to reveal its idolatrous nature and the inconsistencies therein. The fourth point of departure is the Idol of the Public. This idol

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<sup>259</sup> To Jacobi, April 9<sup>th</sup>, 1786. “Entwöhnt vom System müssen wir werden.” Hamann and Jacobi, *Johann Georg Hamann’s, des Magus im Norden, Leben und Schriften*, 5 (Hamann’s Briefwechsel mit Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi):284–85.

<sup>260</sup> Berens was not a philosopher *per se*, but was actively engaging in the intellectual and public life of Königsberg. Berens was greatly interested in persuading Hamann to return to his pre-conversion views regarding the Enlightenment; that is, returning to his commitment to Enlightenment ideals. Furthermore, Hamann and Berens took part in one of the earliest magazines written primarily for women, *Daphne*. Bayer, *A Contemporary in Dissent*, 224.

undergirded the overreliance on theoretical reason present in his age. Some preliminary aspects of the Idol of the Public was already in the introduction. Yet a more in depth will be given. Additionally, the idol of the Public can be found in writing outside of the *Socratic Memorabilia*, particularly in his critique of Herder's subservience to the Berlin Enlightenment. The final idol to be addressed is that of abstract reason itself in the section on the evolution of the Idol of Reason. Hamann's increased interest in this idol throughout the course of his authorship will be examined, demonstrating the continuities and the ways in which his critique matured.

### **The Idol of the Economics of Reason: Johann Christoph Berens**

Although Hamann would commence his authorship with a critique of Enlightenment reason and its counterpart found in the economic system of Johann Christoph Berens (1729-1792), he did not always possess the focus that can be found in his later writings. As a matter of fact, earlier in his life he contributed to the philosophical project of Enlightenment thought. Hence, some historical background will be provided in order to shed light on Hamann's relationship to the "idol" of economics (i.e. manifest in Berens' idea of work), which he would later criticize.

Hamann's economic world was one of transition. As with any historical period, the variety of experience and changes occurring make it difficult to come to a clear consensus on when and to what degree things changed. The lines blur, so to speak. While the influence of Mercantilism had waned, the policies of free trade and the rise of the middle class had not yet spread to the extent seen in the nineteenth century. Nevertheless, on nearly all fronts, rapid changes were taking place. In the philosophical realm, the breaking of

Enlightenment philosophy with organized religion and traditional theological presuppositions coincided with Frederick the Great's secular policies and the rise in importance of merchants and trade. The task at hand is to point out some of the developments occurring that were significant for Hamann. He was exposed to the rising influence of the market and modern Enlightenment forces through his friend Berens, who sought to, as stated in Hamann's *Socratic Memorabilia*, "promote industry, bourgeois virtues, and the welfare of the commonwealth."<sup>261</sup> These qualities alone were not ruinous, but the way in which Berens' imposed his values on others was what Hamann found problematic.

Johann Christoph Berens was very much a man of the Enlightenment. He was engaged in trade and business affairs and later in the politics of Riga – serving as Oberwetherr, a position dealing with issues of commerce. Additionally, he played a key role in forming the *Berensscher Kreis*, a group devoted to furthering Enlightenment ideals and ideas.<sup>262</sup> He was also involved in one of the first journals devoted to a female audience, *Daphne*, of which Hamann also served as a contributor.<sup>263</sup> Berens and Hamann became fast friends after meeting during their studies in Königsberg. At one time, Hamann even referred to him as his best friend, demonstrating his fond feelings and respect for Berens.<sup>264</sup>

Shortly before Hamann would be offered a position in the Berens' family business, and after a short period tutoring a young, aristocratic boy in the countryside, Hamann translated Dangeuil's *Remarques sur les avantages et les désavantages de la France et de Gr.*

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<sup>261</sup> Hamann, *Writings on Philosophy and Language*, 5. *Socratic Memorabilia*.

<sup>262</sup> Georg v. Rauch, "Berens, Johann Christoph, Ratsherr.," *Neue Deutsche Biographie* (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 1955), 71.

<sup>263</sup> Baur, *Johann Georg Hamann Als Publizist*, 18.

<sup>264</sup> N IV, 227:12.



*Bretagne par rapport au Commerce et aux autres sources de la puissance des états.*<sup>265</sup>

Included in the translation was an appendix wherein Hamann advocates for the role of the merchant. “[The appendix] is in effect praise of the new society which under the leadership of the new race, the merchants, was to serve man as part of the divine plan. Hamann was ready to become a useful member of this society. He was never to be in closer accord with the world of the Enlightenment than he was at this time.”<sup>266</sup> Despite his nearness to Enlightenment thought at this time, it is worth noting that some themes that he would later take up were also contained in the appendix (e.g. critique of the arbitrary abuse of power).<sup>267</sup> He demonstrates his view of work as it being connected to one’s involvement in trade, “the labor and work and perspiration make the life of our contemporaries (die Zeitgenossen) blissful.”<sup>268</sup> He goes on to speak of the “nobility of merchants” (Der Adel der Kaufleute), who were to fill an essential role in the future. During this period he was utilizing his philosophical abilities to advocate for both his friend and mainstream Enlightenment ideas.

This would continue until his conversion in London. While in London he recorded his thoughts, which can be found in his autobiographical work, *Thoughts on the Course of My Life*.<sup>269</sup> “I had moved to a coffee-house, since I had not a soul to consort with, in order to seek some cheer in society, and by this means perhaps to become known and build a bridge

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<sup>265</sup> For an excellent analysis see, Manfred Beetz, Andre Rudolph, and Christoph Meineke, eds., “Die Vortheile unserer Vereinigung,” in *Johann Georg Hamann: Religion und Gesellschaft*, Hallesche Beiträge zur europäischen Aufklärung 45 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2012).

<sup>266</sup> Smith, J. G. *Hamann 1730-1788: A Study in Christian Existence*, 28.

<sup>267</sup> T. J. Beech, *Hamann’s Prophetic Mission: A Genetic Study of Three Late Works against the Enlightenment*, Institute of Germanic and Romance Studies Bithell Series of Dissertations, v. 34 (London: Maney Pub. for the Modern Humanities Research Association, 2010), 14.

<sup>268</sup> N IV, 234. Hamann’s appendix to Dangeuil translation.

<sup>269</sup> In addition to its inclusion in Nadler, a more modern, academic version is located in, Hamann, *Londoner Schriften*, 313–52.

to fortune.”<sup>270</sup> Of particular importance for the purpose of explicating the idol of economics is that after the failed mission he was still pursuing wealth. His attempts at attaining fortune did not bear fruit and he fell into financial destitution and personal despair. It is interesting to note that Hamann found his salvation in a situation which was nearly antithetical to Berens’ system of values.

Upon Hamann’s return to Germany following his conversion, he possessed radically differing opinions to that of Berens. His religious views and his lack of desire to engage in the economic world of the merchants were of particular concern to Berens. Much of their disagreement manifested itself in the concept of work, specifically, what it meant to work.

One of Berens’ main points particularly offensive to Hamann was the detrimental element of religion. “He [Berens] wants to winnow (sichten) my religion of superstition and enthusiasm.”<sup>271</sup> Once advising Hamann, “retain only as much religion as necessary”, to which Hamann humorously commented, “wise advice, like that of Job’s wife.”<sup>272</sup> This was in conjunction with Berens’ dissatisfaction with how Hamann was living. Berens seemingly equated proper work with upright moral life. Assuming that Berens’ ideas were close to those expressed by Hamann in his appendix to the *Remarques*, working in trade and commerce would indeed be the highest form of life for the citizen.<sup>273</sup> Because of this position, any form of faith that would dissuade the individual from a life of gainful employment in commerce would be seen as a threat to the betterment of society at large. In this same letter, Hamann takes up Descartes’ search for truth as an analogy to Berens’

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<sup>270</sup> Hamann, *Writings on Philosophy and Language*, 150. *Thoughts on the Course of my Life*.

<sup>271</sup> ZH I, 310:16-17.

<sup>272</sup> ZH I, 306:8.

<sup>273</sup> N IV, 234. Hamann's appendix to Dangeuil translation.

position on work. In Descartes' doubting of nearly everything, he was unable to find truth, but was only able to develop a method.<sup>274</sup> "Descartes did not find truth, never loved, and also could never understand. This method, as he called it, is suitable as a project or system (Würbelsystem)."<sup>275</sup> Hamann insinuates that this method was estranged from reality as he equates this to Berens' elevation of work; that is, overvaluing the work of a merchant. "To seek work – the great care that one does not take. I sought work out of favorableness, or placed myself as one searching. To look for work is a scary thing just as having to search for air that one should create."<sup>276</sup> Additionally, Berens equated a specific type of work (i.e. trade) with morality, which particularly frustrated Hamann. The statement, "Let him stop making such a fuss about my praying, folding of the hands, confessing...work, what do you have to do with the morality of my actions? Such is not the way friends speak to each other, but a lord to his slaves" demonstrates Hamann's feelings towards Berens' opinion.<sup>277</sup> Essentially, Berens' was treating him as inferior, denigrating his way of life for not conforming to what he [Berens] viewed as the superior way. The disagreement about the concept of work was essentially a clash of values.

Berens' second issue with Hamann was that of utility and benefit (Nutz/Nützlichkeit), or the lack thereof in Hamann's case. In regards to this, Hamann wrote, "he [Berens] wants to make the world utilizable to me, and to make me a convert to

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<sup>274</sup> Hamann states that Descartes, "forgot and denied everything and held nothing for true - - except the tricky artifice of a Catechism and his own self"; "er [Descartes] vergaß und leugnete alles und hielt nicht für Wahrheit - - außer den schlaun Kunstgriff einen Catechismus und Sein eigen Selbst als 2 wichtige Wahrheiten zum Grunde zu legen". ZH I, 306:29-31.

<sup>275</sup> ZH I, 306:31-32.

<sup>276</sup> ZH I, 306:34-36.

<sup>277</sup> ZH I, 306:21-24.

freethinking and libertine views.”<sup>278</sup> Conjoined to this attempt at converting Hamann back to the Enlightenment and his concept of productive work, was his trouble with Hamann’s perceived idleness and non-productivity. Hamann states, “Then he [Berens] brags of good commercial activities (voller Geschäfte) and sees me as an idler. If this is true, he has overlooked much to which I can be made useful.”<sup>279</sup> Here one perceives a great disparity between the two men. Hamann has a foundationally different definition of work – what it means to be productive – than Berens.

Hamann was not opposed to trade, working in business or productivity; he even encouraged his brother to be faithful and thankful for his job. Additionally, he also recognized a qualitative difference between Berens’ activities and his own. One could argue that he is defending “leisure” as another viable way of life as opposed to “work”, however, this would be an inaccurate interpretation. A better understanding of this would be the difference between worldly and spiritual work. From the perspective of Berens, Hamann’s activities are merely leisure/idleness. To pick up Hamann’s own analogy, from the perspective of Martha [Berens] in the Gospel story, Mary [Hamann] is not working, when in fact Martha failed to see that sitting at the feet of Christ is of greater value.<sup>280</sup> This fits well into Hamann’s critique insofar as he accepts the work in which Berens is engaged, but opposes Berens’ definition of work. Hamann primarily focuses on its limitations, specifically finding Berens’ attempt to force his values on others as appalling.

In the preceding analysis, one can see a system of economics starting to take shape; one that is conjoined to a philosophical position which takes revealed religion – and from

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<sup>278</sup> ZH I, 310:15.

<sup>279</sup> ZH I, 311:6-7.

<sup>280</sup> Luke 10:38-42.

Hamann's perspective tradition – out of the picture. This system of economics, based on a specific notion of work, is not a type of economic theory, but rather a worldview based upon the abstract reason of the Enlightenment. It sought systematic purity in matters of productivity, which denigrated the spiritual. Furthermore, this system was held to be above other value systems that did not yield as much economic value. Hamann found this position idolatrous.

One of Hamann's fundamental disagreements with Berens was the arbitrary nature of his system of worth, particularly the manner in which it dismissed tradition in favor of the abstract reason of the Enlightenment. What is fascinating about this disagreement with Berens is that he does not engage on Berens' terms. Instead, Hamann attempts to set his own terms, thereby bringing out the arbitrary nature of their respective positions towards work. As has been shown, Berens dismissed Hamann's religious inclinations (not religion as such, but Hamann's "enthusiasm") and this was anathema to Hamann. This had a philosophical foundation which was not based on some fideistic religiosity, rather (as has been demonstrated in the section on superstition and faith) every system is founded upon certain presuppositions that one must accept by faith. This being established, Berens does not have the high ground in the argument; justifying not only Hamann's radical departure from Berens' value placed upon work, but his refusal to argue within its parameters as well.

The tenants of Berens' system are a bit difficult to specify. In Hamann's published work, the *Socratic Memorabilia* deals most explicitly with Berens' position; however, the critique contained therein is broader, addressing the disposition of his age present in philosophy as well as economics. Therefore, one can only discern a skeletal framework of

the idol of economics. This system is not understood as a self-contained system but the outworking of the larger philosophical ideas of his day which provided the foundation for his position.

Berens' dismissal of Hamann's religion was a major point of contention. Perhaps even more contentious to Hamann was what was substituted in favor of it, namely, Enlightenment reason. Hence, in the *Socratic Memorabilia* he speaks on contemporary philosophic prejudice and not Berens' economic stances directly.<sup>281</sup> A comment wherein one might discern his critique of Berens is when he states:

And perhaps philosophical chroniclers and image galleries are less to blame than their misuse by their admirers. A little enthusiasm and superstition would here deserve a little forbearance, but some of that sourdough is part and parcel to mitering the soul in a philosophical heroism.<sup>282</sup>

Although he had already stated that there might be something other than our reason needed to unlock the field of history,<sup>283</sup> here he is more concerned with the contemporary application of what had been chronicled. The sourdough is an obscure reference to the misuse of the work of the philosophical chroniclers.

Reason itself was not criticized, but how it was utilized. For instance, the utilization of reason in the fashion of Descartes' *cogito* was particularly problematic for Hamann.

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<sup>281</sup> Hamann speaks of Berens' work on the "Philosopher's Stone", alluding to the generation of greater wealth. Hamann sees Berens' endeavors akin to searching for the alchemic means of turning normal elements into gold. "This is, with reason, the highest project and highest good of our astute statesmen (*Staatsklugen*)."  
Hamann, *Sokratische Denkwürdigkeiten*, 9.

<sup>282</sup> Hamann, 21–23. "Doch sind vielleicht die philosophischen Chroniken und Bildergallerien weniger zu tadeln, als der schlechte Gebrauch, den ihre Liebhaber davon machen. Ein wenig Schwärmerey und Aberglauben würde hier nicht nur Nachsicht verdienen, sondern etwas von diesem Sauerteige gehört dazu, um die Seele zu einem philosophischen Heroismus in Gährung zu setzen."

<sup>283</sup> Hamann, 27. In Nadler, N II 65:9-13. *Socratic Memorabilia*.

Berens did just that, as he utilized a form of reasoning which denigrated the individual, history, and values found in other sources (i.e. religion). For any merit it might have, this fundamental disposition manifest in Berens was detrimental and violent towards the variety of human life. This limited view was consequently an idol in Hamann's mind: it was not and could not be comprehensive. It was taken as true and the requisite faith therein was ignored.

This section on the idol of economics serves as a good introduction to the Hamannian view of philosophical idolatry. The Hamannian vantage point clearly portrays how systems of thought can concretely be interpreted as a philosophical idol based upon faulty foundations.

### **The Idol of Orthography of Reason: The New Apology of the Letter *h***

At first a bit perplexing, and not without humor, one finds some of Hamann's most articulate explication of Enlightenment superstition and idolatry in a short essay on orthographic reform. Note for English and other non-German speakers: this topic may at first be a bit confusing as the English language is not proliferated with syllables with an unpronounced *h*.<sup>284</sup> This is still common in German (despite some of them being removed since the eighteenth century). Frequently removing the letter *h* is not a misspelling but changes the word entirely. For example, take the words "truth" (*Wahre*) and "commodity

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<sup>284</sup> There are cases of this phenomenon. For instance, in American English the *h* in "herbs" is not pronounced. Merriam-Webster, Inc, ed., "Herb," *Merriam Webster's Collegiate Dictionary* (Springfield: Merriam-Webster, 2014), 581.

(Ware)”: they are pronounced the same, yet when the h is removed they are spelled the same.<sup>285</sup>

This section takes a straightforward explicative approach by primarily focusing on one essay, *The New Apology of the Letter h*. The essay is divided into three sections: the title, the main body composed under the pseudonym “H.S.” (i.e. Heinrich Schröder),<sup>286</sup> and the conclusion written by the letter *h* defending its own existence. All sections will be addressed in order to demonstrate the notion of the idolatry in an orthography based on abstract reason.

#### **Title Page and Introductory Remarks on Hamann’s *New Apology of the Letter h***

Hamann took issue with Enlightenment attempt to bring all thought, religious or otherwise, under the domain of abstract reason. Christian Tobias Damm (1699-1778) was one Enlightenment figure attempting to do this. It was Damm’s writings that instigated Hamann’s authoring the *New Apology of the Letter h*. The full title of Hamann’s book reads: *New Apology of the Letter h, or Extraordinary Observations on the Orthography of German by H.S., Schoolmaster*. Additionally, the title page includes a Latin quote from Horace and a feigned place and date of publication. As with all of Hamann’s title pages, it serves as a precursor to that which follows – containing the kernel of his thought. Hamann calls the title page the *nucleus in nuce*.<sup>287</sup> A defense of the removal of the letter *h* is indicated by using

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<sup>285</sup> This example demonstrates the difference, yet in the case of these two words the gender differs, meaning there are very few instances when this might be confused. Confusion can be found in a few cases of spoken German. However, more ambiguities would arise were the silent *h* taken out entirely.

<sup>286</sup> ZH III, 63. To Herder, November, 1773.

<sup>287</sup> ZH VI, 137.



the word “apology”, and is also indicated in the quote by Horace.<sup>288</sup> The pseudonym employed by Hamann is also revealed: H. S., which stands for Heinrich Schröder.

In the initial pages a great bit is revealed about Hamann’s pseudonymous author. He is “neither a retired nor dismissed school teacher.”<sup>289</sup> A simple and humble man one might say, but one compelled to take up arms for the sake of his faith threatened by the attack on the letter *h*. In fact, the fictitious author is much more developed than is often the case in Hamann’s writings.<sup>290</sup> Schröder is an elderly school teacher who wishes, “to lead my students (who currently number 120) to a proper spelling of our mother tongue”.<sup>291</sup> This humble figure is juxtaposed to the scholar arguing against the use of the letter *h* in the middle and end of syllable.<sup>292</sup> Not uncommon for Hamann, he takes on a character that is weaker and even simple: a humble schoolteacher contra scholar.<sup>293</sup>

The scholar referred to above – Hamann’s interlocutor – Christian Tobias Damm, contended in favor of the removal of the letter *h* on the grounds of abstract and universal reason in his work, *Observations on Religion*.<sup>294</sup> Although Hamann focused his attack on the orthographic proposal advocated in *Observations on Religion*, Damm’s book had broader implications. For instance, in regards to religion he stated that religion “must be grounded

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<sup>288</sup> The quote by Horace on the title pages, “- - et nobilis et decens, Et pro sollicitis non tacitus reis, Et centum puer atrium Late signaferet militia TVAE”. In this quote Hamann is cryptically declaring that he will stand up in defense of the letter *h* and in so doing, for his faith. The last line of the Latin quotes reads, “bear YOUR standards of warfare widely”. The language of warfare coincides with the language used in the essay of the altercation when he speaks of an “orthographic duel”. Hamann, *Writings on Philosophy and Language*, 149.

<sup>289</sup> Hamann, 148.

<sup>290</sup> Often the pseudonymous author merely sets the tone with little biographical information provided. E.g. “Aristobulos” in the *Essay on an Academic Question* (N II, 119, Haynes, 9) or the “Preacher in the Wilderness”, *Golgotha and Sheblimini!* (N III, 291, Haynes, 165).

<sup>291</sup> Hamann, *Writings on Philosophy and Language*, 148.

<sup>292</sup> It is interesting to note that Hamann emphasizes the local and specific in his pseudonym (e.g. teacher of German, his mother tongue, works to support his wife and daughter as well as enjoying of “a small pot of beer” after his labors) as opposed to Damm’s “universal, sound, and practical human reason”.

<sup>293</sup> Again Hamann’s Christian influence is seen here, e.g. the Christological idea of strength in weakness.

<sup>294</sup> Christian Tobias Damm, *Betrachtungen über die Religion* (Berlin, n.d.).

on healthy human reason.”<sup>295</sup> Due to this, one can see that Hamann’s polemic – in attacking the idolatrous use of reason in orthographic reform – had wider implications than merely orthography.

In perhaps the most whimsical of Hamann’s writings, prior to getting into the specifics of orthography in the *Observations on Religion*, the vanity of its author [Damm] is discussed, all the while pointing to the gravity of his conjectures. In these remarks the idolatrous use of Enlightenment reason is indicated. Leaning heavily on quotations taken from Damm’s book, Hamann (in the voice of Schröder) observes that for Damm those who are unfaithful in the spelling of the letter *h* risk being “unfaithful and unjust also in the great revelations and mysteries of universal, sound, and practical human reason.”<sup>296</sup> Hamann asserts that Damm insists on complete accordance with reason in both his orthographic and religious postulates. Because the letter *h* in the middle and end of syllables does not agree with Damm’s reason, it is a “pointless, groundless custom.”<sup>297</sup> This position parallels the attempt to make religion free of traditions which do not accord with sound and universal reason. Hamann asserts that his interlocutor transgresses these attempts at consistency and, furthermore, does not touch “the whole burden of his method in the prevailing matter of the letter *h*”, and by extension, religion.<sup>298</sup> Hamann is convinced that Damm himself will be unable to stand before the judgment of his own assertions. Hamann’s *modus operandi* of sowing doubt and turning things on their head is on display, not to mention his wit. After discussing Damm’s impressive credentials as a scholar,

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<sup>295</sup> Damm, 3. “daß sie [Religion] folglich in der gesunden Menschen-Vernunft gegründet seyn muß.”

<sup>296</sup> Hamann, *Writings on Philosophy and Language*, 147. *New Apology of the Letter h*.

<sup>297</sup> Hamann, 147–48. *New Apology of the Letter h*.

<sup>298</sup> Hamann, 148. *New Apology of the Letter h*.

Hamann comically states, “- is it not a terrible shame that a life so laudably employed should be darkened by the worst treachery against an innocent letter!”, which bespeaks much of his tone in the entire essay: humorously ironic yet earnest in intent.<sup>299</sup>

More critical for the present study are the results of a superstitious belief in reason when applied to orthography. In Hamann’s words it led to “the strange apparition of an orthographic canon, a true god *ex machina*.”<sup>300</sup> Hamann perceived the opposite of the purification of language sought by Damm, but instead language being brought into accordance with the prejudices of the spirit of his age. In the course of his essay Hamann sought to defend the retention of the letter *h*, and, by extension, defend both language and revealed religion. Additionally, how abstract reason had turned even orthography into an idol was brought to the fore in this essay.

### ***Main Body of the New Apology of the Letter h***

The main body of the *New Apology of the Letter h* consists of three subsections: two subsections concerning the reasons for the removal of the letter *h* in the voice of the school teacher Schröder as well as his short response. In the third and final subsection Hamann gives voice to the letter *h* itself, responding directly to those who would remove it.

#### ***First, Potential Answer: Because it is not Pronounced***

Hamann’s first conjecture as to why Damm wanted the removal of the letter *h* at certain times is that it is not always pronounced. In conjunction with this, words should be pronounced according to their letters. Hamann playfully says, “I do not claim this answer is

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<sup>299</sup> Hamann, 149. *New Apology of the Letter h*.

<sup>300</sup> Hamann, 149. *New Apology of the Letter h*.

anything but potential and do not actually burden my adversary with it, so that I am not obliged to start being ashamed of him too soon.”<sup>301</sup> Again, this is meant ironically, as much of Damm’s argument depended on the letter’s unpronounced status.<sup>302</sup> However, Hamann finds this argument wanting and continues to carry the argument further. He states that if this is the case, then all unpronounced letters should be done away with, making *ihn* (In English: “him”) become *in* (In English: “in”).<sup>303</sup> Moreover, if spelling dictated pronunciation – as pure reason would have it, according to Damm – there would be a “Babylonian confusion” within Germany. Hamann points out that if those using dialects began writing words according to the way they are spoken, “what dam could withstand this orthographic deluge?”<sup>304</sup> Of course Hamann is being hyperbolic, but it does bring to light some of the inconsistency, as well as making a pun on the author’s name.<sup>305</sup>

As Hamann progressed with his potential answer, his objection to these attempts become clear, “a universal, sound, practical human language, and human reason, and human religion, without arbitrary fundamental principles, are his own furnace of ice.”<sup>306</sup> This statement criticizing his interlocutor suggests that one element cannot be thought to have dominance over the others. Reason, language, and religion are all bound to one another – they are *interdependent* elements – there is no hierarchy. An important idea

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<sup>301</sup> Hamann, 150. *New Apology of the Letter h*.

<sup>302</sup> Hamann, 150. *New Apology of the Letter h*.

<sup>303</sup> Hamann, 150. *New Apology of the Letter h*.

<sup>304</sup> Hamann, 151. *New Apology of the Letter h*.

<sup>305</sup> The dialects in Germany are so distinct that some people living just a few kilometers away can have difficulty understanding their respective dialects. For a discussion of the variances see, Internationale Gesellschaft für Dialektologie des Deutschen et al., eds., *Deutsche Dialekte - Konzepte, Probleme, Handlungsfelder: Akten des 4. Kongresses der Internationalen Gesellschaft für Dialektologie des Deutschen (IGDD)*, Zeitschrift für Dialektologie und Linguistik. Beihefte, Band 158 (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2015).

<sup>306</sup> Hamann, *Writings on Philosophy and Language*, 154. The reference to a furnace of ice comes from one of Damm’s examples of something contradictory. Hamann is using one of Damm’s own examples to criticize him. Damm, *Betrachtungen über die Religion*, 65.

contained in this quote is that of arbitrariness. At one point Damm conjectured, “The voice of healthy reason is the voice of God.”<sup>307</sup> Hamann demonstrates his radical disagreement on the concept of knowledge in general. Not only was human reason based on arbitrary principles, so was religion, drawing a strong contrast to Damm’s presupposition of the universality of reason.

### ***Second, Actual Answer***

The next subsection is where Hamann seems to think the real problem lies for his interlocutor, namely, in the letter *h* appearing barbaric to foreigners. Hamann picks up on Damm commenting to this point in his book, *Observations on Religion*. This can be easily deconstructed by pointing to the fact that neither the English nor French language (to name his two primary examples) are purely consistent.<sup>308</sup> In this subsection one also sees something that arises occasionally in Hamann’s critiques. He states that he clearly has too many prejudices against the aforementioned nations that he cannot judge fairly. This is not only a candid admission of prejudice on his part, but is a statement of sorts pointing to the prejudices that his contemporaries hold. In favoring the French language they consequently favor the philosophical influence coming from France.<sup>309</sup> There is no concrete argument given here besides the point itself. For to advocate orthographic reform based on a wish to appear a certain way to foreigners, is not to rely on the universal reason Damm held in such reverence. The point itself – if true – undercuts Damm’s ambitions. The

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<sup>307</sup> Damm, *Betrachtungen über die Religion*, 87. “Die Stimme der gesunden Vernunft ist die Stimme Gottes.”

<sup>308</sup> Hamann, *Writings on Philosophy and Language*, 155. *New Apology of the Letter h*.

<sup>309</sup> Not only did Frederick the Great’s favoring of the French language add to its importance socially, it also contributed to the influence of philosophical thought coming from France. By referencing this, Hamann points yet again to his focus on the subjective, the subtleties influencing one’s approach towards philosophy.

forthcoming response reveals much more clearly the idolatrous nature and superstitious foundations of Damm's orthography of abstract reason.

***Final, Merely Probable Response to the Question***

Two main points are contained in Hamann's response in the voice of Schröder. The first speaks of the arrogance of abstract reason, "There is a kind of ignorance in the will, and it can be cured neither by Christian-Wolffian merits in Latin and German nor by careful translations and explications of sacred scripture."<sup>310</sup> Of note, ignorance is not just a flaw in the reasoning but an ignorance of the will. Hamann sees no such thing as abstract reason standing on its own apart from the human will. He speaks of reason as "poor and naked", that is, insofar as it relies on ideas in the rationalist sense, it neglects the historical to its own detriment (as seen in the section demonstrating the absurdity of Damm's argument if taken to its logical end).

Ideas derived by abstract reason have no place forming language to fit its own image. Attempting to do so was at best naive and, at the end of the day, entirely off base. Just as language has historical foundations, so does Enlightenment reason. The orthographic reform based itself on, "Powerful errors and a more than miraculous superstitious faith in lies and mysteries of darkness and wickedness! - - Obstinate stupidity *in pallio philosophico*."<sup>311</sup> This quote brings together many of the elements of Hamann's critique of superstition and idolatry covered thus far. The errors referred to in the quote are based on a superstitious faith in lies. Reason sought to clarify, but Damm's reforms

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<sup>310</sup> Hamann, *Writings on Philosophy and Language*, 156. *New Apology of the Letter h*.

<sup>311</sup> Hamann, 157. *New Apology of the Letter h*.

based on abstract reason were characterized as “lies and mysteries of darkness”, all the while his arguments were dressed *in pallio philosophico* – philosophical clothing.

### ***Excursus on Philosophy of Language***

The intention of the critique in the *New Apology* is not to set forth a prescriptive philosophy of language, but a defense against the onslaught of abstract reason. In reference to Damm, Hamann states, “do not regard as a blind game of chance the fact that the orthography of the extraordinary religious teacher is as closely related to the main subject as to the spirit of his illuminated century.”<sup>312</sup> Hamann appropriately saw the position towards the letter *h* as part of a larger philosophical, religious, and societal movement. Therefore, a close reading of the essay does not accord with Graeme Garrard’s interpretation, who suggested that Hamann sought to get back to a more primitive language similar to Rousseau’s noble savage.<sup>313</sup> This interpretation is incorrect on a number of accounts. In regards to language, Hamann nowhere affirmed that there is some sort of truer, primordial language that humanity might reacquire outside of the analogy of pre-fall humanity.<sup>314</sup> Moreover, since the point of the *New Apology* was to demonstrate the misuse of abstract reason when applied to orthography and its wider implications, no such conjecture is warranted. The reoccurring elements of tradition and experience do appear,

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<sup>312</sup> Hamann, 157. *New Apology of the Letter h*.

<sup>313</sup> Graeme Garrard, *Counter-Enlightenments: From the Eighteenth-Century to the Present* (London ; New York: Routledge, 2006), 35.

<sup>314</sup> This does not correspond to Hamann’s Lutheranism, where mankind and even language are contaminated by sin. Tom Kleffmann gives an important explication of original sin in Hamann’s thought. Particularly, he argues that the idea of sin relates to the self-deification of universal reason and to language’s original state of condescension. Tom Kleffmann, *Die Erbsündenlehre in sprachtheologischem Horizont: eine Interpretation Augustins, Luthers und Hamanns*, Beiträge Zur Historischen Theologie 86 (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1994), 259–305.

but not in the context of postulating an alternative orthography. The focus is on the idolatrous use of reason, not a philosophy of language.

Essentially, Hamann's argument in the main body of the essay is as follows. If the letter *h* is taken out on the basis that it is not pronounced, then this principle must be adhered to with all letters in all circumstances. Yet with pronunciation being so varied – particularly acute due to the widely variant German dialects – communication would disintegrate and writing would become unintelligible. Furthermore, to change language because of how it appears to foreigners betrays the principles of reason attested to by Damm.

### **The Letter *h* Defends Itself**

In the last subsection of the essay Hamann's pseudonym changes entirely. He gives voice to the letter *h* itself. The voice he bestows it is bombastic and critical, spoken in the voice of a prophet of the Old Testament.<sup>315</sup> The criticism shifts from Damm in particular to the “prophets of Böhmisches-Breda”, which appears to be a reference to Enlightenment philosophy as a whole.<sup>316</sup> Although the Enlightenment is broadly under attack, the letter *h* is still addressing the content of *Observations on Religion*. What follows is an explicate attack on the superstitious and idolatrous aspect of the use of abstract reason by Enlightenment philosophers, manifested here in an idolatrous orthography.

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<sup>315</sup> Walter Lowrie, *Johann Georg Hamann: An Existentialist*. (Eugene: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2016), 35. This also adds weight to dealing with Hamann's pseudonyms more seriously, as here one observes that the voice of the pseudonym has changed entirely.

<sup>316</sup> In the speech made by the letter *h*, an analogy to Paul's speech before the Athenians in Acts 17:23 is made, indicating that the Enlightenment philosophers are more broadly in focus.



Although only three short pages, because of its dense prophetic language there is much upon which to expound. The letter is used symbolically and expositively. It is used to symbolize human mortality and hidden knowledge. In its own voice, it exposes the idolatry and arrogance present in the claim of abstract reason to an absolute position.

### *The Symbols of the Letter h*

The letter *h* begins its defense by humorously pointing to its ability to speak – being, as it were, analogous to Balaam’s donkey.<sup>317</sup> It serves as a symbol of human mortality when it states, “Your life is what I am – a breath.”<sup>318</sup> For Hamann the letter *h* is a symbol of mortality, and because of the passing nature of life the letter gives itself license to speak bluntly to the false prophets of the Enlightenment.<sup>319</sup>

The second symbolic use of the letter *h* is more significant. The letter *h* is a symbol of the unknown, the knowledge of God. Consider, “But you belong to the world, and he who is not of this world, his language you do not know and cannot hear his words.”<sup>320</sup> The unspoken *h* is the analogy of that which is beyond, which cannot be grasped by rationality alone. Ernst Jünger (1895-1998) – who held that the *New Apology* was the key text of Hamann’s authorship – asserted that the letter *h*, “in its inaudibility, is representative of the concealed, secretive thing, the symbol of the spiritual portion of words.”<sup>321</sup> This is a

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<sup>317</sup> Numbers 22:21-39.

<sup>318</sup> Hamann, *Writings on Philosophy and Language*, 160.

<sup>319</sup> The letter *h* is understood as a breath in the word, and Hamann makes the biblical analogy of life being like a breath. Hence, the letter *h* speaks to those who share a similar fate. Hamann, 160.

<sup>320</sup> Hamann, 162.

<sup>321</sup> Ernst Jünger, *Sgraffiti*, Jubiläumsausg (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1985), 104. “Der Buchstabe *H* wird in seiner Unhörbarkeit als Vertreter der verborgenen, verschwiegenen Dinge, als Symbol des geistigen Anteils an den Worten aufgefaßt.” Eckhard Schumacher has a similar and ultimately further reaching interpretation. Working closely with Hamann’s *Clouds (Wolken)* Schumacher argues that the way Hamann constructs texts out of other texts, coupled with an ironic, subversive voice, pushes back against the idea that there is a hidden meaning to be uncovered underneath difficult texts. Rather Hamann upholds a manifold of meaning in texts.

very good analysis, finding support in Hamann's use of the *principium coincidentiae*. "Is not your human reason an indeterminate organ, a nose of wax, a weathercock, to which the letter of a holy canon, which was once written and has lasted till now, is not to be preferred? Is the famous *principium coincidentiae oppositorum* entirely unknown to you? It is the spirit that quickens, the letter is flesh, and your dictionaries are straw."<sup>322</sup> For Hamann, some contradiction in experience - reflected in language - is to be expected. This is tied to the larger idea of a resolution, which Hamann resolves in God. What Jünger lacks in his interpretation, however insightful, is neglecting to mention that Hamann always bases this within a theological framework (e.g. all opposites coinciding in God).

These contradictions and mysteries find their resolution in God; however, this is not a subterfuge for avoiding rigorous thought and investigation. It is in fact the presumption of knowledge wherein superstition is found. "I perceive that in all things you are too superstitious. The invisible GOD, who is therefore unknown to you, is of course the father of reason and religion, which however are spirit and truth and thus as hidden from your senses as the invisible GOD, who is therefore unknown to you."<sup>323</sup> Hamann assesses that they - the prophets, that is, Enlightenment Deists - glory in their knowledge of God, but their knowledge is limited insofar as they neglect the inner life of the human being with how they utilize reason. Particularly bothersome, abstract reason was given priority over that of other faculties of knowledge, and as such was intrinsically limited in its ability to provide orientation, organize experience, and interpret the world without acknowledging its dependence on language. The person is not subject to one definition of the world - one

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See, Eckhard Schumacher, *Die Ironie der Unverständlichkeit: Johann Georg Hamann, Friedrich Schlegel, Jacques Derrida, Paul de Man*, 1. Aufl, Aesthetica (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2000), 144-45.

<sup>322</sup> Hamann, *Writings on Philosophy and Language*, 162-63.

<sup>323</sup> Hamann, 160-61. *New Apology of the Letter h*.

which was provided by abstract reason – knowledge was always unfolding, developing.<sup>324</sup> Each individual was a vehicle for revelation and the letter *h* represented the hidden knowledge which required revealing.

### ***The Superstitious Claim to Truth by Abstract Reason***

For Hamann, Enlightenment religion is appalling; not for its pursuit of truth, but for its claim upon it (as revealed by the letter *h*, God and truth are not something able to be grasped solely by the intellect). “‘Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man’ – Herein is the only religion which is worthy of a supreme creature and befitting to him, and which GOD has prepared for them that love him.”<sup>325</sup> Because of the ungraspable nature of God, that which is purported to be knowledge of God attained through the use of abstract reason was only a philosophical idol. Addressing those who think truth (i.e. God) is knowable solely by the means of reason he states, “Lie not against the truth with your vainglorious knowledge of God; for lies belong to the wisdom which is earthly, human, and devilish.”<sup>326</sup> The letter *h* makes some illuminating comments that aid in grasping how Hamann understood the inventions and ideas advanced by philosophers of his time (such as removing the letter *h*) as falsehoods:

You little prophets of Böhmisch-Breda! The object of your observations and devotion is not GOD but a mere verbal image which you have deified through a more than poetic license into a real person, and you make so many gods

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<sup>324</sup> Günter Wohlfart, in pointing to the relationship of reason to language in Hamann, asserts that Hamann understands reason in a manner that provides for a dialectic after Hegel. In reference to Hamann’s thought, he states, “Denken der Sprache heißt, die Gedanken Vernunft und Sprache zusammenzubringen.” Günter Wohlfart, *Denken der Sprache: Sprache und Kunst bei Vico, Hamann, Humboldt und Hegel*, Alber-Broschur Philosophie (Freiburg: K. Alber, 1984), 165–66.

<sup>325</sup> Hamann, *Writings on Philosophy and Language*, 161. *New Apology of the Letter h*.

<sup>326</sup> Hamann, 161. *New Apology of the Letter h*.

and persons of this sort through the transubstantiation of your verbal images that on judgment day the coarsest heathendom and the blindest popery, in comparison with your philosophical idolatry, will be justified and perhaps absolved.<sup>327</sup>

Present in this passage is a clear portrayal of Hamann's notion of philosophical idolatry and a clarification as to why abstract reason is involved in creating "lies" (which could also fall under the umbrella of an idol). This philosophical idolatry consists of "verbal images" which are turned into objects of worship, "gods and persons". One must recall that reason is always already bound up in language; therefore, elements derived by abstract reason are nothing more than mere fabrication. Additionally, it is significant that these objects of devotion are created by the prophets of Böhmisches-Breda [read: Enlightenment Philosophers]. Furthermore, these self-made idols are grounded in ideas that are deified into "a real person". In the present case, the idea of a language purified by reason becomes the deified idea, the idol.

Hamann is again utilizing religious language as part of a critique that is primarily philosophical, e.g. speaking of their fabrications as being a sort of "transubstantiation". Hamann, by using this language, seeks not only to provoke – which of course the language employed here was certainly meant to do – but also to draw parallels between philosophy and religious dogmatism. Analogous to the change in substance of the wafer in the sacrament (transubstantiation), the Enlightenment philosophers change the substance (transubstantiate) of their conjectures. In doing so, they deify their own fabrications, making their fabrications into self-made idols.

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<sup>327</sup> Hamann, 162. *New Apology of the Letter h.*

An implicit part of the argument involves the contradiction pointed out by Hamann in his critique of Damm's reasons for removing the unpronounced letter *h*. Hamann demonstrated the inconsistencies in ideas which were supposed to be based on a universal, sound human reason. In so doing, he demonstrated the contingent nature of knowledge and the limitations of abstract reason. Based on this background, the letter *h* facetiously asks, "Is all your human reason anything other than tradition and inheritance", and "Is not your human reason an indeterminate organ?"<sup>328</sup> The use of this "organ of reason" is determined by elements beyond itself; therefore, any claim to universality by reason is null and void.

### **Summary and Final Thoughts on the Idol of the Orthography of Reason**

A few final observations will be provided to summarize the Idol of the Orthography of Reason. The essay is composed entirely by pseudonymous authors. Hamann's pseudonyms often reflect a consistent critique – in contrast to someone such as Fernando Pessoa (1888-1935). Pessoa used what he called heteronyms to emphasize that his pseudonyms represented differing views of the world as a whole.<sup>329</sup>

Although Hamann's pseudonyms tend not to be taken as seriously as those of Kierkegaard,<sup>330</sup> one sees in the *New Apology* just how significant they can be. Firstly, the

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<sup>328</sup> Hamann, 162. *New Apology of the Letter h*.

<sup>329</sup> Cf. Fernando Pessoa, *A Little Larger than the Entire Universe: Selected Poems*, trans. Richard Zenith, Penguin Classics (New York: Penguin Books, 2006). Pessoa writes in the voices of Alberto Caeiro, Ricardo Reis, Álvaro de Campos, and his own. He developed a history of sorts for what he calls his "heteronyms" in order to emphasize their distinctive identities, which should be held as different than his own.

<sup>330</sup> Kierkegaard's pseudonyms distinctive voices and differing opinions are easier to spot than Hamann's. Cf. The differing voices of the aesthetic and religious in Søren Kierkegaard, *Either/Or*, trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong, Kierkegaard's Writings 3–4 (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1987). One example of both taking Hamann's pseudonyms seriously and providing an analysis of them is found, Wilhelm Koepp's work, *Der Magier unter Masken*. Interestingly, Koepp connects Hamann's pseudonyms (what he calls,

humble voice of the teacher is used to bring out Damm's vanity. This "voice" takes on the specifics of Damm's text and adheres to a more stringent argumentation. Secondly, there is the prophetic voice of the letter *h* lambasting the Enlightenment as a whole, used to voice larger concerns with the presuppositions of the age of Enlightenment. Irony is a common denominator between these two voices. It is not always the content itself voiced by the pseudonyms but the character Hamann gives them that retain Hamann unique perspective.<sup>331</sup> Additionally, the use of pseudonyms and irony is another objection to the systematic application of abstract reason. A pseudonym pushes against the idea of the systematic nature of thought, demonstrating the situational and perspective nature of knowledge. This illuminates the need to pay close attention to Hamann's use of pseudonyms.<sup>332</sup>

Generally as a published author, Hamann wrote with a mask: a statement to the unquantifiable, ungraspable nature of human existence, which cannot be contained in any overarching system. Hamann is not writing as Johann Georg Hamann in the essay, adding

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"masks") with his overall motivation of his authorship (Koepp, p. 245). Indeed, the pseudonyms can be easily connected to the fragmentary and limited nature of knowledge insofar as they represent the multiplicity of knowledge and type of knowledge. Furthermore, Hamann's masks can be seen as an implicit critique of his contemporaries as Hamann tried to unmask them, thereby showing that they have been wearing masks the entire time. Cf. Wilhelm Koepp, *Der Magier unter Masken. Versuch eines neuen Hamannbildes*, (Göttingen: V & R, 1965)

<sup>331</sup> One can also look to the Rhapsodist found in the *Aesthetica* differing from the Knight of the Rose Cross (*Knight of the Rose Cross*) and the Preacher in the Wilderness (*Golgotha and Sheblimini!*). Hamann's texts are often filled with a plethora of references to both recent and ancient texts. However, there is a marked difference in the pseudonyms of the Knight of the Rose Cross and the Preacher in the Wilderness. Both follow the arguments of the texts which they are critiquing, whereas the Rhapsodist is piecing every point together from disparate sources. This point is further supported by Eric Achermann, in *Worte und Werte*, where he analyzes the *Crusades of the Philologist*. Achermann speaks of the pseudonymous authors' voices being unified in their "parodic writing style" (*parodischen Schreibart*). See, Eric Achermann, *Worte und Werte: Geld und Sprache bei Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, Johann Georg Hamann und Adam Müller*, Frühe Neuzeit, Bd. 32 (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1997), 168.

<sup>332</sup> In the case of the *New Apology*, both pseudonymous authors retain a similar position but are voiced from two different perspectives. This is often the case in Hamann's authorship. Because of this, one can draw larger motivations of his authorship and ascertain a perspective offered by Hamann.

nance to, and additional support for, his notion of the idolatry of system. By using differing voices he is making a subtle but important point regarding the multitudinous nature of even one single human being.

The fact that the motif of idolatry is found in his letters and is found throughout his authorship further bolsters the legitimacy of reading Hamann through the lens of his critique of the philosophical idolatry of his contemporaries. In the attempt to purify spelling according to the principles of abstract reason Hamann saw two things which led him categorize it as idolatrous. Namely, the underlying faith involved in the philosophy of that endeavor, as well as the attempt to craft a language free from history and contingency. In his eyes, the thinkers of his day created an idol out of the orthography of reason. This idol did not serve truth, but the purposes of his contemporaries. And it was further problematic insofar as it was supported only by a superstitious faith in a universal, abstract reason.

### **The Idol of the Public**

In the introduction to the current study, the Idol of the Public was used as a means of evincing Hamann's concept of superstition and idolatry, thereby conveying the importance of undertaking the explication of these ideas. Presently, the concept of this idolatry will be discussed in further detail. Specifically pertaining to how the Idol of the Public manifested itself in other aspects of philosophy outside of the *Socratic Memorabilia* will be discussed. In the course of this explication the extent to which this "idol" permeated philosophy will become clear.

Hamann was not the first and certainly not the last to criticize the Public. Rousseau (1712-1778) is one famous example of a philosopher expressing skepticism toward public opinion (*opinion publique*).<sup>333</sup> However, Hamann's understanding of the public as a *philosophical idol* was unique and constituted a distinction from those critical of public opinion. Understanding the idea of the public in Hamann will be aided by first looking to the individual as developed by Kierkegaard in relation to Hamann's idea of the Idol of the Public.

### **Understanding the Public in Hamann through the Concept of the Individual in Kierkegaard**

Often mentioned in Hamann scholarship is his influence upon Kierkegaard.<sup>334</sup> One can observe a direct parallel in Kierkegaard and Hamann in both their notions and descriptions of the public. However, Kierkegaard provides a more lucid account than Hamann. Kierkegaard utilized a language less enigmatic as well as forgoing the idea of an Idol of the Public (favoring instead the idea of the present age which contained similar objections to the public as Hamann).<sup>335</sup> Hence, a brief outline of the Kierkegaardian objections to the public will be briefly addressed. This approach will provide a better indication of Hamann's objections to the public amidst his, at times, scattered approach.

Kierkegaard - in response to suffering abuse from a literary magazine - critiqued the idea of the public through the idea of the crowd over the individual in the text, *On the*

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<sup>333</sup> Cf. Jürgen Oelkers, *Jean-Jacques Rousseau*, 2014, 160. Certain aspects of these tendencies can even be observed in Rousseau's first published work, where he argues that society has corrupting aspects. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Basic Political Writings*, trans. Donald A. Cress, 2nd ed (Indianapolis, IN; Cambridge: Hackett Pub. Co, 2011), 1-26.

<sup>334</sup> For an extensive list of secondary sources on this subject consult, Anders Moe Rasmussen, *Kierkegaard and His German Contemporaries*, Kierkegaard Research: Sources, Reception and Resources; v. 6 (Aldershot, England; Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2008), 97-114.

<sup>335</sup> Søren Kierkegaard, *Two Ages the Age of Revolution and the Present Age: A Literary Review*, trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton, N.J.; Woodstock: Princeton University Press, 2009), 85.



*Dedication to 'That Single Individual'*.<sup>336</sup> Interestingly, this dedication parallels Hamann's dedication to the public so much so that it is undoubtedly drawing from Hamann.<sup>337</sup> However, Kierkegaard addresses the antithesis of the public – that being the individual – and as such gives further insight into Hamann's public; the other side of the coin so to speak.

Kierkegaard's goal is to show that the public or the crowd are themselves abstractions and sowers of untruth. He argues this by discussing how every action or opinion coming from the crowd ultimately derives from human beings, i.e. from individuals.<sup>338</sup> The crowd minimalizes the individual's responsibility, and thereby tends to encourage actions that are not in accordance with the truth but with its own predilections. The public sets itself up as the truth, "daily press and anonymity make our age even more insane with help from 'the public,' which is really an abstraction, which makes a claim to be the court of last resort in relation to 'the truth'."<sup>339</sup> It is this claim to the truth, a claim made by an abstraction, to which Kierkegaard adamantly objects. Nearly every paragraph of the essay begins with the declaration: "The crowd is untruth".<sup>340</sup> Kierkegaard resolves the problem of the public with the biblical idea of the love for one's neighbor.<sup>341</sup> Kierkegaard has the social in mind whereas Hamann largely focused on philosophical movements. Yet

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<sup>336</sup> Søren Kierkegaard, *Crowd Is Untruth*. (Merchant Books, 2014).

<sup>337</sup> Not only does Kierkegaard explicitly mention Hamann's influence, but the beginning of this text employs similar language to Hamann's dedication to the Public in the *Socratic Memorabilia* with one slight difference. Kierkegaard seems to have taken up Hamann's condemnation of the Idol of the Public while engaging with the anonymous reader, whereas Hamann turns to the concrete, e.g. "The Two" (Kant and Berens).

<sup>338</sup> Søren Kierkegaard, "On the Dedication to 'That Single Individual,'" trans. Charles K. Bellinger (Public Domain, 1846). "The untruth is first that it is "the crowd," which does either what only *the single individual* in the crowd does, or in every case what *each single individual* does. For a crowd is an abstraction."

<sup>339</sup> Kierkegaard. *On the Dedication to 'That Single Individual'*.

<sup>340</sup> Kierkegaard. *On the Dedication to 'That Single Individual'*.

<sup>341</sup> Kierkegaard. *On the Dedication to 'That Single Individual'*. "And to honor every individual human being, unconditionally every human being, that is the truth and fear of God and love of "the neighbor"; but ethico-religiously viewed, to recognize "the crowd" as the court of last resort in relation to "the truth," that is to deny God and cannot possibly be to love 'the neighbor.'"

the neighbor is always an individual and Hamann was concerned with the individualistic character of reasoning and discussion. Hamann addressed concrete people, individuals - neighbors if you will. Kierkegaard's individual serves as a good counterpoint to Hamann's public. One might say that it was the idolization of the public which led to the concept of crowd in Kierkegaard.

### **The Public as Philosophical Idol**

Hamann's notion of the Idol of the Public can be difficult to delineate. One might say it was a sensibility that undergirded the overreliance on theoretical reason of his age. This idol manifests itself in a variety of ways. The Idol of the Public is not as confined as the Kierkegaardian idea of the crowd, yet the foundations are similar. In the introductory remarks of the *Socratic Memorabilia*, Hamann determined that the foundation of idolatry in philosophy and economics consisted of the service to the spirit of the age by Berens and Kant. The *Socratic Memorabilia* provides an excellent example of how Hamann's authorship was motivated by the need to critique the superstition and idolatry of his age. The Idol of the Public was not only present in this early text of Hamann's authorship, but was also present in other writings critiquing his contemporaries.

The idolatrous elements of the public are twofold. The first has to do with the abstract nature of the public and those who control the knowledge sanctioned by it. The second has to do with the content of this knowledge sanction, namely, a philosophy based on abstract reason and its claim to universality. The Idol of the Public is very present in his critique of the essay on the origin of language by Herder, which represented the acquiescence of Hamann's friends and contemporaries to the prejudices of the age. Additionally, the

critique of the ubiquitous *bon sens* ( as well as gesunde Vernunft) falls under the Idol of the Public as it was employed to enforce the knowledge sanctioned by the spirit of the age. It is in this critique of Herder and in the *bon sens* that one finds some of the clearest examples of the Idol of the Public in Hamann's thought.

### **Herder's Servitude to the Idol of the Public**

The Hamann-Herder relationship can be a bit baffling. Hamann's authorship is peppered with both praise and denunciation of his once pupil and long time friend, Johann Gottfried Herder. There are competing opinions as to who was more influential on whom, and who first developed the idea of Metacritique. Questions regarding the intricacies of the Hamann-Herder relationship, both personally and philosophically, will be left to others.<sup>342</sup> The intention here is the explication of how the notion of idolatry motivated Hamann's critique. His and Herder's mutual concern for language, history, and revelation notwithstanding, Hamann did not hesitate to impugn Herder when concessions to the spirit

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<sup>342</sup> Most Hamann scholarship treats Hamann as the father of the Metacritique. Even if Herder had used the word first, Hamann's ideas had influenced what was later to become Metacritical thought. One must only look to the continuity between the *Socratic Memorabilia* and the *Aesthetica in Nuce* (published in 1759 and 1762, respectively), with his later *Metacritique on the Purism of Reason* to observe that Hamann certainly played an important role in developing these ideas. However, Michael Forster is one of those who argue for the greater importance of Herder in developing the Metacritique. He argues that Hamann had a radically different view of the Enlightenment prior to Herder's publications that indicate thought's dependence on language. Namely, that Hamann held that thought was indeed prior to language. This critique of Hamann overlooks the fact that much of what he would later discuss regarding language is already present in his early works, i.e. his focus on the faith grounding our existence. Additionally, Hamann indicates a very broad idea of language. Perception itself having its foundations in language, see, Hamann, *Writings on Philosophy and Language*, 64. Hamann's thought was indeed focused less on language and more on feeling, yet this is his response to a philosophy that had ignored the priority of the senses: a theme that would be intrinsic to his later statements about language. (e.g. *Metacritique* Hamann, 215.). Hamann utilizes phraseology from his *Aesthetica* in his *Metacritique*, as well as connecting the ideas between the two. Cf. *Aesthetica in Nuce* Hamann, 63–65. and the *Metacritique* Hamann, 211–12. Therefore, it can be strongly argued that Hamann's views – particularly regarding the Enlightenment and language – did not radically change, but they did mature. For Forster's arguments regarding Herder, Hamann, and the development of Metacritique see, Forster, *After Herder*, 70–72.

of the age were perceived. One such instance came about when Herder wrote for the Berlin Academy's essay contest on the origin of language.<sup>343</sup>

The Idol of the Public manifested itself in Herder's serving the philosophical prejudices of the Berlin Academy. Its agenda was viewed by Hamann as entirely unacceptable as it upheld and purported the dependence on, and superiority of, the abstract reason so abhorred by Hamann. Herder's thought - although critical in many of the same ways as Hamann's - was more engaged with the thought of his time. Herder earnestly tried to advance philosophical positions to be taken up by his contemporaries.<sup>344</sup> He was unlike Hamann, who would ever remain the gadfly, attempting to disrupt to a far greater degree than build up a type of system or school of thought which could be followed (Hamann did seek to build up, but in the Christian sense of reproof).<sup>345</sup> Hamann determined that Herder was serving the Idol of the Public manifest in the Berlin Academy by the content of his submission to its essay competition. Of interest to the present study is Hamann's critique of Herder, namely, for conforming to the prejudices of his day insofar as he advocated the ability of philosophy to achieve universal claims.<sup>346</sup>

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<sup>343</sup> Avi Lifschitz, *Language and Enlightenment: The Berlin Debates of the Eighteenth Century*, 1st ed, Oxford Historical Monographs (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 10.

<sup>344</sup> One must only look to Herder's thought as a whole in support of this point. Whereas Hamann prized his enigmatic and at times contrarian style, Herder took a different approach. For instance, Hamann thought the manner in which Herder had written his *Treatise on the Origin of Language* was itself giving in to the prejudice of his day. Herder was puzzled with Hamann's harsh critique since Herder believed them to be advancing the same view of language. Michael Morton, *Herder and the Poetics of Thought: Unity and Diversity in On Diligence in Several Learned Languages* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1989), 36.

<sup>345</sup> Hamann consistently utilized the language of reproof and exhortation. Cf. In the *New Apology of the Letter h* the letter writes, "to punish your [Enlightenment philosopher's] transgression." Hamann, *Writings on Philosophy and Language*, 160. Also, in his *Golgotha and Sheblimini!*, Hamann takes on the pseudonym of the Preacher in the Wilderness. These are only two among numerous examples. Hamann, 164.

<sup>346</sup> Georg Baudler speaks of Hamann's concern not only being for an outward obedience to the ideas of the Berlin Academy, but that his inner thought was infected with exalting the human spirit. Georg Baudler, *Im Worte sehen": das Sprachdenken Johann Georg Hamanns*, Münchener philosophische Forschungen 2 (Bonn: Bouvier, 1970), 131.

The origin of the contention was in regards to Herder's *Treatise on the Origin of Language*, which addressed the question on the divine or natural origin of language.<sup>347</sup> Herder defended neither viewpoint, rather charting his own path wherein he advanced the thought that reason is dependent upon language. "For Herder, then, language is not an invention of reason *in the abstract*, i.e., it is not something that comes forth from reason as the mere instrument for communicating its concepts (as was commonly held by the *Aufklärer*)."<sup>348</sup> Despite the similarities in regards to the dependence of reason on language, Hamann's response was harsh. Indeed, one can point to explicit passages and elements that diverge only slightly from Hamann's own understanding of language. Notwithstanding, these small differences were seen as allowing for the propensities of his age to creep in (e.g. systematic purity through the application of abstract reason).

On a broader, one might say meta-level, Hamann's critique of Herder was motivated out of his desire to call out those philosophers propagating and serving the idols of his age – even if one of them happened to be his former disciple. In Herder's treatment of the "higher" (read: divine) hypothesis he had worked to please the academy in Berlin – one of the faces of the Enlightenment and the public controlled by it. Herder argued against the idea of a divine origin of language, evoking Hamann's ire. This act was done (à la Hamann) in service of the Idol of the Public, the faceless sentiment making up the general prejudices of the epoch. This can be clearly seen in his statement that Herder has gone "whoring after the beautiful spirits of his century and their *bon ton*."<sup>349</sup> As is often the case with Hamann, biblical imagery is intermingled with philosophical language. In this instance, it was the

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<sup>347</sup> Johann Gottfried Herder, *Philosophical Writings*, trans. Michael N. Forster, Cambridge Texts in the History of Philosophy (Cambridge, UK ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 65–166.

<sup>348</sup> Betz, *After Enlightenment*, 143.

<sup>349</sup> ZH III, 16.

idea of the Children of Israel whoring after false gods.<sup>350</sup> This imagery and rhetoric connects his critique of Herder to the critique of idolatry. The idea of Herder “whoring” has to do with seeking the approval of those of influence. As far as Hamann was concerned, those of influence were not specific persons but merely an abstract sense of what could rightly be called knowledge, epitomized in the Berlin Academy. Hamann thought that Herder's outright condemnation of the higher defense of language was merely a means of appeasing the Berlin Academy, and therewith the critical century as a whole. This demonstrates that the Idol of the Public did not only involve an adherence to rationalist opinions but also the quest for recognition; which he deemed Herder to be seeking.<sup>351</sup> Interestingly, Hamann sees Herder's quest for recognition as service to an abstract idol, i.e. the public, not a specific person or even school of thought.

### ***Herder's Perceived Naturalism and the Consequences of Serving “Healthy Reason”***

Hamann's concern advances to an even deeper philosophical level, namely, Herder's perceived naturalism. The naturalism here refers to Herder allowing for the capacity of the individual to develop language and reason by their own abilities. The abilities then, have the power to substantiate the veracity of general truths on their own account. Herder's similarities notwithstanding, Hamann points to the same elements that he did when critiquing rationalism: the faith-based foundations of every philosophical system. Hamann thought that Herder's attempts to ground the origin of language in nature through

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<sup>350</sup> A plethora of biblical examples exist: Exodus 34:12-17; Leviticus 17:7; 20:1-7; Deuteronomy 31:16-30; 32:16-21; Judges 2:16,17; 8:27; 8:33; 1 Kings 21:25,26; to reference only a few.

<sup>351</sup> Albeit Herder held that philosophy should indeed be utilized by all in a society and should not remain within the confines of professionals. Cf. Michael Forster, “Johann Gottfried von Herder,” ed. Edward N. Zalta, *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Fall 2017 Edition)*, n.d. Yet it is not this that Hamann finds appalling, rather it is that Herder is trying to please the Berlin Academy. This further reinforces Hamann's idea that it is not that the reason of people is set free, but rather that people are directed into a certain type of reason that is alienated from other sources of knowledge.

philosophical arguments were only an expression of – or a creation by – the idiosyncratic reason of the Enlightenment:

He [Herder] had, out of the power of his own testimony, collected solicitous ‘solid data out of the human soul, out of the organization of human persons, out of the structure of all ancient and wild languages and out of the entire household [*Haushaltung*] of humanity in order to prove his position, as the most *permanent philosophical truth* can be proven’; yes! more provable than all proofs of the divinity of the Koran by the Turks can be; for who can be intimately convinced of the power and strength of a proof than the creator [*Artschöpfer*] of that proof.<sup>352</sup>

Again there is the equating of religious systems with philosophical systems and their respective claims to truth. Hamann was opposed to any presumption of truth in itself – religious, philosophical, or otherwise – by any system.<sup>353</sup> It is the nature of truth that is at stake; specifically, the attempt to philosophically ascertain truth on its own account through the use of abstract reason. Visible in the quote above, Hamann affirms the role of the subject in the creation of philosophical proofs. In so doing he sought to undercut the veracity of any attempt to ascertain access to an absolute via a philosophical method that might be universally applied. Hamann accused Herder of engaging in this very thing.

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<sup>352</sup>N III, 19:6-15, “Er [Herder] hat sich, kraft seines eigenen Zeugnisses, beflissen ‘feste Data aus der menschlichen Seele, aus der menschlichen Organisation, aus dem Bau aller alten und wilden Sprachen und aus der ganzen Haushaltung des menschlichen Geschlechts zu sammeln und seinen Satz so zu beweisen, wie *die festeste philosophische Wahrheit bewiesen werden kann*’; ja! beweisbarer, als alle Beweise der Türken von der Göttlichkeit des Korans seyn können; denn wer kann inniger von der Macht und Kraft eines Beweises als der *Artschöpfer* desselben überzeugt seyn?”

<sup>353</sup> Henri Veldhuis constructively points out that Herder’s principle was that of analogy and it is then no wonder that Hamann’s response heavily utilizes analogy. Veldhuis, *Ein versiegeltes Buch: der Naturbegriff in der Theologie J.G. Hamanns (1730-1788)*, 195–96.

### ***Bon sens, gesunde Vernunft* and the Idol of the Public**

The French *bon sens* and German *gesunde Vernunft* embodied the Idol of the Public for Hamann par excellence. *Bon sense* and *gesunde Vernunft* can both be translated into English as “common sense” or “good sense” and are a variant of the Latin *sensus communis*. However, to translate this as simply “common sense” would lack precision insofar as the common sense developing during the Enlightenment period carried local variations between languages; it had a more specific philosophical idea depending on the time period and the philosopher at hand.<sup>354</sup> In order to avoid confusion, instead of employing the English “common sense”, Hamann’s rendering of these terms will retain the French *bon sens* unless the German is used specifically. The motivation for his use of the French was to indicate the French philosophical influence which Hamann saw as advocating the misuse of reason. This *bon sens* was particularly disconcerting to Hamann on multiple levels. It was in itself a fabrication which upheld the philosophical prejudice of his day and was employed to that end. What aligns the *bon sens* with the Idol of the Public is its intangible nature that was connected to a larger idea of reason, which was validated by philosophical consensus.

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<sup>354</sup> Philosophical discussion regarding the nature and use of *sensus communis* continued well beyond Hamann’s time. The myriad of its application and the controversy it has caused can be observed in Lyotard’s critique of Kantian notion of *sensus communis*. See, Jean-François Lyotard, “Sensus Communis,” in *Judging Lyotard*, ed. Andrew E. Benjamin, Warwick Studies in Philosophy and Literature (London; New York: Routledge, 1992), 9. Lyotard opposes those who wanted to employ Kant’s ideas in the political sphere, such as Hannah Arendt. Hannah Arendt and Ronald Beiner, *Lectures on Kant’s Political Philosophy*, 3. Dr. (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1990).



### Early Reservations and Hamann's Curious Translation

Prior to Hamann's trip to London and subsequent conversion, in a text entitled *Letters of a Father (Briefe eines Vaters)* published four years before his authorship, he proffered a version of *bon sens* that could be supported in his view. However, it had the three sources of "history, nature, and revelation" and did not conform to "neither the teaching nor the method which are currently fashionable."<sup>355</sup> Later in his authorship he would speak much less favorably of *bon sens*, seeing that it was utilized in the service of abstract reason.

Before Hamann commenced his authorship he translated various texts. Most pertinent to the present discussion is his translation of various essays by Anthony Ashley Cooper, 3<sup>rd</sup> Earl of Shaftesbury (1671-1713) in his *Characteristics of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times*. In the following quote from Shaftesbury's work there is a particular passage which mirrors Hamann's later opinion of reason:

'If by the word *Sense* we were to understand Opinion and Judgment, and by the word *common* the Generality or any considerable part of Mankind; 'twou'd be hard, he said, to discover where the Subject of common Sense cou'd lie. For that which was according to the Sense of one part of Mankind, was against the Sense of another. And if the Majority were to determine common Sense, it wou'd change as often as Men chang'd. That which was

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<sup>355</sup> N IV, 217:3-9, *Letters of a Father*. "Die gesunde Vernunft, die mit der wahren Weltweisheit im gleichen Paar geht, kennt weder die Lehre noch die Methode, die jetzt Mode ist, Die Geschichte, die Natur, die Offenbarung sind die drei Quellen, aus denen euer Verstand eine Menge fruchtbarer Einsichten schöpfte und die ihr niemals in Erfindung der Wahrheit aus den Augen setzen müßtet." This was set in contrast to Jean-Baptiste de Boyer d'Argens, *La philosophie du bon sens*, ed. Guillaume Pigéard de Gurbert, *Libre penseé et littérature clandestine* 11 (Paris: Champion, 2002).

according to common Sense to day, wou'd be the contrary to morrow, or soon after.<sup>356</sup>

Hamann translated the English “common sense” as “gesunde Vernunft”, which when re-translated into English reads “healthy reason”.<sup>357</sup> Although his translation of common sense may seem strange, there was some precedence for this: Descartes connected *bon sens* with reason in his *Discourse on Method*.<sup>358</sup> Nevertheless, this was a somewhat peculiar translation given by Hamann. Keeping Hamann’s translation in mind, one observes that the idea of the *sensus communis* was linked much closer to that of reason than ordinary understanding.<sup>359</sup> This idea of the *bon sens*, indeed the fabrication of it by those controlling knowledge, would come to dominate Hamann’s interpretation of the *bon sens*.

### ***Bon sens* Weaponized in the Service of the Enlightenment**

The idea of the *bon sens* serving the prejudice of Hamann’s age and thereby belonging to what is here called The Idol of the Public can be found throughout his authorship. A concentrated form of his critique of *bon sens* can be found in the aptly titled “French Project”, an essay from the *Crusades of the Philologist*.

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<sup>356</sup> Anthony Ashley Cooper Shaftesbury, *Characteristics of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times*, ed. Lawrence Eliot Klein, Cambridge Texts in the History of Philosophy (Cambridge, UK ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

<sup>357</sup> Hamann’s translation reads thus, N IV, 163: “Wenn wir durch das Wort Vernunft eine Meynung und Urtheil verstehen, und das Wort gesund nach der Allgemeinheit und dem ansehnlichen Theil des Menschlichen Geschlechts erklären wollen; so würde es schwer seyn’, sagt er, ‘zu entdecken, worinn [sic] der Gegenstand der gesunden Vernunft liegen könne. Denn was mit der Meinung eines Theils des Menschlichen Geschlechts übereinkommt, ist wieder die Meinung eines andern. Und wenn wir die gesunde Vernunft nach den größern Haufen bestimmen wollten, so würde selbige sich so öfters ändern als sich der Mensch ändere. Das was einen Tag der gesunden Vernunft gemäs ist, würde den andern Tag oder bald nachher das Gegentheil seyn.”

<sup>358</sup> Descartes, *Discourse on Method; and, Meditations on First Philosophy*, 1–2.

<sup>359</sup> This term is commonly rendered “gesunder Menschenverstand” in German. That is, *healthy human understanding* instead of Hamann’s *healthy reason*. With reason in his day being so connected to Rationalist thinkers, Hamann could easily associate it with the dominance of abstract reason.

The title, “French Project”, corresponds with Hamann’s view that much of the rationalism of his time originated from French sources. In fact, he writes under the fictitious pseudonym of a Frenchman. The essay begins with a description of the age and the state of philosophy prior to equating *bon sens* to the alkahest of his time, that is, to the alchemic solvent which was to universally turn substances into gold.

### ***The Sickness and its Cure: bon sens***

The initial pages of the essay are a sweeping analysis of the state of intellectual life, particularly French philosophy. He states that the previous century was ruled by genius and the next might be ruled by healthy reason, with his century currently lacking a clear direction.<sup>360</sup> “We fear the suspicion of enthusiasm (Schwärmerey) more than a fervid fever. Are there perhaps as many enthusiasts (Schwärmer) in Italy, Germany, Russia, ending in the same syllable as here? Jansenists! Molinists! Convulists! Secourists! Pichonists! and Encyclopedists!”<sup>361</sup> It is important to note that the Encyclopedists are aligned with fringe, superstitious Christian groups and sects. He goes on to assert that reason and philosophy had become their religion.<sup>362</sup> Hamann points to the power play on the basis of fundamental ideas that was taking place. “Our beautiful spirits, who deny the infallibility of the pope, assuring us that religion is not right, do so in order that we might more easily believe in

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<sup>360</sup> N II, 153:29-31. “Das vorflossene Jahrhundert war das Reich des Genies; das nächste wird vielleicht unter dem Scepter der gesunden Vernunft blühen.”

<sup>361</sup> N II, 154:1-5. “Wir fürchten uns vor dem Verdacht der Schwärmerey mehr als für ein hitzig Fieber. Gibt es aber wohl in Italien, Teutschland, Rußland so viel Schwärmer, die sich auf die Sylbe (ist) endigen, als bey uns? Jansenisten! Molinisten! Convulsionisten! Secouristen! Pichonisten! Encyclopädisten!” Besides the Encyclopedists the others are references to various Christian sects seen as fanatical. *Unpartheyische Kirchen-Historie Alten und Neuen Testaments nach der Methode Herrn Johann Hübners. Dritter Theil hält in sich die Geschichte vom Jahre Jesu Christi 1731. Bis 1750.*, vol. 3 (Jena: Johann Wilhelm Hartung, 1754), 241. “Seckel - Secouristen,” *Allgemeines Lexicon der Religions u. christlichen Kirchengeschichte für alle Confessionen. Nach den Quellen Bearbeitet von Dr. Ch. Gotthold Neudecker.* (Weimar: Bernh. Friedr. Voigt, 1835), 192.

<sup>362</sup> N II, 154, 6-10.

their proofs, planting their own banner of infallibility; if not, what right would they have to take captive our reason?"<sup>363</sup> Here the reoccurring theme of the absolute and infallible nature of Enlightenment philosophy can be observed. Writing or philosophizing for the public ultimately implied universality. By using the militant language of planting a banner, he points to their aggressive attempts to assert their cultural dominance.

After this diagnosis, the pseudonymous author proceeds to present his own cure for this state of affairs. The multiple layers of Hamann's irony are prevalent here. He writes as a Frenchman critiquing his century; alluding to its superstitious elements, only then to resolve it with another form of idolatry, the *bon sens* of French philosophy. However in doing so, he utilizes alchemic language, undercutting its entire claim to resolving the issues presented above (the superstitious and idolatrous elements in the philosophy of the day). The *bon sens* takes as its starting place the notion that human malady is due solely to problems present in the understanding or brain; itself posing as the solution to this problem.<sup>364</sup>

"My alkahest *du bon sens* is the most unnatural composition, to which belongs a deep knowledge of alchemy (Scheidekunst)."<sup>365</sup> After this statement Hamann goes on to describe some of the ingredients of this alkahest: various knowledge found in assorted lands throughout Europe. Continuing with his description of *bon sens* he states, "My alkahest *du bon sens* consists therefore in a miraculous epiphysial theriac, which French

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<sup>363</sup> N II, 154, 28-32, *French Project*. "Unsere schönen Geister, welche dem Papst die Unfehlbarkeit absprechen, versichern uns, daß es mit der Religion nicht richtig sey, um uns desto leichtgläubiger gegen ihre Beweise zu finden, und pflanzen ihre eigene Unfehlbarkeit zum Panier auf; den was für Recht würden sie sonst haben, unsere Vernunft gefangen zu nehmen?"

<sup>364</sup> N II, 155:9-12, *French Project*.

<sup>365</sup> N II, 155:13-14, *French Project*. "Mein Alkahest *du bon sens* ist die künstlichste Zusammensetzung, zu der eine tiefe Kenntniß der Scheidekunst gehöret."

quicksilver fastens to the finest cells in the brain.”<sup>366</sup> Hamann obviously wants to make himself obscene in the eyes of any respectable Enlightenment philosopher by mixing such ideas as healthy reason with the medieval antidote “theriac”. Again he speaks of multiple sources adding to this type of knowledge: British, Spanish, German, etc.<sup>367</sup> Hamann’s text is working antithetically. He is praising this type of knowledge with an ironic voice, making the entire endeavor appear absurd. Furthermore, he alludes to its fabricated nature of the knowledge of *bon sens* insofar as it is treated as his “alkahest”. The ingredients are the contributions of differing places with their own histories and particularities, which one then presumes - when mixed together - would form a type of perfect knowledge. Hamann does not present any arguments in opposition to what he is proposing here; rather, he merely lets it stand there ridiculously.

At the end of the essay the way in which *bon sens* is “weaponized” comes to the fore. He writes that one may “only look in accordance with the use of my alkahest *du bon sens* at those books which he formerly admired.”<sup>368</sup> This indicates the mentality of those serving the Idol of the Public expressed in the *bon sens*. It was a modern dogma attempting to control what could be considered valid knowledge, and this knowledge was that which was deemed acceptable by the Enlightenment. He even facetiously encourages the nations of Europe to continue with experimenting in accordance with his project of *bon sens*. Here *bon sens* falls under the Idol of the Public as it was no one’s theory in particular, but a general

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<sup>366</sup> N II, 155:26.28, *French Project*. “Mein Alkahest *du bon sens* besteht folglich in einem wunderthätigen Zirbeldrüsentheriack, der das französische Quecksilber in den feinsten Zellen des Gehirns fest macht.”

<sup>367</sup> N II, 155:29-31, *French Project*.

<sup>368</sup> N II, 156:5-7, *French Project*. “Wenn ein witziger Kopf von seiner Genesung urtheilen will, so darf er nur nach Gebrauch meines Alkahestes *du bon sens* diejenigen Bücher ansehen, die er vormals am meisten bewundert hat.”

knowledge and sensibility that was used to uphold the Enlightenment use of abstract reason.

### **Summary and Transition**

In the above discussion Hamann's aversion to any overarching entity controlling knowledge (be it cultural sentiment or embodied in a particular institution), in this case the broad idea of *bon sens*, falls under the Idol of the Public. Furthermore, the knowledge propagated by his epoch was idolatrous insofar as its very foundations were, although unacknowledged, based on principles established on faith and did not possess the absolute claims they purported.

### **Evolution of the Idolatry of Reason**

Autonomous reason, abstract reason, theoretical reason, pure reason, are all descriptions of different forms of Enlightenment reason, or rather, how the many people involved in Enlightenment philosophy utilized reason. Hamann suggests that all of the above types of "reason" were approaches and understandings fundamentally opposed to life. All are seen to be outside of both experience and that which is organic, living, and reproductive. Reason in the abstract failed to see its own reliance upon language and the accompanying insights brought forth (tradition, faith, etc.). The application of reason in the manner of his Enlightenment contemporaries had specific consequences, particularly in the propensity to create abstract philosophical systems. It is these systems that were to become the object of the respective thinker's faith in reason. In fact on multiple occasions, reason itself is connected to the notion of idolatry or the fanciful construct of something which can be considered a philosophical idol.

In this section multiple examples will be taken from Hamann's corpus to demonstrate the prevalence of his interpretation of abstract reason as either an idol or as responsible for the creation of an idol. Chronology will be adhered to as much as possible, exhibiting the extent to which Hamann had dealt with reason and its potential misuses critiqued throughout his authorship. Despite the common theme of reason and its misuse, his notion of reason is not static but develops over the course of time, where a certain amount of continuity alongside a continual evolution can be observed.

### **Reason in his Pre-published Works**

The *Biblical Observations* present a critical view of reason, but it was not yet the object of critique. For instance, "A philosopher who is too pleased with reason that he loses sight of the divine word is in the same situation as the Jews, who more stubbornly reject the New Testament the more firmly they cling to the old."<sup>369</sup> Here, one observes that Hamann held that reason employed by the philosopher is not yet superstitious but has potential to mislead. Elsewhere, "Reason does not allow us to discover anything more than what Job saw - - the misfortune of our birth - - precedence of the grave - - and the uselessness and insufficiency of human life, because we have no insights - - and passions and impulses fill us, whose purpose (*Absicht*) is unknown to us."<sup>370</sup> Reason is worldly, not something opposed to faith but limited in scope. In fact, the quote above suggests that

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<sup>369</sup> N I, 9:8-10, *Biblical Observations*, "Ein Philosoph, welcher der Vernunft zu gefallen das göttliche Wort aus den Augen setzt, ist in dem Fall der Juden, die desto hartnäckiger das neue Testament verwerfen, je fester sie an das alte zu hangen scheinen."

<sup>370</sup> N I, 147:3-7, *Biblical Observations*, "Die Vernunft entdeckt uns nicht mehr, als was Hiob sahe - - das Unglück unserer Geburt - - den Vorzug des Grabes - - und die Unnützlichkeit und Unhinlänglichkeit des menschlichen Lebens, weil wir keine Einsichten haben - - und Leidenschaften und Triebe in uns fühlen, deren Absicht uns unbekannt ist."

reason plays a significant role in developing faith: it reveals the vanity of life and the futile attempts to grasp life by one's own means and abilities.<sup>371</sup>

Later in the *Biblical Observations* there is indication that reason has a propensity to create false concepts, foreshadowing his future focus on the philosophical idolatry of abstract reason.<sup>372</sup> Generally throughout his early work (things written surrounding the time of his conversion around 1758) it is revelation which receives most of the attention, be it through nature or other people. "How the lowest of circumstances in the holy Scriptures are prophetic! Here two excesses of human reason that persist to our age are on display: to explain the voice of God through natural effects or through subordinate miracles."<sup>373</sup> The futility of the ability of reason to systematize our perceptions and give orientation is seen by Hamann early on in life. In fact, he speaks of knowledge being "piecemeal" (*Stückwerk*), again evincing what would later develop into a robust critique of the systematic and abstract aspects of reason employed by his contemporaries.<sup>374</sup> Near the end of the *Biblical Observations*, a passage in the commentary on the Gospel of Luke begins to place reason on its own, and adverse to the true knowledge of God. "This is one of the innumerable contradictions, which we find in our nature and whose resolution is impossible for us. Reason is inclined to serve an unknown God, but infinitely far away to know him. It does not want to know - - and even more astounding - - if it would know him,

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<sup>371</sup> Reiner Wild, in his explication of the *Aesthetica in Nuce*, notes how Hamann perceived in the emerging "Wissenschaft" the desire to control and command - much different to the humbler approach presented by Hamann. Wild Reiner, "Jeder Erscheinung der Natur war ein Wort," in *Hamann*, ed. Oswald Bayer, Bernhard Gajek, and Josef Simon, Erste Auflage, Insel-Almanach 1988 (Frankfurt am Main: Insel Verlag, 1987).

<sup>372</sup> N I 167:15-16, 18-21, *Biblical Observations*.

<sup>373</sup> N I, 217:31-35, *Biblical Observations*. "Wie die geringsten Umstände in der heiligen Schrift prophetisch sind! Hier sind zwey Ausschweifungen der menschlichen Vernunft angezeigt, die bis zu unsern Zeiten fortdauern. Die Stimme Gottes durch natürliche Wirkungen zu erklären oder durch untergeordnete Wunder."

<sup>374</sup> N I 167:26-27-



it would cease to serve him.”<sup>375</sup> Thus reason is adverse to true knowledge; it will gladly serve an unknown god (later one of its own construction), pushing aside revelation. He never claims that one should not utilize one’s reason; only that thought must be informed by much more.

Another text of his pre-published works deserving attention is his “Fragments” (Brocken), wherein he indicates his strong empiricism. This text is less personal, yet lays a foundation for his later assertions that would show up in the *Socratic Memorabilia* as well as elsewhere. “And whereupon is everything based? On five loafs of barley, the five senses, which we have in common with unreasoning animals. Not only is the entire storehouse of reason based on this floor, but the treasure house of faith itself.”<sup>376</sup> The importance of sense experience for both faith and reason is present. However, the focus of the role of language lacks development. It almost appears in the above quote as though faith is dependent on sense perception, whereas later Hamann focuses on the faith element in making sense of that which is perceived.

Although not fully formed – nor written for publication – even in the earliest stages of that which would serve as the catalyst of his authorship was present: empiricism, faith, and the inability of reason to attain true knowledge on its own. These early texts sowed the seeds of what would later come to fruition.

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<sup>375</sup> Hamann, *Londoner Schriften*, 286. (N I 224:13-17), *Biblical Observations*. “Dies ist einer von den unzähligen Widersprüchen, die wir in unserer Natur finden und deren Auflösung uns unmöglich ist. Die Vernunft ist geneigt, einem unbekanntem Gott zu dienen, aber unendlich entfernt ihn zu kennen. Sie will ihn nicht kennen - - und was noch erstaunender - - wenn sie ihn erkennt, so hört sie ihn auf zu dienen.”

<sup>376</sup> N I 298:14-17, *Brocken*. “Und worauf gründet sich alle? Auf 5 Gerstenbrodte, auf 5 Sinne, die wir mit den unvernünftigen Thieren gemeinschaftlich besitzen. Nicht nur das ganze Waarhaus der Vernunft sondern selbst die Schatzkammer des Glaubens beruhen auf diesem Stock.”

## Early Publications and Abstract Reason

The *Socratic Memorabilia*, published in 1759, was the first text of his authorship. Therein, Hamann's critique was more tempered regarding Enlightenment reason than it would later become. He had the rudimentary ideas but had yet to follow them to their foregone conclusions. Reason was indeed aligned with a form of worldly wisdom demonstrated by the oft quoted "Perhaps is the whole of history more mythology than it was thought by this philosopher [Bolingbroke], and like nature is a sealed book, a hidden testimony, a puzzle that does not let itself be unraveled without plowing with another calf than our reason."<sup>377</sup>

He begins the *Socratic Memorabilia* by accusing Kant and Berens of idolatry; however, it is their service to the spirit of the times and not necessarily to their use of reason, for which they are accused of idolatry. Of course, one characteristic of the spirit of the times would become the utilization of abstract reason in a philosophically idolatrous manner. However, in the *Socratic Memorabilia* it remains under development. Idolatry is connected to the public and this public has a predilection toward applying reason abstractly.

Another example from his early works is found in the "Clouds" (*Wolken*), where he states, "Reason is holy, right, and good; but through it comes nothing other than the awareness [*Erkenntnis*] of an exceedingly sinful nescience, which, if it becomes epidemic, will enter the wisdom of the world (*Weltweisheit*), as one of its own prophets has said, the

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<sup>377</sup> N II 65:9-13, *Socratic Memorabilia*. "Doch vielleicht ist die ganze Historie mehr Mythologie, als es dieser Philosoph meynt, und gleich der Natur ein versiegelt Buch, ein verdecktes Zeugnis, ein Räthsel, das sich nicht auflösen läßt, ohne mit einem andern Kalbe, als unserer Vernunft zu pflügen."

Methuselah among the *beaux-esprits* of this generation: *Les sages d'une Nation sont fous de la folie commune.*"<sup>378</sup> In this passage it is clear that reason has not yet become the abstract reason or Enlightenment reason criticized in his later works but, it was nevertheless unable to bring about a true knowledge of things, in fact it brought about the opposite – reason establishes the limitations of human knowledge. Note his emphasis on the necessity of faith for philosophy from the very beginning, whether in the texts written around his conversion or in the very broad ideas presented in the *Socratic Memorabilia*. It is almost as if Hamann, at this early stage, had not yet realized how instrumental the role of language and faith were to the application of reason in philosophical thought. In the above quote, philosophy is disconnected from reason in the sense that it is not based solely on the use of reason to the detriment of other modes of thought (tradition, history, language).

Some of his early essays were printed in a collection entitled, *Crusades of the Philologist (Kreuzzüge des Philologen)*, wherein there is a similar sentiment toward reason reflective of that described above. The target of his critique was the idolatrous philosophy of the philosophers of his day, as well as their respective individual misuses of reason. Also, his *Political Arithmetic (Arithmétique politique)* should be considered. Although it was not included in the *Crusades of the Philologist*, it belongs to this early period of his writings. In each of these texts there is considerable concern with the influence of French philosophy in Germany, with its perceived anti-Christian sentiments latent in the use of abstract reason. Reason was attached to a way of thinking, in this case the *bon sens*. In his essay, *Chimerical Thoughts (Chimärische Einfälle)*, he speaks of how, if reason had “flesh and blood”, it would

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<sup>378</sup> N II 108:19-24, *Brocken*. “Die Vernunft ist heilig, recht und gut; durch sie kommt aber nichts als Erkenntnis der überaus sündigen Unwissenheit, die, wenn sie epidemisch wird, in die Rechte der Weltweisheit tritt, wie einer aus ihnen gesagt hat, ihr eigen Prophet, der Metthysalah unter den *beaux-esprits* dieses Geschlechts: *Les sages d'une Nation sont fous de la folie commune.*”

not neglect the passions.<sup>379</sup> *Crusades of the Philologist*, which includes the influential essay *Aesthetica in Nuce*, focuses on the passions and the senses, “The senses and the passions speak and understand nothing but images. All the wealth of human knowledge and happiness consists in images. The first outburst of creation, and the first impression of its chronicler; - - the first manifestation and the first enjoyment of nature are united in the words: ‘Let there be light!’”<sup>380</sup> Philosophy had become “murderous” of nature by denying the senses their proper place in the respective philosophical endeavors, which aired on the side of abstraction. The remedy for these abstractions was, according to the *Aesthetica*, to give proper credence to the passions. “A philosopher such as Saul sets up monastic rules - - passion alone gives hands, feet, and wings to abstractions as well as to hypotheses; - to images and signs it gives spirit, life, and tongue.”<sup>381</sup> This point would later be focused more specifically on reason. It certainly had to do with the abstraction of nature and that was related to reason, but reason was less of a target than the philosophers themselves. Additionally, the fragmentary nature of our knowledge is emphasized: everything from the title, a “Rhapsody in Cabbalistic Prose” to the idea of nature as the *disjecti membra poetae*, all pointed to his conviction that every “devotion to a system is a leaven for the pure, sincere truth.”<sup>382</sup> This thought would later be attached directly to abstract, autonomous reason (i.e. Enlightenment reason). In support of his belief in the fragmentary nature of knowledge and the multifaceted nature of the human being – not to mention his humor –

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<sup>379</sup> N II 164:19. *Chimerical Thoughts*.

<sup>380</sup> Hamann, *Writings on Philosophy and Language*, 63, 64. *Aesthetica in Nuce*.

<sup>381</sup> Hamann, 81. *Aesthetica in Nuce*.

<sup>382</sup> To Jacobi, 9th of April 1786. “Jede Anhänglichkeit eines Systems ist ein Sauerteig für die reine, lautere Wahrheit.” Hamann and Jacobi, *Johann Georg Hamann’s, des Magus im Norden, Leben und Schriften*, 5 (Hamann’s Briefwechsel mit Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi):284–85.

he wrote reviews of his own works by other pseudonymous authors.<sup>383</sup> The use of pseudonyms in this way provides further justification for reading Hamann with the larger motive or idea of philosophical idolatry. Through the analysis of this common motif of philosophical idolatry, an underlying current present within the numerous pseudonymous texts can be achieved.

Interestingly, in these early writings all of the elements that form his critique of the superstition of his century were present: animosity towards system, emphasis on the passions, the priority of language, distaste for abstraction, etc. However, despite his energetic style and passionate rhetoric, he seemed to possess a greater hope for where philosophy could go. Keep in mind that Hamann's authorship extended from the late 1750's to the mid-1780s. Despite minor changes, though articulated in a more subdued manner in these early texts, they remain quite consistent but as they become more refined throughout the course of his life.

### **The Middle Years: the Critique of the Idolatry of Reason Coming to Fruition**

In Nadler's Edition of Hamann's work, Volumes II and III contain the longer philosophical works by Hamann. Between Hamann's publications in Volume II and those in Volume III there is a nine year gap. Hamann was active in the interim period, writing letters and articles in periodicals (e.g. *Königsberger Gelehrte und Politische Zeitung*). However, the Hamann who surfaced in his reviews and essays on Herder's text, *Treatise on the Origin of Language*, is much more critical of abstract reason.<sup>384</sup> These texts written in the middle of his authorship (beginning 1772), have a greater focus on Enlightenment reason as a cause

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<sup>383</sup> Dickson and Hamann, *Johann Georg Hamann's Relational Metacriticism*, 163.

<sup>384</sup> For the English translation of Herder's *Treatise* see, Herder, *Philosophical Writings*, 65–164.

of philosophical idolatry rather than his former focus on the misuse of reason by philosophers themselves. This is demonstrated in a quote from *The Last Will and Testament of the Knight of the Rose Cross*, “The confusion of language, by which however they seduce and are seduced [philosophers], is of course a very natural magic of automatic reason, to which it comes at little cost to be transformed into a star of the first magnitude, especially for the pranksters of like blindness.”<sup>385</sup> In this above quote it is *automatic reason* causing the confusing of language, and thereby taking away from the healthy use of both language and reason. Published in 1773, a year after the *Last Will and Testament*, the *New Apology of the Letter h* contained very explicate language condemning abstract reason and the attempts to submit tradition and experience to it. He even declares the assertions of “universal, sound, and practiced reason” to be, in fact, “lies”.<sup>386</sup> This type of language, despite all the signs that would lead to abstract reason being singled out, received no such explicit language in his early works (e.g. *Crusades of the Philologist*), thereby demonstrating the persistent evolution of his notion of the idol of abstract reason.

Language plays a more significant role in his critique as time progressed. In the *Aesthetica*, the original sensations are referred to as being words, with an emphasis on the role of transmission in conveying truths and ideas. In fact, it is the early works that warrant grouping Hamann in the Sturm und Drang movement as well as a type of proto-Romantic.<sup>387</sup> In the middle of his authorship, language takes on the primary role in both attacking abstract reason and in tying together the various faculties of human knowledge.

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<sup>385</sup> Hamann, *Writings on Philosophy and Language*, 106. *Last Will and Testament of the Knight of the Rose Cross*.

<sup>386</sup> Hamann, 161. *New Apology of the Letter h*.

<sup>387</sup> Helmut Gipper and Peter Schmitter, *Sprachwissenschaft und Sprachphilosophie im Zeitalter der Romantik: E. Beitr. zur Historiographie d. Linguistik*, Tübinger Beiträge Zur Linguistik; 123 (Tübingen: Narr, 1979), 60–76.; Jørgensen, “Hamanns Streitkultur.”

The contingency of reason is also overtly addressed. “The *stamina* and *menstrua* of our reason are thus in the truest understanding revelations and traditions.”<sup>388</sup> Another instance where reason is further specified and critiqued in this period is located in, *Beylage zun Denkwürdigkeiten des seligen Sokrates*, published 1774, fifteen years after *Socratic Memorabilia*. Hamann speaks of the “Vanity of dogmatic and polemical reason that will shrug its shoulders in its moral sentimental blissfulness (*Emfindseligkeit*).”<sup>389</sup> Enlightenment reason is being singled out, not as a means to reveal sin or as misapplied by an arrogant philosophy, but as something detrimental and leading to idolatry.

Another text of from this middle period, written in 1775, the *Hierophantische Briefe*, the connection of reason to idolatry is evident. “Wherein does idolatry exist, this cardinal vice of paganism? – with children in the lust for every forbidden fruit- with man hunters (Menschenjäger) of a philosophical-poetic imagination, in their systematic construction of a tower without a visible tip.”<sup>390</sup> It is abstract reason that creates these systems and hence, not only leads to idolatry, but the dependency on abstract reason becomes a superstition. Here it has been shown that in the middle of Hamann’s authorship – the early to middle 1770’s – there is a marked turn toward both an even greater and focused role of language in his philosophy and the problematic and even superstitious elements of abstract reason employed by his century.

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<sup>388</sup> Hamann, *Writings on Philosophy and Language*, 116. N III 39:13-15, *Philological Ideas and Doubts*. “Die *stamina* und *menstrua* unsrer Vernunft sind daher im eigentlichen Verstande Offenbarungen und Ueberlieferungen.”

<sup>389</sup> N III 118:3-4, *Beylage zun Denkwürdigkeiten des seligen Sokrates*. “Eitelkeit dogmatischer und polemischer Vernunft und ihrer moralischen Emfindseligkeit die Achseln zucken wird.”

<sup>390</sup> N III 158:8-12, *Hierophantish Letters*. “Worinn besteht endlich die Abgötterey, dies Hauptlaster des Heidentums? – Bey Kindern in der Lüsterheit nach jeder verbotenen Gartenfrucht – Bey Menschenjägern von philosophisch-poetischer Einbildungskraft, in dem systematischen Bau eines Thurms von unabsehbarer Spitze.”

## The Idol of Abstract Reason Fully Developed

Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* provided Hamann with the opportunity to speak on reason itself as Kant's book was already addressing it specifically. Hamann received early proofs of the *Critique of Pure Reason* from his publisher in 1781.<sup>391</sup> From that point on it would become the most serious piece of philosophical thought reflected on by Hamann. He would go on to reference it throughout his correspondence with Herder and Jacobi among others. Outside of his letters and their multiple references, Hamann wrote both a review as well as the *Metacritique* addressing the content of the *Critique of Pure Reason*.<sup>392</sup> It is in this later period of Hamann's authorship that the full development of his critique of the idol of abstract reason culminated.

Bear in mind that he held a high degree of respect for Kant. Despite the directness of his critique, in other places Hamann demonstrates more reserved judgment. For instance, "He [Kant], as I assume, speaks more modestly without hypocrisy of revelation and seems to take it as part of his interest."<sup>393</sup> This is still far from giving his stamp of approval, but does show that he regarded Kant to be honestly pursuing knowledge and respected his abilities. He once humorously noted, "My poor head is a broken pot against Kant's – clay

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<sup>391</sup> To I. F. Hartknoch, April 8, 1781.

<sup>392</sup> Since the focus here is on the evolution of Hamann's view of abstract reason as idolatrous, the reader might consult the following for a more specific explication of the *Metacritique*. Cf. Oswald Bayer, *Vernunft ist Sprache: Hamanns Metakritik Kants*, ed. Benjamin Gleede and Ulrich Moustakas, *Spekulation und Erfahrung*, Bd. 50 (Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt: Frommann-Holzboog, 2002).

<sup>393</sup> To Jacobi, April 9, 1786. "Er [Kant], wie ich vermuthe, ohne Heuchelei von der Offenbarung bescheidener redet und selbige mit in sein Interesse zu ziehen scheint."



against iron”.<sup>394</sup> Hamann also had gratitude for Kant, particularly his kind treatment of Hamann’s son.<sup>395</sup>

Despite his respect for Kant, reason crafted into an idol would come under direct scrutiny in his *Metacritique*. This work can be interpreted as nothing less than a complete dismantling of the idea of pure reason as the entity whereby thought is generated. Hamann attempted to reveal its idolatrous nature by demonstrating that pure reason cannot exist in the way Kant asserted that it did. In the *Metacritique* many of the themes that have been addressed in the course of this study are taken up.

Hamann was aware that Kant sought to chart a course between Wolffian rationalism and Humian empiricism. However, Kant remained within the Cartesian focus on the *cogito*, holding to the superiority of the interior to that of the exterior according to Hamann.<sup>396</sup> Consequently Kant’s philosophy fell into a similar position as that of Hamann’s other interlocutors. Hamann deemed that Kant was engaging in a philosophy that was arrogant, serving an idol of its own creation: pure reason.

Hamann is concerned with Kant’s “pure reason”, but also with abstract reason in a broader sense. At the time of the writing of the *Metacritique*, Kant’s other critiques had yet to be published.<sup>397</sup> Hamann does not make the Kantian differentiation between pure reason,

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<sup>394</sup> ZH V, 108. This translation was taken from, Bayer, *A Contemporary in Dissent*, 154.

<sup>395</sup> ZH V, 432. To Herder, May 8, 1785. “Kant hat mich auch durch Erkenntlichkeit für meinen Sohn gefeßelt, um eben wie Sie jedes Misverhältnis zu vermeiden.” Also, To Jacobi, April 9, 1786. “Alle meine Verbindlichkeiten, die ich ihm schuldig bin, und daß Michael alle seine Collegia die Erlaubniß hat zu hören, soll mich nicht abhalten, so zu schreiben, als ich denke.” Hamann and Jacobi, *Johann Georg Hamann’s, des Magus im Norden, Leben und Schriften*, 5 (Hamann’s Briefwechsel mit Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi):285.

<sup>396</sup> Alexander, *Johann Georg Hamann Philosophy and Faith*, 138.

<sup>397</sup> Cf. Immanuel Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, trans. Paul Guyer and Eric Matthews, 11. print, The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Immanuel Kant, general ed.: Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood[...] (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2009). See also, Immanuel Kant, “Critique of Practical Reason,” in

practical reason, and judgment. Although working at times closely with the *Critique of Pure Reason*, Hamann's critique was to be applied broadly to the Enlightenment use of reason as a whole.

### **The Reoccurrence of the Importance of Faith and Sense Experience**

Among the hidden mysteries the problem of which (let alone the solution) has apparently not yet entered into a philosopher's heart is the possibility of the human knowledge of objects of experience and after this without and before any experience and after this the possibility of a sensible intuition before any sensation of an object. The matter and form of a Transcendental Doctrine of Elements and Method is grounded on this double impossibility.<sup>398</sup>

Hamann's reoccurring critique of abstract reason being independent from experience is as clear as ever, he still sees a bifurcation of reason and experience in Kant. Reason remains abstract, disconnected from life – at least in Hamann's conception of it. He speaks of something higher and self-evident that needs no concept in order to speak of reason as an “object or source of knowledge or even as kind of knowledge”, which is language with its empirical and subjective elements.<sup>399</sup> In the *Metacritique*, Hamann goes on to present his three purifications of philosophy. These provide probably the clearest moment of

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*Practical Philosophy*, trans. Mary J. Gregor, 1. paperback ed., 9. print, The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Immanuel Kant, general ed.: Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood[...] (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 133–272.

<sup>398</sup> Hamann, *Writings on Philosophy and Language*, 206. N III, 283:18-23, “Zu den verborgenen Geheimnissen, derer Aufgabe geschweige ihre Auflösung noch in keines Philosophen Herz gekommen seyn soll, gehört die Möglichkeit menschlicher Erkenntnis von Gegenständen der Erfahrung ohne und vor aller Erfahrung und hiernächst die Möglichkeit einer sinnlichen Anschauung vor aller Empfindung eines Gegenstandes. Auf dieser doppelten Un=Möglichkeit und dem mächtigen Unterschiede.”

<sup>399</sup> Hamann, 206, 207. *Metacritique of the Purism of Reason*.

addressing his epoch's false use of reason – demonstrating how it had been turned into an idol.

### **The First Purification of Philosophy**

In the most recent translation of Hamann into English there is an error due to a faulty translation. It translates the word “philosophy” into “reason” in the beginning of Hamann’s purifications of philosophy. Although not entirely skewing the argument, the translation is incorrect and misleading in regards to the overall focus of the argument. It is philosophy which has sought to create and use reason in this abstract way. This shifts the focus on how philosophy (and philosophers) has utilized reason and not that reason itself is necessarily superstitious itself. One sees that it is philosophy that has created an idol out of the application of abstract reason and not, as the translation would suggest, the other way around. Hence, the following quote is the author’s own translation.

“The first purification of philosophy consisted, namely, in the partly misunderstood, partly failed attempt to make reason independent from all transmission, tradition and faith.”<sup>400</sup> This is the most concise of Hamann’s purifications and is not entirely conclusive in refuting the use of reason by his contemporaries.<sup>401</sup> Yet this claim gains greater persuasive power with the additional purifications and serves as the foundation of his critique. The implication in the first purification, that reason is dependent on faith and on historical

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<sup>400</sup> The incorrect translation referenced above reads, “The first purification of reason consisted in the partly misunderstood, partly failed attempt to make reason independent of all tradition and custom and belief in them.” Hamann, 207. N III 284:7-9, *Metacritique of the Purism of Reason*. “Die erste Reinigung der Philosophie bestand nemlich in dem theils misverstandenen, theils mislungenen Versuch, die Vernunft von aller Ueberlieferung, Tradition und Glauben daran unabhängig zu machen.”

<sup>401</sup> This points back to the beginning of his *Metacritique*, where Hamann draws attention to the fact that Hume was dependent on Berkley, and Kant on Hume. Therefore, Kant is engaging in a historical endeavor. It is not that reason was now finally being analyzed on its own.

contingency, reveals the essential elements of Hamann's critique of philosophical idolatry. The attempt to separate reason from transmission (i.e. tradition) and history is misunderstood. Hamann spends much time demonstrating the essential nature of history when doing philosophy. All knowledge is historically contingent and any attempt to disregard this is bound to fail. In conjunction with Hamann's broad notion of faith (as analyzed in Chapter II), any attempt to extrapolate reason from contingency was something he saw as futile and unachievable. The following purifications further show how the utilization of abstract reason by reason was untenable.

### **The Second Purification of Philosophy**

The second [purification] is even more transcendent and comes to nothing less than independence from experience and its every day induction. After a search of two thousand years for who knows what beyond experience, reason not only suddenly despairs of the progressive course of its predecessors but also defiantly promises impatient contemporaries delivery, and this in a short time, of that general and infallible philosopher's stone, indispensable for Catholicism and despotism. Religion will submit its sanctity to it right away, and law-giving its majesty, especially at the final close of a critical century when empiricism on both sides, struck blind, makes its own nakedness daily more suspect and ridiculous.<sup>402</sup>

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<sup>402</sup> Hamann, *Writings on Philosophy and Language*, 207–8. N III, 284:10-21, *Metacritique of the Purism of Reason*. "Die zweite ist noch transcendenter, und läuft auf nichts weniger als eine Unabhängigkeit von der Erfahrung und ihrer alltäglichen Induction hinaus - Denn, nachdem die Vernunft über 2000 Jahre, man weiß nicht was? jenseits der Erfahrung gesucht, verzagt sie nicht nur auf einmahl an der progressiven Laufbahn ihrer Vorfahren, sondern verspricht auch mit eben so viel Trotz dem ungedultigen Zeitverwandten, und zwar in kurzer Zeit, jenen allgemeinen und zum Katholicismo und Despotismo nothwendigen und unfehlbaren Stein der Weisen, dem die Religion ihre Heiligkeit und die Gesetzgebung ihre Majestät flugs unterwerfen wird, besonders in der letzten Neige eines kritischen Jahrhunderts, wo beyderseitiger Empirismus, mit Blindheit geschlagen, seine eigene Blöße von Tag zu Tag verdächtiger u. lächerlicher macht."

A few important points that further his concept and critique of reason are found in the second purification of philosophy. Here one finds support for Hamann being against abstract reason, but not reason per se - he is against the construct of reason created by his contemporaries. His contemporaries not only neglected the limitations of reason, but sought to dispense with the history of philosophy and thought in favor of their own version of the “philosopher’s stone” (i.e. in this case, abstract reason). Hamann connects this to an attempt at an absolute philosophy cut off from history. Although the reference to the philosopher’s stone is bit a cryptic, it is nevertheless essential for the purification of philosophy. It relates to the first purification in recognizing the historical break sometimes interpreted by Enlightenment philosophy. This reference also highlights the perceived dogmatism of his contemporaries. Philosophy had turned its use of abstract reason into a philosopher’s stone of sorts. This could then be used to suppress and justify disparate claims and set up a totalizing system, which in Hamann’s thought is despotic. Therefore he equates this with Catholicism, which was seen by Hamann as despotic due to its systematization.<sup>403</sup>

It follows logically that once the root of the transmission of history through language is cut, empiricism is blinded; for without something beyond it to give orientation (i.e. language which is dependent on history) empiricism has no other means of providing understanding of the perceived world. This position reinforces the opinion that Hamann

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<sup>403</sup> The reference to religion and law-giving is referencing directly a footnote in Kant’s *Critique*. Cf. “Our age is, in especial degree, the age of criticism, and to criticism everything must submit. Religion through its sanctity, and law-giving through its majesty, may seek to exempt themselves from it. But they then awaken just suspicion, and cannot claim the sincere respect which reason accords only to that which has been able to sustain these tests of free and open examination.” Kant, *Immanuel Kant’s Critique of Pure Reason*, A xi.

rejects all modern developments; here he indicates that philosophy is always developing. It is the break with the past that is detrimental.<sup>404</sup>

### **The Third Purification of Philosophy**

The third, highest, and, as it were, empirical purism is therefore concerned with language, the only, first, and last organon and criterion of reason, with no credentials but tradition (*Überlieferung*) and usage. But it is almost the same with this idol as it was with the ideal of reason for that ancient [Simonides]. The longer one deliberates, the more deeply and inwardly one is struck dumb and loses all desire to speak. 'Woe to the tyrants when God troubles himself about them! Why then do they seek after Him? Mene, mene, tekkel to the sophists! Their small change will be found wanting and their banks (*Wechselbank*) broken!<sup>405</sup>

As might be expected, the quintessential purification of philosophy comes down to language, which ties together the first and second purifications of philosophy. Language comes through the senses and is, therefore, inherently empirical. The meaning of the linguistic content comes through historical transmission; and faith underlies the reception of language.<sup>406</sup> Language is not the terminus, as indicated in the quote above. It is not as though if one recognizes reason as being dependent upon language that it would

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<sup>404</sup> This is more evidence against Isaiah Berlin's conjectures that Hamann was reacting in a way that pushed aside modern developments in favor of a superstitious past. Also, this pushes back against Radical Orthodoxy using Hamann as an ally in their crusade against secularity (Betz, Milbank). This is not to say that Hamann did not have his reservations of what would later be secularity, but his solution was not bound to a harkening back to a former "Christian" society.

<sup>405</sup> Hamann, *Writings on Philosophy and Language*, 208. N III, 284:23-32, *Metacritique of the Purism of Reason*. "Der dritte höchste und gleichsam empirische Purismus betrifft also noch die Sprache, das einzige erste und letzte Organon und Kriterion der Vernunft, ohne ein ander Creditiv als Ueberlieferung und Usum. Es geht aber einem auch beinah mit diesem Idol, wie jenem Alten, mit dem Ideal der Vernunft. Je länger man noch denkt, desto tiefer und inniger man verstummt und alle Lust zu reden verliert. Weh den Tyrannen, wenn sich Gott um sie bekommern wird! wozu fragen sie also nach Ihm? Mene, mene, tekkel den Sophisten! ihre Scheidemünze wird zu leicht gefunden und ihre Wechselbank zu brochen werden!!"

<sup>406</sup> Hamann's ideas regarding this subject matter are covered in Chapter II.

immediately lead to a pure philosophy void of epistemological challenges. Hence, Hamann states that language is “the same with this idol [reason]”; that is, language itself can become an idol. This does not detract from his argument but further informs it. One cannot substitute a general idea or concept and expect it to suffice for navigating the intricacies of human life. Hence Hamann’s suggest that even language might become only a fabrication of the schools.<sup>407</sup> Elevating language to the level that philosophy had elevated abstract reason would only be to create another idol. The comments pertaining to the potential of language to be employed in a similar fashion to that of abstract reason indicate Hamann’s attempt to guard against any form of philosophical idolatry. He does not want to swap one system or idol for another.

The address to the tyrants contained in this third purification relates to the despotic nature of the idol of reason. The “Mene mene tekel” suggests that the philosophy employed by his contemporaries has been weighed – presumably by these purifications – and has been found wanting. The “banks being broken” – most likely a reference to Jesus’ overturning the money changers’ tables at the temple – indicates the duplicitous manner in which his contemporaries were employing abstract reason.

The comments on the dissolution of meaning due to intense deliberation correspond with the dependent nature of the faculties of knowledge. Since all thought is interdependent, one specific faculty of knowledge is insufficient – be it experience, language, or reason. The more one seeks to define one of these faculties, the less clear they become. This relates to Hamann’s technique of looking to the foundational principles of a

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<sup>407</sup> Language is indeed concrete as it is received in the senses. It nevertheless remained allusive to Hamann: he was carefree in his criticism of concepts but was still searching for a key “to the abyss” of language. ZH V, 177.

given system – which must be believed – before grappling with the specific elements of an individual system (in this case, Kant’s). Following the three purifications in the *Metacritique*, Hamann goes on to deal more specifically with Kant’s pure. Hamann’s text shifts to a more specific critique of the *Critique of Pure Reason* and the ambiguities found therein.

### **Foundational Disagreements and the Idol of Reason**

Hamann casts doubt on the foundational principles of Kant’s system of philosophy, expounding upon that which was suggested in the three purifications of philosophy. The approach employed parallels his critique of Mendelssohn’s concept of a “state of nature” in *Golgotha and Schiblimini!*<sup>408</sup> Whether utilizing quotes from secondary sources or direct language Hamann sows the seed of doubt by pointing out potential contradictions and foundational faith-based elements.

Within the *Metacritique*, there is the recurrent use of religious terminology in the context of addressing philosophical concepts, thus continuing to allude to the faith-based nature of reason. An example of this is his attempt to make some of Kant’s postulates preposterous by referencing the “hypostatic union” of common language and the “transubstantiation of subjective conditions.”<sup>409</sup> This language would certainly not belong to a discussion on pure reason in Kant’s eyes – and “transubstantiation” in particular would not, as it would fall into some superstitious Roman Catholic doctrine. These references are not pointed out in order to demonstrate that the Kantian Critique was in some way

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<sup>408</sup> Both texts were developed out of an initial idea of critiquing Kant but later were split into two: one addressing Mendelssohn, the other Kant. Cf. Betz, *After Enlightenment*, 221.

<sup>409</sup> Hamann, *Writings on Philosophy and Language*, 213. *Metacritique of the Purism of Reason*.



fruitless, but to emphasize the manner in which Hamann viewed the philosophy of his age as engaging in philosophical idolatry. One way to do this was to amalgamate religious doctrinism with Enlightenment philosophy.

The nature of language – its empirical, conceptual, and historical aspects – plays a significant role in casting doubt on Kant's *a priori* assertions such as something = x (covered in the previous section on superstition)<sup>410</sup> and the *a priori* nature of space and time. For Hamann, words are the true *a priori*. In both history and usage words acquire a meaning that cannot be simply derived by the understanding; words have a basis in sense perception, hence they are also *a posteriori*.<sup>411</sup> Consequently, in Hamann's view, the very foundations of Kant's assertions are inaccurate. It is not space and time but words that are *a priori*.<sup>412</sup>

A full discussion of how and to what degree Hamann understood Kant and what such a critique might mean would require a much more intense look at the Kantian project. However, this would only serve to distract from the overall argument contained in the present study. To reiterate, this has already been done by other scholars and would detract from serving the overall purpose of reading Hamann's philosophy as a critique of the idolatry of his age.<sup>413</sup>

Since the object of Kant's critique was pure reason, it is not surprising to find Hamann's clearest statements regarding how abstract reason was a creation by

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<sup>410</sup> On page 98 and 99.

<sup>411</sup> Hamann, *Writings on Philosophy and Language*, 211. N III, 286:14, *Metacritique of the Purism of Reason*.

<sup>412</sup> Hamann, 211. *Metacritique of the Purism of Reason*.

<sup>413</sup> Axel Weishoff, *Wider den Purismus der Vernunft: J. G. Hamanns sakral-rhetorischer Ansatz zu einer Metakritik des Kantischen Kritizismus*, Kulturwissenschaftliche Studien zur deutschen Literatur (Opladen: Westdt. Verl, 1998), 89–146. See also, Bayer, *Vernunft ist Sprache*.

Enlightenment philosophy in his critique of Kant. It was not only the misapplication of reason which led to the creation of the idol of a “state of nature”, the public, or orthographic reform, but was itself an object of adulation which, according to Hamann, was only the fabrication of his contemporaries. The idol of reason manifests itself when reason is interpreted as *the* faculty of thought. That reason governs humankind’s relation to the world, and furthermore, that reason can be addressed unrelated to the subject is where the idolatry begins.<sup>414</sup> Hamann conjectures that abstract reason resembles Gnosticism in its hatred of matter.<sup>415</sup> He holds this to be detrimental, in that instead of focusing on the subject, reason possesses, “an old, cold prejudice for mathematics” due to its, “universal and necessary reliability”.<sup>416</sup> The futility of this attempt is brought forth by Hamann in the quote below:

If then a chief question indeed still remains – how is the faculty of thought possible? the faculty to think right and left, before and without, with and beyond experience? – then no deduction is needed to demonstrate the genealogical priority of language, and its heraldry, over the seven holy functions of logical propositions and inferences. Not only is the entire faculty of thought founded on language...but language is also the counterpoint of reason’s misunderstanding with itself.<sup>417</sup>

Hamann proceeds in his discussion of the *a priori* nature of language and the conception of knowledge being founded on both the sensibility and understanding. Pure reason had essentially cut off the sensibility by ignoring language. The idolatry was manifest in the

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<sup>414</sup> Hamann explicitly states that, “the synthesis of the predicate with the subject” is “the proper object of pure reason”. Hamann, *Writings on Philosophy and Language*, 209.

<sup>415</sup> Hamann, 209. *Metacritique of the Purism of Reason*.

<sup>416</sup> Hamann, 210–11. *Metacritique of the Purism of Reason*.

<sup>417</sup> Hamann, 211. *Metacritique of the Purism of Reason*.

quest for universality. Pure reason ignores essential elements of human knowledge, and attempts to attain universal knowledge on its own by whatever means deemed necessary. It is this “pure reason, christened *per antiphrasin*, and its metaphysics which serve the prevailing indifferentism.”<sup>418</sup> Pure reason is christened by antiphrasis – that is, it is the opposite of what it purports to be – insofar as it ignores the foundations upon which it rests and serves the ambitions of the age. According to Hamann, pure reason is not so much interested in attaining true knowledge, but is utilized by Enlightenment philosophers in service of the presuppositions of the age. Reason was the idol of the philosophy of the age of Enlightenment.

One of the final remarks in the *Metacritique* points to Hamann’s resolution to the idolatry of philosophy. He states, “And what the transcendental philosophy metagrabolizes I have, for the sake of the weak readers, transferred in a figure to the sacrament of language, the letter of its elements, the spirit of its institution, and I leave it to each one to unclench the closed fist into an open palm.”<sup>419</sup> Language – and all its theological, historical, and empirical elements – was that which his contemporaries overlooked in favor of systems and faiths [read. idols] of their own creation. In the end it was a disposition that could only be changed in the individual to decide to open the closed fist to receive Hamann’s insights.

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<sup>418</sup> Hamann, 211–12. *Metacritique of the Purism of Reason*.

<sup>419</sup> Hamann, 218. N III, 289:20–24, *Metacritique of the Purism of Reason*. “Was die Transzendentalphilosophie metagrabolosirt, 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.”

## Summary

The intention of this chapter has been to demonstrate the specific idols of thought that had been constructed by Hamann's contemporaries in their application of abstract reason. Furthermore, how abstract reason was used as a tool for the construction of philosophical idols was elucidated, as well as how it was later considered an idol in and of itself. The commonalities of these varying systems can be tied together by the notion of idolatry. These philosophical systems all aspired to some form of abstraction, not giving enough precedence to experience. They sought a totality of knowledge with no regard to contingency. Their own faith-based foundations were overlooked, causing them to fall into philosophical superstition. Above all, they proceeded with an unprecedented arrogance in regards to the veracity of their own endeavors. Hamann's authorship was driven by what he determined were abuses of his age. His authorship was corrective to what he saw as an underlying superstition and adherence to the philosophical idols constructed thereof. It is the contention of the present study that reading Hamann in this way allows for a more complete and unified understanding of his authorship and its philosophical motivation. For all of Hamann's corrective intentions there are positive elements to his thought that can be discerned concerning reason, language, and philosophy. This will be discussed in the following chapter.

## Chapter IV

After the devastating critique of the thought of his time, there are a few questions that are in need of being answered: can anything be positively constructed out of Hamann's authorship, and if so, to what degree might it be employed when approaching philosophical questions? Furthermore, why and how Hamann's thought avoids falling into his own critique of the superstition that leads to philosophical idolatry will be addressed.<sup>420</sup> This chapter posits a manner in which to read Hamann constructively. This is to say that Hamann, at least in his own understanding, was able to come to terms with the tension presented by his own approach. Additionally, how his Christianity affected his thought and also how it avoided the idolatry of system will be discussed.

Anyone seeking to sum up Hamann's thought is caught in a bit of a quandary, specifically, how to adequately summarize the thought of a figure resisting the idea of that very possibility. Due to the diversity of subject matter and, at times, esoteric statements, it can be tempting to pull various quotes from Hamann's authorship in order to place him into a clear category of thinker. Normally this has amounted to turning him into a good Lutheran or Pietist, pre-deconstructionist or theological conservative, mystic or philosopher of language, to name just a few categorizations.<sup>421</sup> In one way or another, Hamann is all of these and none of them. Therefore, going forward it is not the desire of this study to present a version of Hamann competing against these other prescriptive

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<sup>420</sup> It has been implied, and is indeed present in some of the various quotes, that Hamann does not personally ascribe to pessimism or nihilism. In fact, he conjectures that something similar to nihilism is the final outcome of his contemporaries approach. E.g. When Hamann speaks of two dead halves when convictions are severed from actions. See, *Golgotha and Sheblimini!*. Hamann, 179.

<sup>421</sup> Karl Pruter, *The Teachings of the Great Mystics* (San Bernardino, Calif.: Borgo Pr., 1985), 79-83.; Henry Corbin, *Hamann, Philosophe du Luthéranisme* (Paris: Berg International, 1985).

conceptions of his thought. Here, the intention is to exhibit how Hamann's thought - specifically his approach to knowledge - corrected the idolatry of abstract reason. The philosophical repercussions of Hamann's critique of superstition and idolatry will be analyzed through the notion of a *hermeneutics of humility*.<sup>422</sup> This term, however limited, helps express a Hamannian approach which takes faith and its relation to the interdependency of the faculties of knowledge, convivial reasoning, and the contingency of history into account.<sup>423</sup>

### **Hermeneutics of Humility**

This study considers Hamann's thought or approach a *disposition*.<sup>424</sup> This word fits Hamann well as he did not wish to establish a school or a philosophy that potential followers might attempt to further (e.g. Wolffian Rationalism, Kantian Transcendental

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<sup>422</sup> The connection to humility and hermeneutics in Hamann has received some comment in the past. Heinzpeter Hempelmann pointed out that humility (Demut) was the foundational principal for Hamann's Hermeneutics. Heinzpeter Hempelmann, *Gott, ein Schriftsteller! Johann Georg Hamann über die End-Äusserung Gottes ins Wort der Heiligen Schrift und ihre hermeneutischen Konsequenzen*, Monographien und Studienbücher (Wuppertal: R. Brockhaus, 1988), 24. However, Hempelmann is focused on explicating the idea of the condescension of God and its consequences for hermeneutics. He does not specifically address further a Hamannian approach or what the tenets of such an approach might be. Often humility is not connected directly to hermeneutics as it is influenced by Hamann's idea of the condescension of God. E.g. H. A. Salmony, *Johann Georg Hamanns metakritische Philosophie 1. Bd.: Einführung in die metakritische Philosophie J. G. Hamanns* (Freiburg, 1958), 188. While the idea of God humbling himself is undoubtedly important for Hamann's approach, it does not contain the entirety of Hamann's philosophical ideas. In fact, due to the clarity of the *Biblical Observations*, it can be tempting to focus entirely on them. However, it will be argued here that specific elements of a Hamannian hermeneutics can be delineated. In the present study this insight fall under the *hermeneutics of humility*.

<sup>423</sup> Ulrich Moustakas works in hermeneutics and theology within Hamann in his, *Urkunde und Experiment*. However, the subject matter differs significantly from the present idea of the *hermeneutics of humility* in important respects. Firstly, Moustakas' focus is reconciling Hamann within the field of theological hermeneutics, specifically the relationship between the natural sciences and theology. Secondly, the hermeneutics therein relate to Hamann's theology of creation and connecting it to the natural sciences. Here the idea of the condescension of God in creation informs the hermeneutical approach set forth. Condescension having informed Hamann's approach, the specific theological idea presented by Moustakas is not Hamann's hermeneutical approach, but how Hamann's thought applies to theology and the natural sciences. Cf. Ulrich Moustakas, *Urkunde und Experiment: neuzeitliche Naturwissenschaft im Horizont einer hermeneutischen Theologie der Schöpfung bei Johann Georg Hamann*, Theologische Bibliothek Töpelmann, Bd. 114 (Berlin ; New York: W. de Gruyter, 2003), 285.

<sup>424</sup> The German equivalent would be "Gesinnung" or "Grundeinstellung".

idealism). In fact, Hamann actively took steps to evade being pinned down by anyone for theological or philosophical purposes. Yet by writing to reprove his century, an implicit approach or counterpoint cannot be averted. Hamann utilized a myriad of methods entrenched in pseudonyms and intertextuality while retaining his unique voice. He had a particular *disposition* for approaching matters of philosophy. By observing the key elements of this disposition one might extrapolate an approach inherent therein.

It is important to note that for Hamann human knowledge, philosophical or otherwise, begins with the subject: all experience must be interpreted. As such, knowledge about the world is always a way of reading the world. This helps justify speaking of a hermeneutical element to philosophical knowledge and reasoning.

By focusing on the faith-based foundations of the principles of his contemporaries, he drew attention to the subjective nature of knowledge. This furthered the *interpretive* aspect of the subjects' understanding of the world. Faith is inherently subjective. The object of faith can be mutual, yet faith itself comes down to the subject. Therefore, if his contemporaries were dependent upon faith in their principles and systems, there was no purely objective philosophical knowledge that could be derived solely by abstract reason.

On some occasions Hamann reveals the dilemma presented by his own insights and his focus on language. For example, "Reason is language, λόγος; on this marrowbone I gnaw and will gnaw myself to death. For me there still remains a darkness over this depth: I am still waiting on an apocalyptic angel with a key to this abyss."<sup>425</sup> Elsewhere, "Here [in

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<sup>425</sup> ZH V, 177, To Herder, August 6, 1784, "Vernunft ist Sprache λόγος; an diesem Markknochen nag' ich und werde mich zu Tod drüber nagen. Noch bleibt es immer finster über diese Tiefe für mich: Ich warte noch immer auf einen apokalypitschen Engel mit einem Schlüssel zu diesem Abgrund."

language] lies pure reason and at the same time its critique – and the eternal disputes over its boundaries will remain until language stops with prophecies and the recognition of truth.”<sup>426</sup> Again, nothing is finalized in regards to the boundary of reason and language. Presumably this dispute will continue until there would be no more language or reason as Hamann held that language implies a prophetic, eschatological element.<sup>427</sup>

Also present in his critique was that merely recognizing the faith-based elements of all of thought does not solve the problem of the subject's knowledge of the world: it only puts one on the right track. Ordering experience is done by the understanding, by reasoning, however, this is not the concept of abstract reason advanced by his contemporaries. In contrast to his contemporaries, Hamann embraced the idea that reason is something done by individuals in relation to other entities (internal and external). Hamann speaks of his own reason and that of other individuals. For instance, in his *Biblical Observations* during a discussion regarding the condescension of God he stated, “Each had understood his own language (Sprache) and no one that of the other. Descartes had his reason, Leibniz his, Newton his...”<sup>428</sup> Hamann closely connected language to reason and the individual's subjective role in utilizing language. This indicates that he held that reasoning is an activity of the individual. Despite the emphasis on interpretation and subjectivity, this did not lead Hamann to purport a radical relativity, which he circumvents through

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<sup>426</sup> ZH V, 360. To Scheffner, February 11, 1785. “Hier liegt reine Vernunft und zugleich ihre Kritik – und die ewigen Grenzstreitigkeiten werden so lange währen, bis die Sprache aufhört mit Weissagungen und Erkenntniß.”

<sup>427</sup> This is another reason why atheistic claims to truth or morality are religious in Hamann's view. As all language touches upon that which is beyond the spirit of observation or abstract reason there is no getting outside the mythical in terms of explaining human existence.

<sup>428</sup> Hamann, *Londoner Schriften*, 89. “Jeder hat seine Sprache verstanden und keiner des andern, Cartes hat seine Vernunft, Leibniz seine, Newton seine, eigene verstanden, verstehen sie sich daher besser untereinander selbst.”



language. Individuals reason with language, and it transcends the mere subjective elements of the individual. Additionally, sense experience was revelation that – although needing interpretation – was real. It was not the self *creating* the world or the self *ordering* the world, but rather it was the self working to *read* the language given in the senses.

These insights lead to the question: how does one go about acquiring knowledge and communicating with others? The fact that Hamann wrote and engaged with his contemporaries reveals that he ascribed to a form of reasoning and communication capable of developing and coming to conclusions. The human capacity of reasoning and knowing bases itself on contingency and the interdependency of the faculties of knowledge. However, this does not leave the subject to grapple with the world without the aid of rationality. The point is that one's reason is neither independent nor *a priori*, according to Hamann.

In a letter to Wizenmann Hamann wrote, “By the tree of knowledge we are robbed of the fruit of life.”<sup>429</sup> Hamann advocated life over knowledge. This did not mean that he wanted philosophy to cease in its attempts to better understand and clarify the world. Yet Hamann insisted that the *why* and *how* one went about understanding the world were of equal importance. Additionally, the limits of the endeavors of philosophy should continually be kept in mind according to Hamann. In the last statement of the *Metacritique* he leaves it up to the reader to unclench the fist to the open palm. This image relates directly to how he thought philosophy should be done. One must come to reality with a disposition of humility, not seeking to control but seeking to understand that which is

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<sup>429</sup> ZH VI, 492. To Thomas Wizenmann, July 22, 1786. “Durch den Baum der Erkenntnis, werden wir der Frucht des Lebens beraubt.”

received in sense experience. This is exemplified in his statement, “Not *cogito, ergo sum* instead the reverse or yet more Hebraic, *est, ergo cogito*, and with the inversion of such a simple principle the entire system takes on another language and direction.”<sup>430</sup> Knowledge does not start with the “Me” of the *cogito* but with the “You” of revelation.

Coupled with the hermeneutical element is the aspect humility. The germ of arrogance was present in the superstition and idolatry of the philosophy of his time, and hence permeated the systems constructed by abstract reason. In the same letter to Wizenmann quoted above, Hamann juxtaposes the tree of knowledge with the arrogance of philosophy, providing a vivid example of Hamann’s prioritization of humility. In reference to John 3:27, he writes, “A man can receive nothing, except it be given him” (KJV), then adding, “and to whom He gives it has it at no cost (*umsonst*)” and that which is given cannot be “procured” by “Papismus philosophicus” (philosophical Popery).<sup>431</sup> It is important to observe that philosophy seeks to procure that which is given. Since this procurement was directly connected to philosophical Popery, Hamann viewed the attempt to control and possess as arrogance, which he saw the doctrines of Catholicism doing. Moreover, later in the letter he states that, “The arts of school [a reference to philosophical schools] and the world intoxicate and puff up more than they are in a position to quench our thirst and satisfy our hunger.”<sup>432</sup> A plethora of other examples could be given to support the notion that humility was a quintessential element to Hamann’s approach. Hamann deemed it vital

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<sup>430</sup> To Jacobi, June 2, 1785. “Nicht *Cogito, ergo sum*, sondern umgekehrt oder noch Hebräischer *Est, ergo cogito*, und mit der Inversion eines so einfachen Principii bekommt vielleicht das ganze System eine andere Sprache und Richtung.” Hamann and Jacobi, *Johann Georg Hamann’s, des Magus im Norden, Leben und Schriften*, 5 (Hamann’s Briefwechsel mit Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi):81.

<sup>431</sup> Z VI, 492. “Ein Mensch kann nichts nehmen, es werde ihm den gegeben – und wem Ers giebt, der hats umsonst Es mag niemand ererben...noch erwerben/Papismus philosophicus.”

<sup>432</sup> Z VI, 492. “Die Künste der Schule und der Welt berauschen u. blähen mehr, als daß sie im Stande sind unsern Durst zu löschen und Hunger zu stillen.”

that one's fundamental attitude, when reading the world, be one of humility. Therefore the term *hermeneutics of humility* expresses well what a Hamannian approach to philosophy would look like. The elements making up this approach will be addressed in what follows.

### **Hermeneutics of Humility: Interdependency**

Interdependency is a term that was not specifically employed by Hamann, but he does make statements that support the use of this term (e.g. “Reason and language are therefore the inner and outer band of all social life” and, “Faith is in need of reason as much as the latter of the former.”).<sup>433</sup> The idea of the interdependency of the faculties of knowledge helps tie together how he addressed multiple philosophical concepts and language. For instance, despite Hamann’s harsh criticism of abstract reason, his authorship is interspersed with positive and constructive references to reason. Concurrently, although language is employed as the crux of his critique, it is at times disparaged as being susceptible to becoming simply another idol upon which to build one’s philosophy. Before long, language might become nothing more than another abstract construct whereupon philosophy could find a basis for another idol. The term interdependency explains how the faculties of knowledge are mutually dependent upon one another for any sort of meaning to be constructed.<sup>434</sup> Hamann refrains from giving a definitive list of the faculties of knowledge, but he does give some clear statements regarding what one might regard as a faculty of knowledge. Predominately, interdependency of the faculties of knowledge appears in his correspondence with Jacobi. However, aspects of interdependency are present throughout his criticism – particularly when he speaks of dividing sense

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<sup>433</sup> Hamann, *Writings on Philosophy and Language*, 175. *Golgotha and Sheblimini!*.

<sup>434</sup> ZH VII, 174. To Jacobi, April 30, 1787.

perception, or when he refers to reason as severing that which naturally grows together. The analogy suggests that they can be differentiated, that they are interdependent, organically growing together. To isolate one faculty is to take life out of the living organism or reasoning.

When speaking of the role of reason in human cognition he speaks of the “powers of cognition”.<sup>435</sup> Faith, sense-perception, and reason all appear prominently. The following quote has been utilized earlier but effectively proves the point here being made. “Sensation can be as easily separated from human nature as reason, or reason separated from the senses [*Sinnlichkeit*]...Knowledge from faith is essentially identical with the *nil in intellectu*.”<sup>436</sup> By working together - acknowledging and applying the powers of cognition - one can come to a better understanding of the world. Hence, experience and faith might be the eyes of reason, yet reason is still essential for one’s ability to make sense of the world. “Faith necessarily needs reason as much as it needs the faith...” he continues by noting that unity should be at the basis of all our concepts.<sup>437</sup> This is where the term interdependency becomes constructive for understanding Hamann’s thought: faith and reason working together. However chaotic Hamann’s texts might be, he sought a unity nevertheless. This study has elucidated an aspect of this unity, namely, his critique of idolatry and

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<sup>435</sup> N III, 191.

<sup>436</sup> ZH VII, 165-166, To Jacobi April 27, 1787. “Empfindung kann in der menschl. Natur eben so wenig von Vernunft, als diese von der Sinnlichkeit geschieden werden...Erkenntnis aus dem Glauben ist im Grunde identisch mit dem: Nil in intellectu.”

<sup>437</sup> ZH VII, 165. To Jacobi, April 27, 1784. “Glaube hat Vernunft eben so nöthig: als diese jenen hat.”

superstition. This involved pointing out the disunity in the systems of his contemporaries.<sup>438</sup>

Hamann's critique was informed by the interdependency of reason and faith. "Being, faith, reason are, accordingly, relationships that do not let themselves be treated absolutely, are not things but pure concepts of the schools, symbols to understand not admire, to aid in awakening our attention, not to fetter it."<sup>439</sup> The faculties or powers of cognition cannot be absolutely defined in a philosophical sense. They are not things but faculties of the mind, that is, the mind of an individual subject – not an abstract, theoretical "mind". The faculties of knowledge are made unquantifiable and indefinable by their subjectivity, e.g. Hamann's reason, Mendelssohn's reason, or Kant's reason; it is not a universal, abstract reason. This position adds greater clarity to Hamann's manner of critique. He does not believe that one can come with objective, outside, universal arguments. Because of this he attacks the lack of unity in the respective author's philosophy; his is an internal rather than external critique. He critiqued the foundational principles and verisimilitude of the respective system. This method would, theoretically, spur his respective interlocutor on to correcting the imbalances in thought.

### **Hermeneutics of Humility: Conviviality of Reason (*Geselligkeit der Vernunft*)**

Although the powers of cognition have a certain harmony in the conception above (i.e. interdependency), they remain inherently subject to contingencies which inform their

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<sup>438</sup> Hamann saw his own thought, as chaotic as it might first appear, having a unity all its own. He asserts that his "mimic style" is ruled by "a stricter logic and are more closely glued together (*geleimtere Verbindung*) than in the concepts of livelier heads." ZH I, 378. To Kant, July 27, 1759.

<sup>439</sup> ZH VII, 173. To Jacobi, April 29, 1787. "Seyn, Glaube Vernunft sind lauter Verhältnisse, die sich nicht absoluten behadeln laße, sind keine Dinge sondern reine Schulbegriffe, Zeichen zum Verstehen, nicht Bewundern, Hilfsmittel unsere Aufmerksamkeit zu erwecken, nicht to feßeln."

interdependency. New perceptions and experiences (i.e. revelations) are continually being received, and therefore there can be nothing which remains static in thought and in life. Faith and reason are relationships; as such, they cannot be simply defined or properly balanced to arrive at an absolute approach. Every person works within their own subjectivity - this is to say that there is no reason outside of the subject reasoning. However, one does not live isolated from history or other individuals, who are themselves also employing their own reason to better understand the world, not to mention the fast history informing the language one utilizes to reason. Hamann resolved the organic interdependency and contingent element of thought through *conviviality*. In the following quote many things come together which are present throughout his authorship with a clarity rarely found:

Sense perception and knowledge from reason (*Vernunfterkentniß*) are both based on the relations of things, their qualities with the instruments of receptivity as the relations of our conceptions (*Vorstellungen*). It is pure idealism to segregate belief and sensation (*Empfinden*) from thinking. Conviviality (*Geselligkeit*) is the true principle of reason and language, through which our sensations and conceptions are modified. This and that philosophy segregate things that can in no way be separated. Things without relationships, relationships without things...Since each works on the analysis of the concepts of others and the synthesis of his own concepts, no constancy is possible from either side, but rather an eternal turning and an unavoidable change.<sup>440</sup>

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<sup>440</sup> ZH VII, 174. To Jacobi, 30th of April, 1787. "Das wirkliche Dasein ist nichts (p.575) als ein *ens rationis*. Empfindung und Vernunfterkentniß beruhen beiderseits auf Verhältnissen der Dinge, ihrer Eigenschaften mit den Werkzeugen unserer Empfänglichkeit, wie auf den Verhältnissen unserer Vorstellungen. Es ist reiner Idealismus, Glauben und Empfinden vom Denken abzusondern. Geselligkeit ist das wahre Princip der Vernunft und Sprache, durch welche unsere Empfindungen und Vorstellungen modifiziert werden. Diese und jene Philosophie sondert immer Dinge ab, die gar nicht geschieden werden können. Dinge ohne Verhältnisse,

Although reason is derived from language, it does not automatically order sense perceptions accurately, as indicated earlier, it can mislead. Here *Geselligkeit* is the solution to understanding how the powers of cognition relate to one another, and how interactions take place on the societal level. *Geselligkeit* is a rather peculiar word to use when speaking about the use of reason and language. This word was once misleadingly translated by Ronald Gregor Smith as “community”.<sup>441</sup> More accurately it should be rendered conviviality, which is much closer to the German original. Conviviality as a principle relates more to the disposition of the subject than a scheme of how to relate language and reason to each other. Hamann's use of the term conviviality points to a number of important aspects in his thought: the social element of knowledge, the contingent (and therefore non-absolute state of philosophical ideas), and the focus on life over knowledge.

Conviviality brings together elements of primary importance to Hamann. It is important to note that he does not advocate mere consensus building as means of validating opinions that might then be deemed to be derived from “reason”. Rather this must be understood as building upon the already established subjective element of reason.<sup>442</sup> The later section of the quote above supports this idea. One must be convivial when reasoning. The subject is always working, “on the analysis of the concepts of others

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Verhältnisse ohne Dinge.... Da jeder an der Analysis des andern und an der Synthesis seiner eigenen Begriffe arbeitet, so ist keine Stetigkeit möglich von beiden Seiten, sondern ein ewiges Drehen und ein unvermeidlicher Wechsel.”

<sup>441</sup> Smith, J. G. *Hamann 1730-1788: A Study in Christian Existence*, 257.

<sup>442</sup> Cf. It has been well established that Hamann did not find the conception of reason outside of lived experience possible. One can reason (i.e. use the intellect to order sense perceptions), but this does not correspond to an absolute or abstract reason.

and the synthesis of his own". This is done through being social, from engaging and working with others to modify one's conceptions but not to build consensus.<sup>443</sup>

### ***Conviviality of Reason in Golgotha and Sheblimini!***

Language has a fundamentally relational and social element as one's reasoning is continually working with the ideas of others. This insight is addressed broadly in *Golgotha and Sheblimini!* His critique of Mendelssohn's philosophical approach, in part, was its lack of accommodating dependency. Mendelssohn neglected to address dependency, not only on history and language, but one's dependency on others according to Hamann. "Should everyone intend to set up his unphilosophical Me as the royal umpire in cases of collision, neither a state of nature nor a state of society is possible."<sup>444</sup> In order to fruitfully interact with one another there needs to be conviviality. Society is built upon the ability of language to express the inner convictions of the person. "The moral capacity to say Yes! or No! is based on the natural use of human reason and speech."<sup>445</sup> In the same section Hamann speaks of language and reason as the inner and outer band of all social life and that this should bring about an attitude of conviviality. In doing so, it negates the philosophical spirit purported by Mendelssohn's state of nature that amounted to each having the right of a "Nimrod, to call out in the state of nature with the force of a horned brow, 'To Me, and to Me alone, appertains the right to decide whether, for whose benefit, when, and under what conditions I am obliged to exercise beneficence'."<sup>446</sup> This is in stark contrast to Hamann's

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<sup>443</sup> The idea of convivial reason aids in differentiating Hamann's thought from Jacobi, namely, how he avoided the fideism of Jacobi.

<sup>444</sup> Hamann, *Writings on Philosophy and Language*, 175. *Golgotha and Sheblimini!*.

<sup>445</sup> Hamann, 175. *Golgotha and Sheblimini!*.

<sup>446</sup> Hamann, 174. *Golgotha and Sheblimini!*.



counter proposal, "let us rejoice over the We of God's Grace".<sup>447</sup> Although the individual subjectively utilizes reason, there is always a relational element. Mendelssohn's use of reason was the opposite of Hamann's relational understanding of reason. Mendelssohn's conception of reason led to the individual becoming a Nimrod in the state of nature.<sup>448</sup> Hamann goes on to juxtapose this with a more *humble* position.

*Golgotha and Sheblimini!* is a superb text to display the convivial (*gesellig*) approach of Hamann. The text is confrontational and borderline defamatory, but written to a friend for the purpose of confronting philosophical issues in which they greatly differ. Hamann frequently emphasizes interpersonal interaction and the continuous unfolding of experience. Although he speaks of conviviality as a principle modifying our sense-experience and conceptions, he does not suggest finding the proper balance of the powers of cognition but rather healthy interaction, resulting in a continuum. Everyone brings more to the table; hence, his interaction with, and appreciation for, those with an entirely different opinion. All of these revelations and interactions lead to an ever developing opinions and ideas - there is no definitive philosophical system. This leads to the next point: the contingent and therefore non-absolute nature of knowledge.

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<sup>447</sup> Hamann, 175. *Golgotha and Sheblimini!*

<sup>448</sup> Hamann attached the idea of the tower of Babel to Nimrod. This also points towards idolatry as it represented the arrogant desire of man to reach God. In fact, the use of Nimrod is not arbitrary in the least. Later in the text Hamann connects Mendelssohn's idea of Jerusalem to a modern Babel. "Meanwhile the ephah of theory in the land of Shinar is lifted up between heaven and earth, and Jerusalem shall no more be inhabited in her own place, even in Jerusalem, but shall come to be under the meridian of Babel. -" Hamann, 178, 179. *Golgotha and Sheblimini!* This point continues to support the idea of abstract reason being a tool used by the Enlightenment to uphold its own type of despotism and absolute hold on knowledge. Anytime an absolute position such as this was postulated, Hamann viewed it as idolatrous.

## Hermeneutics of Humility: Contingency

The notion of contingency plays an important role in Hamann's thought and underlies his conjectures of the non-absolute nature of human knowledge and the concrete nature of existence. Knowledge - most importantly that derived through philosophical reason - is contingently conditioned by history, experience, and above all, language. Language is first apprehended in the senses and transmitted in history. Philosophical knowledge is constructed on the contingent and therefore on the concrete - the tangible - insofar as it is founded upon language. The contingent element of all thought and philosophy are not absolute - recall the idolization of abstract systems being referred to as creations and fabrications of human art. Accordingly, the knowledge of philosophy is impermanent due to the perpetual influx of experiences and interactions. Consider again his statement, "There are no absolute creations, and just as little absolute certainty... Since each works on the analysis of the concepts of others and the synthesis of his own concepts, no constancy is possible from either side, but rather an eternal turning and an unavoidable change."<sup>449</sup> One might speak of the verisimilitude within a philosophical system; however, it will always remain a tentative relation to the outside world due to its contingency. Therefore, greater verisimilitude should be attempted, with the caveat that it is not absolute. Not to attempt this would be to disregard the philosophical enterprise. It must be understood that one does not achieve philosophical access to truth with a capital "T", so to speak. The idea of the concrete allows him to retain elements of the Christian faith of which he can be certain of, at least on the subjective level.

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<sup>449</sup> ZH VII, 174. To Jacobi, 30th of April, 1787. "Es giebt keine absoluten Geschöpfe, und eben so wenig absolute Gewißeheit."

In Hamann's critique of Mendelssohn he does not quarrel with their differing philosophical principles when addressing the difference between Judaism and Christianity. For Hamann it comes down to historical revelation passed down and recorded in history; the knowledge thereof being historically and linguistically contingent, yet real. He considers, in agreement with Hume, that it is something of a continuous miracle which must take place for contingent truths to be accepted. Indeed, it is due to his ideas of the contingency of all knowledge that he is able to hold as tightly as he does to this claim.

### **Hermeneutics of Humility Summarized**

Interdependency of the faculties of knowledge, a convivial understanding of reason, and the contingency of knowledge are the building blocks of the *hermeneutics of humility*. Each of these building blocks resists the compulsion to create a philosophical system that might abstract or claim absolute metaphysical certainty. As such, Hamann avoids the superstition and idolatry that he so avidly assailed.

His contemporaries were idolatrous due to their faulty faith in arbitrary principles that were supposed to lead to knowledge that was universal. The result of this faulty (i.e. superstitious) faith was a philosophical idol; which could manifest itself as a system or an underlying prejudice of what might be considered legitimate knowledge. Hamann's notion and application of faith is located in the subject seeking to interpret his or her world and is always unfolding; he provides no coinciding system. In fact, there is no possible system that one might derive from a *hermeneutics of humility*, at least in a universal sense. It leaves room for new revelations as reading and reasoning in the world is done by individuals interacting with other individuals in history. This might at first seem to decentralize

institutions and society by promoting the dissolution of the social into the purely individual. Yet this is not the case. This approach emphasizes the individual's dependence upon language, history, and one's neighbor. For the above reasons Hamann was able to avoid the philosophical idolatry of which he condemned his century.

### **Hamann's Christianity in Relation to the Critique of Superstition**

To what degree do Christian truth claims differ from the idolatry and superstition of his contemporaries? Answering this question is critical to perceiving Hamann's understanding of the Christian faith and how it avoids the pitfalls of superstitious faith.

Christian truth claims are historically contingent. Christianity (as well as other concrete faiths for that matter) is precluded from the same critique he launched against his age due to its concrete nature. To illustrate this point, one can look to the resurrection. Because of the nature of how the resurrection is communicated there can be no philosophical proof, either positively or negatively, of its veracity for Hamann. Another example can be found in Hamann's defense of Rabbinical thought. He defended Rabbinical thought against Mendelssohn's abstractions. Hamann argued that Mendelssohn sought to take Judaism out of history by seeking to show that it was merely a religious precursor to moral truths that would later be confirmed through philosophical reason. This would essentially do away with Judaism itself, according to Hamann. For Hamann, these revelations cannot be equated with the theological theorizing of the subject. Theology and philosophy were guilty of superstition when believing in the truth of their own abstract systems created by reason. The systems of abstract reason usurped the fluidity of thought and contingency of experience. Christianity was an experience based on revelation coming

in language through history, not an abstract system of beliefs. The faith in contingently revealed truth avoided the abstract claims, and therefore idolatry, of Enlightenment philosophy.

The contingency of thought justified his personal Christian experience. Contingent revelation avoided the definitive and purely abstract systemization that leads to idolatry. Hamann justified his Christian faith for himself and sought to demonstrate its veracity to others. But he does not lay claim to an absolute way of thinking available to the subject apart from faith in special revelation that can neither be conveyed nor proven outside of experience. In this sense, Hamann's Christian faith has a personal claim to truth, indeed, as it informs his life and thought but does not claim universality outside of subjective experience. Contingent faith lays no totalitarian claim to knowledge. Hamann's views were formed by elements of his faith and written in the Christian idiom. With the nature of his highly inter-textual criticism, language holds philosophical content only insofar as it reveals deficiencies or juxtaposes the belief of philosophy in abstract reason. One might say that Hamann had come to terms with (resolved) Christianity in his life and sought to share it with - but not impose it upon - others.

In short, to answer the question as to why Hamann's Christian faith avoided superstition - it is because of its concrete nature. It is something which is transmitted in the Scriptures and is experienced by the individual. This type of faith is uninterested in absolute claims concerning the world outside of its personal meaning for the individual. They are individually absolute, yet leave each to judge the veracity of a claim. It is individually absolute and metaphysically non-absolute simultaneously.

## Hamann's Final Attempt at a Philosophical Approach

Hamann's occasional writing bespeaks his ideas of the continual changing of conceptions through the "analysis of other people's ideas" and our own, as well as the concrete nature of existence. The term *occasional* is used here to point out that Hamann wrote to address specific people, situations, and philosophical writings.<sup>450</sup> The interpersonal, concrete, and non-abstract were earmarks of his authorship. He is not interested in constructing his own system; to the contrary, he is interested in interaction with the ideas of others. To advocate something of his own, in the sense of system, would be to fall into the trap of philosophical idolatry. In his *Disrobing and Transfiguration*, Hamann revealed his desire to be understood. He did not want only to be shrouded in idiosyncrasy. In this work he attempted to clarify, to a degree, his authorship.

His contemporaries sought to come to absolute ideas about reality – most often by the use of abstract reason – in so doing they created their own totalizing systems which were nothing more than an idol. In contrast, Hamann sketched an approach relying much more on both history and eschatology in what he calls the spirit of observation and the spirit of prophecy.

His text, *Disrobing and Transfiguration*, carries the subtitle: A Flying Letter to Nobody the Well Known. This reflects a direct relation to the work commencing his authorship, the *Socratic Memorabilia*, which carried a double dedication: to Nobody and to Two. *Disrobing and Transfiguration* was the last text he was working on before his death.

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<sup>450</sup> ZH V, 358. Letter to Scheffner 11 Feb. 1785 "Es ist für mich wirklich eine herkulische Arbeit gewesen, was ich von 59 bis 83 [1759-1783] geschrieben, durchzugehen, weil sich Alles auf die wirklichen Lagen meines Lebens bezieht.

The title indicates that he considered it and the *Socratic Memorabilia* as bookends of his authorship as they are both dedicated to "nobody", i.e. the ambiguous public.<sup>451</sup> When speaking of his own authorship Hamann notes the difficulty of his language, that is, the clothing of his thought. He announces his desire to disrobe, indicating that he wants to express his thoughts with greater clarity than heretofore. Additionally, he wanted to sum up the main tenets of his authorship, but he thinks it doubtful that this will make his thought endearing to the public, yet attempts it nonetheless.

*Disrobing and Transfiguration* discusses a rather wide array of issues, much of it in relation to the then departed Mendelssohn. Hamann's attempt to describe an approach most applicable to this study can be found at the end of the text. The discourse is about Jerusalem, namely, Mendelssohn's attempt to make an analogy that the city of Jerusalem (representing the Jewish religion in ancient times) should now conform to modern Enlightenment philosophy and religion within the confines of the secular state. Furthermore, he conjectured that these insights should be applied to the modern Prussian State. This analogy is the springboard for Hamann's comments on everything from philosophical bias to his attempt at overcoming the trap of idolatry.<sup>452</sup> The primary passage to be explicated is the following:

The spirit of observation and the spirit of prophecy are the wings of human genius. All that is present belongs to the domain of the former; all that is

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<sup>451</sup> It was never published during his lifetime, and in Nadler there are two versions of the text placed side by side.

<sup>452</sup> It must be kept in mind that the text was never published and existed in multiple versions. This particular passage does not exist in all versions and therefore it remains unclear to what degree Hamann was content with it. However, there is reason to work with this passage as it accords with much of his other works. The other the version published by Nadler does nothing to correct or re-phrase; it focuses more directly on Mendelssohn and the idea of revealed religion.

absent, the past and the future, belongs to the domain of the latter. Philosophical genius expresses its power through striving, by means of abstraction, to make what is present absent; it disrobes actual objects into naked concepts and merely conceivable attributes, into pure appearances and phenomena. Poetic genius express its power through transfiguring, by means of fiction, visions of the absent past and future into present representations. Criticism and politics resist the usurpations of both powers and ensure that they are balanced, through these positive forces and means of observation and prophecy.<sup>453</sup>

The spirit of observation clearly resembles other statements regarding the intellect and the positive use of reason. The tendency towards abstracting is clearly present. A certain amount of abstraction is acceptable, even necessary; it is how abstractions are understood and their limitations that are important.<sup>454</sup> The spirit of observation cannot provide the past with meaning because it is beyond its capacity to do. Therefore, those who believe that they can derive meaning and knowledge of the future are engaging in a form of conjecture and interpretation which belongs to the spirit of prophecy.<sup>455</sup> This scheme allows for Hamann's defense of revealed religion coming through history and language: emphasizing that it did not belong to the sphere of abstract reason employed by philosophy. Even more fascinating

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<sup>453</sup> Hamann, *Writings on Philosophy and Language*, 221. N III 382:30:34; 384:1-8, *Disrobing and Transfiguration: A Flying Letter to Nobody, the Well Known*. "Geist der Beobachtung und Geist der Weissagung sind die Fittige des menschlichen Genius. Zum Gebiete der ersteren gehört alles Gegenwärtige; zum Gebiete des letzteren alles Abwesende, der Vergangenheit und Zukunft. Das philosophische Genie äussert seine Macht dadurch, daß es, vermittelst der Abstraction, das Gegenwärtige abwesend zu machen sich bemüht; wirkliche Gegenstände zu nackten Begriffen und bloß denkbaren Merkmalen, zu reinen Erscheinungen und Phänomenen entkleidet. Das poetische Genie äussert seine Macht dadurch, daß es, vermittelst der Fiction, die Visionen abwesender Vergangenheit und Zukunft zu gegenwärtigen Darstellungen verklärt. Kritik und Politik widerstehen den Usurpationen beyder Mächte, und sorgen für das Gleichgewicht derselben, durch die nemlichen positiven Kräfte und Mittel der Beobachtung und Weissagung."

<sup>454</sup> This closely resembles Francis Bacon and his limitations placed on the use of the scientific method, particularly its inability to provide orientation regarding religious matters. Cf. Sven-Aage Jørgensen, "Hamann, Bacon, and Tradition," *Orbis Litterarum* 16, no. 1-2 (1961): 48-73. Also, Sven-Aage Jørgensen, *Querdenker der Aufklärung: Studien zu Johann Georg Hamann* (Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag, 2013), 37.

<sup>455</sup> For Hamann, to act is to act in accordance with an eschatological view of the future. As such, the domain of human moral action is not grounded in the spirit of observation.



are the eschatological aspects of the spirit of prophecy.<sup>456</sup> Poetic genius is to the spirit of prophecy what philosophy is to the spirit of observation. It is that which provides explanatory power to our lives, through fiction. There is an interesting convergence between Hamann's critique of his contemporaries' systems as fabrication of human art and the poetic element present when interpreting and giving meaning to reality. The critical difference appears to be the independence from contingency and further claim of access to "reality". Enlightenment thinkers rejected the spirit of prophecy all the while possessing their own form of eschatology. In the passages that follow the quote above, a concrete example is given of the spirit of prophecy. The idea of Jerusalem is taken into consideration. Mendelssohn used the analogy of Jerusalem to proffer the idea that the Jewish religion was merely a vehicle for revealing the eternal truths of reason. For Hamann, Jerusalem can only be understood through prophecy; this meant the revelation of a new heaven and new earth – the New Jerusalem. In light of the prospect of the New Jerusalem is the Old Jerusalem given meaning.

The regulatory apparatuses of criticism and of politics are important to understanding how this scheme does not give human imagination free rein. Hamann does not precisely define how politics and criticism work in resisting both powers, but one can draw on earlier ideas expressed in his thought that aid in understanding how this might function. Without some sort of control, the idea of the spirit of prophecy would seem to give free rein to any and all pseudo-poetic explanations of life. In fact, it might be for this reason that Hamann focused on the idea of Jerusalem as having a prophetic function and

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<sup>456</sup> This is only found in the second version of *Disrobing and Transfiguration* that currently has no English translation.

interpretation due to the alterations he made in his second draft.<sup>457</sup> Either way, the manner in which Hamann processed knowledge is revealed in this sketch: reason being limited in its ability to provide meaning for the existence of life. Additionally, the spirit of prophecy indicates the importance he placed upon history and eschatology, which are behind the meaning given to our world, which informs one's reading of the world (i.e. hermeneutics).

Hamann gives reasons for why he interprets the prophetic element of Jerusalem as he does. However, this approach gives little if any room for definitiveness, as it would lead to a system that had the potential to become a superstitious idol of thought. Fundamentally it involves the continual interpretation of the world that includes factors inaccessible to the spirit of observation (i.e. the field of reason), namely, history and eschatology. By adding criticism and politics he acknowledges the need to regulate interpretations that are constantly changing in light of the present situation.<sup>458</sup>

### **Life over Knowledge**

The *hermeneutics of humility*, his understanding of Christianity, and his attempts to explicate his thought in *Disrobing and Transfiguration*, all help to further understand Hamann's response to the philosophical idolatry of his age. Specifically in regards to how he understood philosophical knowledge, and how he was able to avoid, to a degree, the idolatry which he critiqued. However much the interdependency of the powers of cognition were important to the approach of philosophy in understanding the world, for Hamann that remained only a part of life. "Which [the powers of cognition/faculties of knowledge]

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<sup>457</sup> Both versions follow the same general argumentative blueprint, they differ in the harshness of his critique of Mendelssohn. That found in Haynes' English translations of Hamann is the first and less harsh version.

<sup>458</sup> Albeit one's imagining has the potential to run amuck, consequently requiring regulation on a larger, societal scale.

taken all together, account for the most accidental and abstract *modum* of our existence.”<sup>459</sup>

This leads to the final point of Hamann’s authorship: existence over knowledge. He regularly points toward lived existence over abstract analysis. Lived experience was a priority both in his life and in his thought. It was far removed from the abstract notion of the *cogito*, which dominated the philosophy of his time. A humorous yet apt example of this is exemplified in his comment to Jacobi, “Also in the kitchen are the gods, and what Descartes said of his *cogito* is carried over to me (*überführt mich*) by the activity of my stomach.”<sup>460</sup> Here he is pointing to the *sum* of the formula *cogito ergo sum*. On numerous occasions he references the importance of the *sum* (i.e. one's existence) over the cognitive element.<sup>461</sup> In these statements he indicates that abstract thought and the acquisition of knowledge are not the ultimate purpose or objective for the individual. Despite his erudition and extensive reading in philosophy, Hamann prioritized living above thinking. In a discussion on reason during his correspondence with Jacobi he stated, “Over clear concepts meals will grow cold and lose their taste.”<sup>462</sup> Hamann says this to support his focus on language, “I have completely given up this investigation [to define reason] due to its difficulty, and hold myself closely to the certain, on the *Organo* or *Criterion*) – I mean language. Without word, no reason, - no world. Here is the source of creation and

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<sup>459</sup> N III, 191, *Zweifel und Einfälle*. “welche alle zusammengenommen, den zufälligsten und abstractesten *modum* unserer Existenz ausmachen.”

<sup>460</sup> To Jacobi, April 9, 1787. “Auch in der Küche sind die Götter und was *Cartes* von seinem *Cogito* sagt, überführt mich die Thätigkeit meines Mages.” Hamann and Jacobi, *Johann Georg Hamann’s, des Magus im Norden, Leben und Schriften*, 5 (Hamann’s Briefwechsel mit Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi):476–77.

<sup>461</sup> Cf. To Jacobi, January 15, 1786, “Nur nicht über das *cogito* das edle *Sum* vergessen.” Hamann and Jacobi, 5 (Hamann’s Briefwechsel mit Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi):195. Also, to Jacobi, 28 Dec. 1785, “und muß man aus *Cogito* allein folgern das *Sum*. Dieser Cartesianismus ist von Sp. und Wolf übergegangen und da liegt der Haase im Pfeffer.” Hamann and Jacobi, 5 (Hamann’s Briefwechsel mit Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi):173.

<sup>462</sup> To Jacobi, November 2, 1783. “Ueber die deutlichen Begriffe werden die Gerichte kalt und verlieren den Geschmack.” Hamann and Jacobi, *Johann Georg Hamann’s, des Magus im Norden, Leben und Schriften*, 5 (Hamann’s Briefwechsel mit Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi):7.

government."<sup>463</sup> Even Hamann's emphasis on language and its critical function in forming reason was a turn toward lived experience. That is why he perpetually utilized the analogy of a living organism to represent a vibrant philosophy.<sup>464</sup>

Hamann was concerned that philosophy had taken a place of detracting from life. For all of the philosophical idolatry in abstract systems and the superstitious belief in them that he critiqued, what was at stake was life itself: concrete, lived experience. Sometimes this revolved around the idea of what it meant to work and having a different value system and idea of what constituted work, e.g. caring for family above commercial success. Friendship was also a priority to him.<sup>465</sup> As much as Hamann was immersed in the world of literature and philosophy he valued friendship above acclaim. For all his emphasis on experience and convivial reason he goes yet further, emphasizing the way the entire Enlightenment philosophical enterprise detracted from the basic enjoyment and appreciation of a life well lived. Not in an Epicurean sense of seeking pleasure, but finding the pleasure in friends and family, food and drink.<sup>466</sup> Hamann does not regard the products of abstract reason as a way of truth or life. For Hamann truth is something to be known (i.e. in the *Logos*) not uncovered, to be experienced not grasped.

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<sup>463</sup> To Jacobi, November 2, 1783. "Ich habe aber diese Untersuchung ganz aufgegeben, wegen ihrer Schwierigkeit, und halte mich jetzo an das sichtbare Element, an dem *Organo* oder *Criterio*) – ich meine Sprache. Ohne Wort, keine Vernunft, - keine Welt. Hier ist die Quelle der Schöpfung und Regierung!" Hamann and Jacobi, 5 (Hamann's Briefwechsel mit Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi):7.

<sup>464</sup> E.g. "Would not a single stem with two roots be an apter image of our knowledge, one root above in the air and one below in the earth?" Hamann, *Writings on Philosophy and Language*, 212. *Metacritique of the Purism of Reason*.

<sup>465</sup> Prior to her translation of Hegel's review of Hamann, Lisa Marie Anderson gives a great analysis of Hamann and how Friendship played a significant role in his life and thought. See, Lisa Marie Anderson, "The Notion of Friendship in Hegel and Hamann," in *Hegel on Hamann*, Topics in Historical Philosophy (Evanston, Ill: Northwestern University Press, 2008).

<sup>466</sup> In *Aesthetica in Nuce*, Hamann makes clear that both Epicureanism and Stoicism mislead philosophy. Hamann, *Writings on Philosophy and Language*, 80.

In summation, Hamann did not claim to have solved the riddle of language or of life. He did, however, offer a way of thinking; a disposition with which to approach knowledge of the world. Despite not coming to a definitive solution to the riddle of language, he does come to terms with his Christian faith in his notion of knowledge. His authorship confronted the philosophical superstition and idolatry of his time, pointing to how it detracted from life.

### **Concluding Remarks**

This study has presented Hamann's authorship as a critique of the superstition and corresponding idolatry of the philosophy of his age, connecting the disparate topics and various styles of his authorship. Furthermore, the insights brought about by this interpretation reveal constructive elements in Hamann's thought that can be understood as a loose philosophical approach. In this respect, this interpretation falls within the group of Hamann scholarship that asserts that his thought can and does have an internal consistency. Moreover, it provides positive, constructive insight, aiding and furthering Hamann research. Assuredly, his thought was informed by his Christian faith, but often this has been too much the focus. What is unique about the present study is that it provides explication of the philosophical motivations of his critique.

Remarkably, this reading of Hamann avoids many common pitfalls when attempting to interpret his work. That is, being able to hold together the primary emphases of his thought: for instance, the inter-textuality and irony pointing to the non-absolute and subjective element in philosophical writings; or how his broad idea of faith allowed him to be both highly skeptical while being devoutly Christian.

This reading of Hamann opens up a few new avenues that could be further pursued. One of them would be how his broad notion of faith would compare to current ideas of faith in the different Christian traditions: does it err too far on the broadly philosophical or might it aid in bridging the contention between revealed religion and philosophical as well as scientific approaches to knowledge. Another avenue opened up by this interpretation is in the field of interreligious dialogue. Namely, how might a Hamannian focus on the inability of philosophy to prove or disprove religious truths revealed in the concrete, historical religions be a means whereby dialogue could focus on understanding could be investigated? That is, being solutions oriented rather than truth oriented. Hamann's defense of historical Judaism in *Golgotha and Sheblimini!* is a specific example of how he treated two differing concrete religions in his authorship.

Significantly, the interpretation of Hamann's critique being motivated by his notion of superstition and its corresponding idolatry of philosophy presented in the present study holds up from the beginning of his authorship through the end. Albeit there are slight changes and developments, yet these only add to a greater focus of his critique, christened by the *Socratic Memorabilia*.<sup>467</sup> Finally, the interpretation of Hamann as argued for here presents a Hamannian approach to philosophy, namely, the *hermeneutics of humility*. The latter provides those who have the patience and learning requisite to reading Hamann, a lens by which he can be better understood and applied to contemporary theological and philosophical questions.

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<sup>467</sup> For instance, his later use of *Metacritique* did not offer a new approach, but only a better description of what Hamann had been doing up until that point.

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