Imagination and Critique in the Work of Johann Georg Hamann

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Introduction

Johann Georg Hamann (1730-1788) is a fascinating person. He was well trained in languages and literature, but had no formal position at an institution of learning. Still, he was well known and respected among his contemporary intellectuals and had close personal relationships with many of them. He was fluent in English, a rare gift among 18th century Germans, and he was for that reason familiar with Enlightenment philosophy as performed on both sides of the English Channel. For his own part, however, he remained convinced that the biblical and Lutheran convictions he had appropriated in his youth were the more consistent world view. He was thus able to engage Enlightenment philosophy from a deeply held Christian conviction in a way that still makes sense today.

The leading Jewish Enlightenment philosopher in Germany was Moses Mendelssohn (1729-1786), the grandfather of the great composer. Hamann and Mendelssohn knew each other well and had quite a close relationship. That did not stop Hamann from publishing a rather sharp critique of Mendelssohn's book *Jerusalem oder über religiöse Macht und Judenthum* (*Jerusalem, or On Religious Power and Judaism*), which was published in 1783. The content and implications of this critique is the main subject of this article. Before looking at the book Hamann wrote against Mendelssohn, however, I will present an outline of his thought, particularly focussing on his understanding of the role of the imagination.[64]

[64] For presentations of the thought world of Hamann, see John R. Betz, *After Enlightenment: The Post-Secular Vision of J. G. Hamann* (Malden, Mass; Oxford; Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009); Oswald Bayer, *A Contemporary in Dissent: Johann Georg Hamann as Radical Enlightener* (Roy A. Harrisville and Mark C. Mattes, trans., Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012); Knut Alfsvåg, *Christology as Critique: On the Relation between Christ, Creation and Epistemology* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2018), 53–107.

The London experience

The decisive spiritual experience in Hamann's life occurred in London in 1758. Poor and alone in his lodgings with the Bible, he read it extensively, and discovered to his astonishment that it told a story in which he found himself included.[65] In this book it was told how the eternal God, Creator of heaven and earth, had condescended to the level of humans to reveal his love and mercy, and how he had chosen the Jews for this purpose. However, despite being singled out in this way as the object of God's love, the Jews had repeatedly rejected God and chosen their own way. It was above all this that gave Hamann his flash of recognition; this was exactly how he had behaved himself. The story about Cain in Gen 4 seems to have made a particularly deep impression on him, and he found himself to be guilty of his brother's blood in the same way as Cain. The consummation of the biblical story of divine love is the story of the death and resurrection of Christ, and in rejecting this proof of divine love, Hamann had behaved toward his brother Christ as Cain behaved toward his brother Abel. When he had admitted this, however, he felt how the Spirit made the mystery of divine love a living reality for him.[66]

Hamann emphasizes that in order to appreciate the biblical story in this way, one must apply imagination ("Einbildungskraft") for the sake of placing oneself as close as possible to the position of the author. Only then will it be possible to appropriate the perspective of the author as one's own. For Hamann, this is a general rule that applies to all literature, but it is particularly important when reading the Bible. A text will only capture its readers when it captures their imagination. If it does not, it will only

[65] Hamann wrote quite extensively on his London experience. See "Gedanken über mein Lebenslauf", Johann Georg Hamann, *Sämtliche Werke* (Josef Nadler ed., 6 vols., Wien: Verlag Herder, 1949–1957), hereafter referred to as N, vol. 2, 11–54 and Johann Georg Hamann, *Londoner Schriften* (Oswald Bayer and Bernd Weissenborn ed., München: C. H. Beck, 1993) (BW), 313–349; an English translation of the most important passages is found in Ronald Gregor Smith, *J. G. Hamann: A Study in Christian Existence* (London: Collins, 1960), 139–157. See also "Über die Auslegug der Heilige Schrift", BW 59–61 and N1:5–6, and "Biblische Betrachtungen eines Christen", BW 65–311 and N1:7–249, partly translated in Smith, *Hamann*, 118–138.

[66] BW 343–344; N2, 40–41; Smith, *Hamann*, 153.

transmit information, and important as that may be, information alone never changes or creates anything.[67] Faith will only be established and nourished when one finds oneself in the biblical story, and this requires imaginative reading.

In reflecting on biblical authorship, Hamann thinks of the Bible as a canonical unity with the Holy Spirit as the author. The merely historical approach to the Bible, which Hamann later came to know through the works of Johann David Michaelis (1717–1791) and Hermann Samuel Reimarus (1694–1768), he found shallow and unsatisfactory.[68] The point of the Bible is that it gives us the story of how God reveals himself by addressing humans at their own level, thus opening the possibility for the readers to find themselves in the story. Isolating elements of the biblical narrative from this context and looking at them as mere historical facts detaches the readers from the story and subverts the biblical text as the source of faith.

In emphasizing the biblical story as something that captures its readers by engaging their imagination, Hamann shows himself to be a disciple of Luther to a greater extent than he probably was aware of himself. Luther's rediscovery of the significance of the biblical text was carried by a deep appreciation of classical rhetoric and its emphasis of how an orator or a text could change the basic *adfectus* or attitude of its listeners or readers by letting them see the realities of the story in their mind.[69] The Enlightenment preoccupation with facts and rationality did not have much time for these perspectives,[70] but Hamann knew from his own conversion experience how decisive they were. To change the attitude, and thus the behaviour of a human, one must engage his or her imagination, and address the human on an emotional level.

For Hamann, the biblical text is primarily important as it brings us God as actively present today in transmitting his love and mercy to humans. However, divine presence is not limited to the book. Already in his London writings, Hamann also

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[67] BW 66, 27–33; N1:29–35.

[68] Alfsvåg, *Christology as Critique*, 74–75 and 85–86.

[69] See Knut Alfsvåg, "What no mind has conceived: On the significance of Christological apophaticism" (*Studies in Philosophical Theology* 45, Leuven, Paris, Walpole: Peeters, 2010), chapter 7.4: Metaphorical language as the presence of Christ (on Luther).

[70] On the outcome of this development, which Hamann tried to resist, see Hans W. Frei, *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative: A Study in Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century Hermeneutics* (New Haven: Yale University Pr, 1975).

describes how we also should look at nature as the area for God's wise involvement. This presupposes, however, that we abandon the idea of eternal laws of nature; this notion is for Hamann as unacceptable as the understanding of the Bible as a record of mere facts. Hamann has already at this early stage in his development appropriated David Hume's (1711–1776) critique of the idea of natural laws and placed it in the service of his own theological project.[71] To look for something eternal within the area of the created is for Hamann a contradiction; only God is eternal, but he may show his merciful wisdom by giving the world a certain stability and predictability. For Hamann, God is the Lord of nature, not a servant of its laws.[72]

To an astonishing degree, all the main topics of Hamann's later works are present in his London writings. In his later writings, he developed and reemphasized aspects of this thought as he found it necessary when engaging with his Enlightenment contemporaries.

Imagination in Hamann's polemical writings

When Hamann returned to his native Königsberg after his visit to London, he found that he had to defend his newfound faith in revelation against the attacks of his friends, the most important of whom was Immanuel Kant (1724–1804). This he did by making Socrates the central figure of his short book *Sokratische Denkwürdigkeiten* (1759).[73] Socrates was a hero for Hamann's Enlightenment opponents, but in Hamann's view, they did not understand him; they were disciples who betrayed their master. The starting point for Hamann's understanding is that Socrates's father was a sculptor who created his image by taking away what did not belong to it. Socrates adopted his father's work, but what he took away were illusions of knowledge. Socrates knew that he did not

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[71] Hume was important for Hamann, who is the one who transmitted his thoughts to Kant and thus enticed him to write *Kritik der reinen Vernunft* (1781). On Hamann's relationship to Hume, see Thomas Brose, *Johann Georg Hamann und David Hume: Metaphysikkritik und Glaube im Spannungsfeld der Aufklarung* (vol. I and II, Frankfurt a M; Berlin; Bern; Bruxelles; New York; Oxford; Wien: Lang, 2006).

[72] Alfsvåg, *Christology as Critique*, 59.

[73] N2, 57–82. Translated as *Socratic Memorabilia* in Gwen Griffith Dickson, "Johann Georg Hamann's Relational Metacriticism" (*Theologische Bibliothek Töpelmann* 67, Berlin, New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1995), 375–400.

know and was therefore never burdened by deceptions as in the same way as both his and Hamann's contemporaries.

Hamann explores this perspective more precisely by means of the difference between *Empfindung* (perception) and *Lehrsatz* (doctrine); the former is the appropriation of the fact that we do not know the essentials of our existence, and this opens the possibility for faith.[74] On the contrary, doctrines are established by proof and logic, and while there are limited areas of research where this may be relevant, none of the important elements of a world view are among them. Even here, Hamann refers to Hume as one who got this right. Philosophers trusting their reason and poets trusting their imagination equally go wrong; life must be lived on a foundation of faith, the source of which can never be found in the human itself, neither in its reason nor its imagination.[75] For all his emphasis on imagination as indispensable in appropriating the wisdom of both the Bible and literature in general, Hamann does not endorse a view of the imagination as an independent guide to truth.

As the *Lehrsatz*-approach is clueless concerning the essentials of life, the attempt at following its guidelines leaves one rudderless on the sea of existence. One may then as well philosophize according to the expectations of the public, and this is what Enlightenment philosophers usually do.[76] At least they are rational insofar as by following the view of the majority they cater to their own well-being.[77] What they will never grasp is the paradox of revelation, according to which the essentials are revealed

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[74] This arguably is Hamann's appropriation of the distinction between νοῦς/*intellectus* and διάνοια/*ratio*, which is essential in Platonic thought, and defined by Plato in the line parable in *Republic* 509d–511e. In Kant, it resurfaces as the distinction between *Vernunft* (reason) and *Verstand* (understanding), and thus serves a quite different purpose from what it does in Hamann. See Alfsvåg, *Christology as Critique*, 95.

[75] N2, 74.

[76] As Hamann emphasizes in later writings, e.g., in the one against Mendelssohn, they may alternatively play to the tune of the powerful, but this is not a part of the argument in *Sokratische Denkwürdigkeiten*.

[77] The fact that Hamann and Kant remained on good terms even after the former had publicly criticized the latter in this way, demonstrates quite a profound friendship. On the relationship between the two, see further Oswald Bayer, *Vernunft ist Sprache: Hamanns Metakritik Kants* (Stuttgart; Bad Cannstatt: Frommann-Holzbog, 2002), 23-26.

by the poor and despised. Both Socrates and Jesus confirm this pattern.[78] What we need, therefore, according to Hamann, is a tutor who can teach us to read the patterns of history in the same way as Francis Bacon taught us to read the patterns of nature.[79] That is the only way to avoid a superstitious trust in merely alleged knowledge.

In 1762, Hamann published *Aesthetica in Nuce*, where he develops his epistemology even further.[80] *Empfindung* is here closely related to the divine light of creation; it is the appreciation of creation as revelation both in the context of history and nature. To interpret creation as a divine address is no easy thing, though; it demands a creative imagination even on the side of those receiving the revelation. One will then see both history and nature as transparent for transcendence. Concerning the hermeneutics of reading the book of nature, Hamann is very critical of the Gnostic abstraction that reduces senses and passions to mathematical equations.[81] In this respect, he is criticizing Descartes as the origin of modernity for doing violence towards nature in a way that anticipates 21st century ecological concerns in a very interesting way. It is essential for Hamann that our relationship with nature should not be reduced to explanation and computation; even in this context, the essential thing is to read imaginatively.[82]

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[78] Hamann's most important 19th century disciple, Søren Kierkegaard, also explored the difference between Socrates and Jesus. Hamann is more concerned with the parallels between the two.

[79] On Hamann's appreciation of Bacon, see Sven-Aage Jørgensen, "Hamann, Bacon, and Tradition," *Orbis Literarum* 16 (1961), 48-73.

[80] N 2:195–217. There are English translations of this work both in Dickson, *Relational Metacriticism*, 409–431, and in Johann Georg Hamann, *Writings on Philosophy and Language* (Kenneth Haynes trans., Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 60–95.

[81] Hamann thus anticipates an important part of the argument in C. S. Lewis's *The Abolition of Man* (1943).

[82] The significance of this aspect of Hamann's thought was emphasized already in Erwin Metzke, "Hamann und das Geheimnis des Wortes," in *Coincidentia oppositorum: Gesammelte Studien zur Philosophiegeschiche* (ed. Karlfried Gründer) (Witten: Luther-Verlag, 1961), 271–293. For an updated version of the same emphasis, see Ulrich Moustakas, *Urkunde und Experiment: Neuzeitliche Naturwissenschaft im Horizont einer hermeneutischen Theologie der Schöpfung bei Johann Georg Hamann* (Theologische Bibliothek Töpelmann 114, Berlin; New York: de Gruyter, 2003).

The understanding of creation as an address from God to humans even informs Hamann's understanding of language, which he developed in a critique of the position of Johann Gottfried Herder (1744–1803). Hamann is critical both of theories that find the origin of language in direct divine intervention and of theories that find it in the development of an inherent human capacity (Herder's position). In his view, language is what occurs when God addresses humans in a way they can understand and articulate. Language is thus divine and human at the same time, and that is what enables divine-human communication as the key to the understanding of the world. For Hamann, this is nothing but the application of the idea of *communicatio idiomatum*, the communication of (divine and human) properties, which originally was developed in the context of Christology, on the understanding of the work of the Creator.[83] In a similar, way Hamann also explores marriage, particularly in its sexual aspect, as an example of divine-human communication.[84]

Hamann was thus not afraid of criticizing the prevalent positions among his contemporaries even when they were defended by the best and the brightest. He even took on Kant in a critique of *Kritik der reinen Vernuft* that, despite remaining unpublished in Hamann's lifetime, is a substantial critique that makes sense even today — the postmodern catchword "metacritique" was coined by Hamann on this occasion.[85] He was thus well prepared for a discussion with Mendelssohn when *Jerusalem* appeared in 1783.[86]

[83] Hamann develops his understanding of the origin of language in *Des Ritters von Rosencreuz letzte Willensmeynung über den göttlichen und menschlichen Ursprung der Sprache* (1772), N3:25–33, translated in Dickson, *Relational Metacriticism*, 461–469, and in Hamann, *Writings*, 96–110. On the significance of *communicatio idiomatum* in the thought of Hamann, see Friedemann Fritsch, *Communicatio idiomatium: zur Bedeutung einer christologischen Bestimmung für das Denken Johann Georg Hamanns* (Theologische Bibliothek Töpelmann, vol. 89, Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1998). On Hamann's view of language, see further Alfsvåg, *Christology as Critique*, 81–83.

[84] Alfsvåg, *Christology as Critique*, 83–84.

[85] On Hamann's metacritique of Kant's critique of reason, see Alfsvåg, *Christology as Critique*, 95–105.

[86] Moses Mendelssohn, *Gesammelte Schriften* (vol. 8, Bad Cannstatt: Fromman-Holzboog, 1983), 99–204. It is published in English as Moses Mendelssohn, *Jerusalem, or On Religious Power*

Hamann's critique of Mendelssohn

Moses Mendelssohn was born in Dessau in Saxony in 1729 and educated himself to such a degree that he was considered among the leading German intellectuals. His father's name was Mendel, and young Moses Germanized his name to avoid the problems that might be associated with being called Ben Mendel. In 1762, he won a prize essay in metaphysics at the Berlin Academy; the runner-up was no less than Immanuel Kant. In spite of being a Jew, he was granted permanent residence in Berlin, and published a work on the immortality of the soul in the style of Plato's dialogues. In a debate with the Christian theologian Johann Kaspar Lavater (1741–1801), he defended the idea of religious tolerance, maintaining that he would remain a Jew, but had no intention of converting others to his religion. Gotthold Ephraim Lessing (1729–1781), who was a close friend of Mendelssohn's, found in Mendelssohn both a confirmation and a stimulus for his own views on religious tolerance.

From the 1770s, Mendelssohn's main project was to draw his fellow Jews into the mainstream of German culture, while at the same time promoting religious tolerance for all, including Jews. An important expression of the first part of the project was to translate parts of the Tanakh into German; an important expression of the second part was his book *Jerusalem, or On Religious Power and Judaism*. In his argument for religious tolerance in this book, he draws heavily on mainstream Enlightenment philosophy. Religion is important for the state as a foundation for the moral of its citizens; the doctrinal differences between Judaism, Christianity, and Islam are, however, of less importance and should be left to the discretion of the subjects. Mendelssohn thus defends the public significance and support of rational religion as far as it conforms to and strengthens a socially accepted morality, but leaves all aspects of revealed religion to the private sphere. Religious doctrines should be tolerated, but no religions should receive governmental preference. Mendelssohn is therefore explicitly critical of theocracy both as traditionally maintained in the biblical history of the Jews and as materialized in the Lutheran state church in Prussia. He obviously has to accept the latter, but considers its dismantling a both desirable and inevitable outcome.

and Judaism (Alexander Altmann trans., Hanover and London: University Press of New England, 1983). Both Fritsch, *Communicatio idiomatium*, 243–246 and Betz, *After Enlightenment*, 262–270 give useful summaries of Mendelssohn's argument.

This was at odds with Hamann's understanding of the significance of revelation at almost every point. He therefore felt it necessary to write a refutation, which he published under the title *Golgotha und Scheblimini*,[87] the latter word being a transliteration of the Hebrew expression *shev limini*, [88] "sit at my right hand!", a quotation from Psalm 110:1. According to a saying of Jesus recorded in Matt 22:44, these words are addressed to the Messiah. The title thus refers to both the humble and the exalted state of The Anointed One.

Mendelssohn's defence for religious tolerance rests on his understanding of humans as independent moral beings with inherent rights from an alleged natural state before the establishment of human society. Hamann finds this to be but a repetition of the idea of human autonomy inherent in Herder's understanding of the development of language, and he finds both to be variations of a Pelagian anthropology maintaining the idea of a pure nature to which grace is later added as an embellishment.[89] For Hamann, there is no pure nature; the understanding of human identity as a gift from God implies that divine-human communication is the basic reality of human existence. As Hamann understands it, nature is therefore always graced.[90]

Since the theory of the natural state lacks a firm foundation,[91] it will, like Enlightenment rationality in general, always serve the powerful.[92] Hamann always insists on the relationship between the foundation of knowledge and social power structures. Since resisting prevalent positions from a loosely founded epistemology is like building on sand, those with a poor foundation for their thought will therefore tend to support the establishment. He is also critical on Mendelssohn's attempt at developing

[87] N3, 291–320. English translation in Hamann, *Writings*, 164–204.

[88] שֵׁב לִימִינִי

[89] Hamann thus even anticipates the critique of *natura pura* which was so important for parts of 20th century Roman-Catholic thought (Fergus Kerr, "Henri de Lubac", in *Key Theological Thinkers: From Modern to Postmodern* [eds. Staale Johannes Kristiansen and Svein Rise; Farnham: Ashgate, 2013], 201–212, 204).

[90] N3, 293.

[91] Hamann creates the word psilosophy, from ψιλός, bare (N3, 316) to describe this kind of argument. Psilosophy is naked reason unsupported by faith or evidence.

[92] N3, 294. Cf. note 76 above.

a theory of rights; for Hamann, this seems to be nothing but an endorsement of Augustine's *civitas terrena* with concupiscence as its main characteristic.[93]

Hamann then devotes the second half of *Gogotha und Scheblimini* to the task of defending traditional Judaism against what he considers Mendelssohn's attack on it. In Hamann's view, Mendelssohn's idea of rationally accessible, eternal truths is as foreign to Judaism as it is to Christianity. Both insist on historical events as manifestations of revelation, and for both, this notion is essential.[94] Admittedly, Christians insist on the significance of revelatory events that the Jews reject, and Christians even insist that these revelations uncover what is hidden in the Bible of the Jews. Still, as a Christian, Hamann has a deep respect for the traditions of the Jews, and he is quite sharp in his critique of Mendelssohn for selling out on this point, even calling him "an uncircumcised sophist."[95] Imagination, which is essential for establishing faith, cannot work with the abstractions that follow Mendelssohn's idea of the natural state. It is thus as destructive for traditional Judaism as it is for traditional Christianity.

Mendelssohn finds the essence of the Mosaic Law in promoting obedience toward the state. Hamann could not disagree more. He is aware that the church is used by the established authorities in this way, but this is a contradiction of its essence. The church builds a kingdom that is not of this world and should therefore not be co-opted by the state for the purpose of building earthly kingdoms.[96] Mendelssohn and the Lutheran state church authorities agree on the primarily moral significance of religion, while Hamann disagrees with both. This is a radical critique of the state church, and one may wonder why the Prussian state censorship allowed him to publish it.[97]

Antisemitism was quite strong in the 18th century, even among intellectuals.[98] Voltaire was "an extreme case,"[99] but he is not the only one. Mendelssohn's appeal for

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[93] N3, 299. The connection is underlined by Betz, *After Enlightenment*, 275.

[94] N3, 305.

[95] N3, 308.

[96] N3, 312–131.

[97] Kierkegaard's critique of the state church thus arguably represents a radicalization of what he already found in Hamann.

[98] See Adam Sutcliffe, "The Enlightenment, French Revolution, Napoleon", in *Antisemitism: A History* (eds. Richard S. Levy and Albert S. Lindemann; Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 107–120.

tolerance is therefore easily understandable. There is, however, no such understanding to be found in Hamann's *Golgotha und Scheblimini.* On the contrary, he turns the tables to the extent that he maintains that it is Mendelssohn who represents a covert attack of the very religion for which he is promoting tolerance by building his demand for tolerance on principles that are incompatible with Judaism as traditionally interpreted. Far from promoting antisemitism, Hamann therefore, as a Christian, finds it necessary to defend Judaism against the covert attack by one its own highly respected representatives.[100] For Hamann, this is necessary both because he finds Mendelssohn's argument to be inconsistent, because he has learned from the apostle Paul that Christians should respect Jews (cf. Rom 11:18–24), and because he finds the significance of revelation through particular historical events to be a common emphasis among Jews and Christians.

Hamann is not burdened by the history of Christian discrimination against Jews in a way that forces him to step carefully when he enters into his debate with Mendelssohn. On the contrary, he does not mince his words when speaking out against what he finds to be inconsistent in Mendelssohn's argument, and that is quite a lot. Still, his critique is exemplary in not containing a single trace of antisemitism. It is rather carried by a deep appreciation for the religion of the Jews and its significance for Christians both concerning the elements the two traditions hold in common and where their ways part. Religious tolerance is arguably as important for Hamann as it is for Mendelssohn. However, he is deeply suspicious of the kind of "tolerance" that insists that religions should confirm to a predefined pattern as a condition of the state's "tolerance" of them. Living at the other end of a history that has taught us more about the problems inherent in this kind of "tolerance" than Hamann could dream of, we should be able to see that he has a point worth considering.

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[99] Sutcliffe, "The Enlightenment", 111.

[100] However, in 1785 Mendelssohn was drawn into a controversy over the alleged pantheism, by many considered equal to atheism, of his close friend Lessing, which made Mendelssohn into a target of attack from all sides. Hamann's critique had nothing to do with this debate. On this debate and Mendelssohn's role in it, see Fredrick C. Beiser, *The Fate of Reason: German Philosophy from Kant to Fichte* (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London: Harvard University Press, 1987), 92–108.

Imagination and critique in the thought of Hamann

One of the striking features of Hamann's thought is his deep appreciation of British empiricism in the tradition of Bacon and Hume. For Hamann, empiricism serves a double purpose. He insists that a consistent world view will have to appreciate the world as it is experienced within the realms of both history and nature; unfounded speculation never carries much weight for Hamann. At the same time, he appreciates how empiricism, particularly in Hume, is unfolded as a deconstruction of all kinds of rationalism; here Hume in Hamann's view serves as a John the Baptist among the philosophers, paving the way for faith.[101] Admittedly, Hume did not quite understand that himself, applying his critique of reason also in the area of faith. In Hamann's view, this is such an obvious category error that he is willing to overlook it. The error may have stopped Hume himself from entering the Promised Land, but he certainly was able to show us the way.[102]

This tells us that the dismantling of rationalism in itself does not suffice. The reason is that the real significance of history and nature as areas of divine presence, the revelation of divine condescension, does not correspond to the understanding of the divine as preconceived by humans. Empiricism that does not expect revelation to establish patterns of divine action that differ from human expectations are therefore in Hamann's view not sufficiently empirical. Imagination is essential for Hamann in making out the real content of divine revelation and applying it one's own life, but even imagination is from the outset determined by the one-sidedly human to the extent that it on its own will not capture the essentials of revelation. It will have to be exposed to, and thus determined by, the traditions of revelations that show us the paradoxality of divinity under the cover of the apparently humble and insignificant.[103] In appropriating these revelations and making them the foundation of life as lived by humans today, imagination is indispensable. It is thus imagination on the part of the human that corresponds to and appreciates both history and nature as the area of divine presence.

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[101] See John R. Betz, "Hamann before Kierkegaard: A systematic theological oversight," *Pro Ecclesia* 16 (2007), 299–333, 315.

[102] On Hamann's critical appreciation of Hume, see further Alfsvåg, *Christology as Critique*, 67–68.

[103] The classic text on this topic in Lutheran theology is Luther's Heidelberg Disputation from 1518. On Hamann's appreciation of this text, see Brose, *Hamann und Hume*, 1:171–174.

Hamann is not limiting the world of relevant revelation to the biblical tradition. Even in this respect anticipating aspects of the thought of C. S. Lewis, Hamann finds revelatory significance in all religious traditions, both pagan, Jewish, and Christian, even if he as a Christian is not in doubt that it is the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus that sets the pattern according to which all revelations are to be interpreted. His main objection against Mendelssohn is that the latter interprets revelation according to the rules of reason. For Hamann, it is reason that should be governed by revelation as interpreted and applied by imagination, and this principle is what governs his polemic against Herder, Kant, Mendelssohn, and other Enlightenment thinkers. He knew from his own experience that mainstream Enlightenment thought was too limited to able to capture the heights and depths of human existence. For that purpose, the imaginative identification of oneself with the figures of the biblical story was much better starting point.

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