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**Kierkegaard's Reception of Hamann:  
Language, Selfhood and Reflection**

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## Declaration

I composed this thesis, the work is my own. No part of this thesis has been submitted for any other degree or qualification.

Name..... Date.....

*To Yv , Leah and Jona*  
*Your love and grace have sustained me.*

## Abstract

This thesis investigates *Søren Kierkegaard's* (1813-1855) reception of the writings of *Johann Georg Hamann* (1730-1788). I focus on four specific topics. In chapter one I examine Kierkegaard's early reception of Hamann which I argue provides the basis for Kierkegaard's conception of his own authorial task. In particular, I examine concepts of humour and systematicity and the centrality of the figure of Socrates. Central to my argument is a contrast between Kierkegaard's reception of Hamann and that of Hegel's review. In chapter two I show that Kierkegaard develops an argument against speculative philosophy and its claims to have achieved the absolute beginning. I argue that Kierkegaard appeals to Hamann's critique of Kant which centres around the possibility of *a priori* cognition and the dependency of reason on language. I contend that Kierkegaard takes up Hamann's critique in order to show that the absolute beginning which speculative philosophy claims to have achieved in the form of pure thinking is unachievable because of the dependency of thought on language. Chapter three examines the conception of selfhood in Hamann and Kierkegaard. I address their views of the self as unified and their critique of alternative conceptions of selfhood which undermine this unity. I show that Kierkegaard's arguments in relation to despair and forgetfulness share important similarities with Hamann. Chapter four explores Kierkegaard's critique and repair of post-Kantian reflection theory. I demonstrate that Kierkegaard proceeds to provide a minimal view of the self achieved through reflection which finally encounters its own limits in its own self-knowledge. I propose that Kierkegaard presents this as Socratic ignorance and that his model for outlining the limits of self-knowledge stems from Hamann. I develop my argument by arguing that for Hamann and Kierkegaard self-knowledge is only available through divine revelation.

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## Abbreviations

- CA Søren Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Anxiety*, ed. and tr. Reidar Thomte (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980).
- CI Søren Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Irony*, ed. and tr. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989).
- CUP Søren Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to Philosophical Fragments*, ed. and tr. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992).
- E/O I Søren Kierkegaard, *Either/Or I*, ed. and tr. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987).
- E/O II Søren Kierkegaard, *Either/Or II*, ed. and tr. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987).
- H IV - VII Johann Georg Hamann, *Briefwechsel*, vol.IV-VII, ed. Arthur Henkel (Weisbaden: Insel, 1959-1979).
- JP Søren Kierkegaard, *Journals and Papers*, 7 vols., ed. and tr. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1967-78).
- KrV Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, ed. and tr. Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998).
- LS Johann Georg Hamann, *Londoner Schriften*, Historische-kritische Neuedition, ed. Oswald Bayer and Bernd Weissenborn (Munich: C.H. Beck, 1993).

- N I - N VI            Johann Georg Hamann, *Sämtliche Werke*, 6 vols., ed. Josef Nadler, Historical-critical edition (Vienna: Herder, 1949-57).
- PF                      Søren Kierkegaard, *Philosophical Fragments*, ed. and tr. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985).
- R I - VIII             Johann Georg Hamann, *Hamann's Schriften*, ed. Friedrich and Gustav Adolf Wiener (VIII, 2 vols.), (Berlin: G. Reimer, 1820-1843).
- SKS                    *Søren Kierkegaards Skrifter*, 28 text volumes and 28 commentary volumes, ed. Niels Jørgen Cappelørn, Joakim Garff, Jette Knudsen, Johnny Kondrup, and Alstair McKinnon (Copenhagen: Gad Publishers, 1997 – ).
- SM                      James C. O’Flaherty, *Hamann’s Socratic Memorabilia: A Translation and Commentary* (Baltimore: The John Hopkins Press, 1967).
- SUD                    Søren Kierkegaard, *The Sickness unto Death*, ed. and tr. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980).
- ZH I - III             Johann Georg Hamann, *Briefwechsel*, vol.I-III, ed. Walter Ziesemer and Arthur Henkel (Weisbaden: Insel, 1955-1957).

# Introduction

In 1856, the year following Kierkegaard's death, Peter Christian Zahle (1825-98) published a short monograph, *In Memory of Johann Georg Hamann and Søren Aabye Kierkegaard*.<sup>1</sup> From such an early date, Hamann was already recognised as significant to Kierkegaard's authorship. The next work devoted to Kierkegaard's relation to Hamann appeared in 1922.<sup>2</sup> Since that time, not a single full length study has been produced investigating a relation that has been widely recognised as perhaps the most significant in Kierkegaard's intellectual development and authorship. From the time of Rodemann's publication to the present day there have been a handful of articles and chapters in edited volumes published exploring the relation between Hamann and Kierkegaard, as well as Hamann receiving brief mention in numerous studies. In fact, it has become something of a standard practice in Kierkegaard studies to gesture towards Hamann, but these rarely go beyond the superficial.<sup>3</sup> In relation to other areas of Kierkegaard studies, Kierkegaard's reception of Hamann has been not been thoroughly investigated. The present work is a modest contribution to correcting this.

A lack of material devoted to explicating Kierkegaard's reception of Hamann does not in and of itself necessarily warrant a study of the kind I undertake here. However, given the virtual universal agreement regarding the importance of Hamann for Kierkegaard's authorship, and the relatively little attention this has received, I

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<sup>1</sup> Peter Christian Zahle, *Til Erindring om Johan Georg Hamann og Søren Kierkegaard* (Copenhagen: Thiele, 1856). See "Peter Christian Zahle" in *Dansk Biografisk Leksikon*, ed. Povl Engelstoft (Copenhagen: J.H. Schulz, 1944), p.414-417. See also "Peter Christian Zahle" in *Encounters with Kierkegaard: a life seen by his contemporaries*, ed. Bruce Kirmmse; trans. Bruce Kirmmse and Virginia R. Laursen (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996), p.113-114; Niels Jørgen Cappelørn, "A Letter from Peter Christian Zahle concerning Kierkegaard's Illness, Death, and Funeral", trans. K. Brian Söderquist in *Kierkegaard Studies Yearbook 2006*, ed. Niels Jørgen Cappelørn, Hermann Deuser and K. Brian Söderquist (New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2006), p.316-356.

<sup>2</sup> Wilhelm Rodemann, *Hamann und Kierkegaard* (Gütersloh: C. Bertelsmann, 1922).

<sup>3</sup> Most recently, Sergia Karen Hay has provided a helpful bibliography which highlights works that discuss Kierkegaard's relation to Hamann, although it is not exhaustive. I do not specifically reference the majority of these writings because as a rule they do not engage with the topic at a high level, and merely gesture towards Hamann. See Sergia Karen Hay, "Sharing Style and Thesis: Kierkegaard's Appropriation of Hamann's Work" in *Kierkegaard and his German contemporaries. Tome 3: Literature and aesthetics*, vol. 5, ed. Jon Stewart (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate Publishing, 2008), p.111-113. In the current work, I only avail myself of the literature which is specifically devoted to Kierkegaard's relation to Hamann.

believe that there are at least two further reasons why this relation is justified in receiving more attention. First, it helps to understand the genesis of Kierkegaard's arguments and his dependence on Hamann for their execution. Second, in investigating Kierkegaard's reception of Hamann, one is able to appreciate aspects of his thinking which can be overlooked when this relation is not considered. That is to say that understanding Hamann one gains a better understanding of Kierkegaard. In this respect, I will present those aspects of Hamann's work that are taken up by Kierkegaard. I will do this by rehearsing Hamann's arguments in detail and show how Kierkegaard takes them up. This is similar, one could argue, to the need to understand Kant's project if one is to appreciate Hegel.

There are two aspects of Kierkegaard's reception of Hamann that form the focus of this thesis. The first is to show that some of Kierkegaard's arguments have their genesis in his reading of Hamann. The second is to demonstrate that some arguments which are part of the standard Kierkegaardian lexicon can be given new impetus and seen in a new light when considered against Kierkegaard's reception of Hamann. In this respect, I will show that aspects of Kierkegaard's arguments can be overlooked if one lacks the proper lens through which to view them. While there are many lenses which can be applied in this respect, my task is to provide the Hamannian lens, which is not to discount the need for other lenses. I simply suggest that an attention to Hamann helps the reader of Kierkegaard appreciate those aspects of his thought that are either misleadingly treated as original to him and/or overlooked when not considered in light of his reception of Hamann.

In treating Kierkegaard's reception of Hamann I present my findings in four chapters. In chapter one, *Style, System, and Socrates*, I assess Kierkegaard's early reception of Hamann. I do this drawing predominantly on his *Journals*. I argue that Kierkegaard's early reception of Hamann forms the basis of central aspects of his later authorship: the centrality of Socrates, style, communication and humour as a challenge to standard post-Kantian attempts to produce a scientific system of knowledge. I argue that Kierkegaard develops these ideas, particularly the non-systematic nature of his writings, in distinction from the fashionable philosophical trends in his native Denmark. In distinguishing Kierkegaard's conception of his authorship and the dominant Hegelian philosophy, I contrast Kierkegaard's reception of Hamann (reconstructed from a series of brief, fragmentary entries in the *Journals*) with Hegel's review of the Roth edition of Hamann's collected works. Throughout

the course of this discussion I address, and correct, several views which have become standard in discussions regarding Kierkegaard's reception of Hamann; specifically the claim that Kierkegaard criticised Hamann for not being systematic enough and that he came to Hamann via Hegel which I examine in relation to Kierkegaard's interest in Hamann's marriage of conscience.

In chapter two, *The Presuppositionless Beginning*, I examine Kierkegaard's formal critique of speculative philosophy, distinguishing this from his main existential criticisms. Focussing predominantly on Kierkegaard's *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, I assess his argument against the post-Kantian Idealist attempts to provide an absolute, presuppositionless beginning to a philosophical system. I claim that Kierkegaard provides two distinct arguments, where others normally see one, in order to demonstrate that such an absolute starting point for philosophy is unachievable. The first argument that Kierkegaard pursues is one from agency as a means to counter the systematic attempt, via infinite reflection, to begin with *pure being*. I point out that this argument has its genesis in Romantic critiques of Fichte. I then treat Kierkegaard's second argument from language which I propose Kierkegaard establishes in order to counter the systematic attempt to begin, via infinite abstraction, with *pure thinking*. I demonstrate that this important argument in Kierkegaard's work has its genesis in Hamann. In order to supplement this argument which appears *in nuce*, I turn to discuss Hamann's critique of Kant aptly summarised as *Vernunft ist Sprache*. Drawing almost exclusively on Hamann's *Metacritique of the Purism of Reason*, I outline Hamann's central insight that Reason cannot be viewed as independent from language, that language is required for Reason itself to be conceptualised and therefore cannot be free from *a posteriori* deliverances thereby challenging Kant's claim for the *a priori* and independent nature of Reason. Concurrently with my treatment of Hamann, I point to Kierkegaard's agreement.

Chapter three, *The Existential Self*, examines Hamann and Kierkegaard's conceptions of selfhood, their diagnoses of existential ailments which arise through faulty conceptions of selfhood, and their proposed cures. In section one I present Hamann's description of the unified self, drawing primarily on his *Philological Ideas and Doubts*. Remaining with this text, I then rehearse Hamann's critique of the Enlightenment view of the self, focussing on his claim that a false understanding of the self emerges when the dignity of selfhood rests on the rational self. For Hamann this causes a divorce in the self and ultimately leads to a separation of the self from

the ground of the self's being, namely God. Examining his critique as outlined in the *Review*, *Konxompax* and *Aesthetica in nuce*, I show that, for Hamann, such a conception of selfhood leads to an indifferent approach to existence, whereas he advocates passion and that in separating the self from God, the self attributes to itself divine predicates, creating itself in its own image. As a cure, Hamann proposes *companionability* which entails the disciplining of reason in order that a proper view of the self might be maintained. I then examine Hamann's claim that a faulty conception of the self arises through a seduction of language and ultimately self-deception. These latter two arguments I draw primarily from Hamann's correspondence with Jacobi.

In the second section, I turn to consider Kierkegaard's conception of the self and his diagnosis of two failures to achieve selfhood – infinitude's despair in *The Sickness Unto Death* and forgetfulness in the *Postscript*. Beginning with SUD, I first discuss Kierkegaard's notion of selfhood as unified in its relation to itself and then turn to consider his description of the self's failure to be a self in infinitude's despair. Here I argue that Kierkegaard traces this failure to an elevation of the imagination which not only causes a failure for selfhood but also, thereby, separates the self from its relation to its ontological ground, i.e., God. In such a displacement of the divine relation the self appropriates to itself divine attributes in order to fill the void created in its false selfhood. As a cure, Kierkegaard argues that the imagination must be coordinated with the will in order to avoid the consequences of infinitude's despair.

I then consider Kierkegaard's treatment of forgetfulness in CUP and argue that it is structurally similar to his treatment in SUD. I show that, for Kierkegaard, forgetfulness is a choice that the self takes up in order to avoid the task of selfhood. Unlike SUD, however, Kierkegaard argues in CUP that the false elevation of reason is to blame for engendering forgetfulness. As a cure, he advances an argument for what he terms *concurrency* whereby reason is brought into a non-hierarchical relation with the other faculties and through this the possibility of achieving selfhood is available. In a final step, I consider Kierkegaard's view that the faulty conceptions of selfhood of despair and forgetfulness rest in a form of self-deception. Concluding this chapter, I highlight the parallels between the existential diagnoses of Hamann and Kierkegaard. I suggest Hamann should be considered as an important, albeit not sole, contributor to the formation of Kierkegaard's mature existential views.

The final chapter, *Reflection and the Dialectical Self*, discusses Kierkegaard's treatment of a central post-Kantian problem: reflection. The issue is the possibility (or not) of gaining a view of our selfhood when we are the ones doing the viewing. That is, what type of access do we have to our non-empirical self such as our reason, freedom or infinitude? In addressing these issues, I reconstruct from Kierkegaard's writings, predominantly drawing on the *Postscript*, *The Concept of Irony*, and *Sickness Unto Death*, both his agreements and disagreements with post-Kantian attempts to answer this question. I argue that Kierkegaard takes up this issue because he detects a loss of infinitude in Hegelianism which he describes as pantheism. In an attempt to rehabilitate infinitude, I examine Kierkegaard's critique of Fichte's form of infinitude and claim that Kierkegaard moves to regain infinitude without abandoning finitude which he views as the major problem with Fichte's account. Following from this, I examine Kierkegaard's critique of Romantic attempts to gain access to the self and show that for Kierkegaard the turn to art also leads, as with Fichte, to a loss of finitude. I then turn to consider Kierkegaard's proposed way of accessing infinitude without abandoning finitude and vice versa. He rehabilitates infinitude, I argue, through an alternative method which has its roots in Hamann and Early German Romanticism, namely by establishing feeling as an indication of the priority of being over reflection. I then outline what I take to be Kierkegaard's circumscribed rehabilitation of reflection and demonstrate that despite his criticisms of reflection, he does maintain a role for reflection in accessing the self.

In the concluding section, I then turn to consider Kierkegaard and Hamann as advocating the need for divine revelation as a means to provide the proper reflection of the self. To begin, I examine first Hamann and then Kierkegaard in their articulation of Socratic ignorance as the description of the limits which the self reaches in knowledge of the self. Drawing on Hamann's *Socratic Memorabilia* and Kierkegaard's *The Concept of Irony*, I show that they both advance an argument for the limits of self-knowledge. The limits that the self reaches in self-knowledge not only represents a barrier to full self-presence but is held by both to be an indispensable propaedeutic to the reception of full self-knowledge. As I show, drawing on Hamann's *Londoner Schriften* and Kierkegaard's *For Self-Examination*, both maintain that Socratic ignorance can only be overcome through the divine revelation in the Word. For both individuals, true self-knowledge, the true reflection

of the self is only attainable through the revelation of the divine who is the ground of the self's existence.

In this thesis, therefore, I have chosen to focus on a small number of writings and a set number of topics from those writings as outlined above. However, much work still needs to be done in order to fully appreciate the extent of Kierkegaard's reception of Hamann. In relation to the current work, this of course means that there are a number of issues that I will not address and a number of texts that I do not engage with. These areas are vast. A few of them, however, are worth highlighting.

I will not discuss the relation of faith to reason found in their writings, specifically as it relates to paradox in Kierkegaard's *Philosophical Fragments* as this is an issue which has been treated in past studies, most recently by John Betz, and Joachim Ringleben.<sup>4</sup> Nor do I address the issue of the infinite qualitative distinction which Kierkegaard employs and is of Hamannian origin.<sup>5</sup> In chapter three and four, I address their views of the human relation to the divine and set this within the context of concerns regarding selfhood and the limits of philosophical inquiry. In this respect, I note in chapter three Kierkegaard's claim in his *Journals* that he had advanced Hamann's view regarding the parallels to reason and faith and law and grace. But I construe these topics as related to other areas outwith their criticisms of rational theology, and specific concerns related to knowledge of God. In a related way, I do not address the topic of faith and reason in relation to Hamann's appropriation of Hume, nor do I examine Kierkegaard's appeal to these arguments. Of course, this is a central concern for both authors, but again this has already been addressed in previous treatments to which I point my reader in chapter two. Related to this, I do not concern myself with offering a defense of Hamann and Kierkegaard respectively against the charge of irrationalism. Such a concern has been adequately addressed and defeated in relation to both Hamann and Kierkegaard independently of each other. I also do not engage with Kierkegaard's treatment of anxiety which he claims from Hamann, while he indicates that his use of the concept is different to that

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<sup>4</sup> John R. Betz, "Hamann Before Kierkegaard: A Systematic Theological Oversight", *Pro Ecclesia* XVII/ 3 (2007): p.314-318; Joachim Ringleben, "Søren Kierkegaard as a Reader of Hamann", trans. Jon Stewart, in *Kierkegaard Studies Yearbook 2006*, ed. Niels Jørgen Cappelørn, Hermann Deuser, and K. Brian Söderquist (New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2006), p.214-217.

<sup>5</sup> For a recent, albeit brief discussion of this topic, see Ringleben, *Kierkegaard as Reader of Hamann*, p. 217. See, for example, SUD, p.99. In Hamann it appears in *Golgotha and Sheblimini!*; N III, p.312/R VII, p.59; See also H V, 319; (to Hamann from Jacobi, 11.1.1785).

of Hamann's, nor do I pursue a discussion of silence in *Fear and Trembling*, although the motto originates with Hamann, and the figure of the Knight of faith is traceable to Hamann's *Londoner Schriften*. Further study is required in these areas.

I leave aside a discussion of their personal religious commitments and simply treat it as obvious that both Hamann and Kierkegaard considered themselves to be Christian writers articulating a critique of the ever increasing encroachment of rationalism. My focus, instead, is to take these issues for granted and to explore other aspects of Kierkegaard's relation to Hamann which are perhaps less obvious. My attention will be to issues which hold this to be important and implied but it will not figure prominently in the current work. Instead, I take it as an obvious point which informs their writings at the most fundamental level.

At the same time I do not address the points of difference that exist between Hamann and Kierkegaard – differences which pertain to biographical as well as intellectual issues – which I believe are as significant as the substantial similarities between them. For all of the influence that Hamann had on Kierkegaard – which I believe was significant – there are admittedly important differences in their views. These differences one discovers largely through Kierkegaard's critical remarks of certain themes, for example his view of nature and divine revelation which plays a central role in Hamann's writings, particularly as articulated in *Aesthetica in nuce*. Further, the fact that central Hamannian themes are rarely discussed in Kierkegaard indicates that there were concerns which Hamann had that are not replicated in Kierkegaard. Nor do I approach my topic from a comparative perspective. That is, my aim is not to present their views on a particular topic and offer a comparison between them. Instead, my focus is on Kierkegaard's reception of Hamann, discussed from Kierkegaard's perspective.

Related, I am not concerned with whether or not Kierkegaard *got Hamann right*. This is to say, I will not offer any detailed discussion of whether Kierkegaard read Hamann correctly. Despite the fact that Kierkegaard read widely across the critical edition of Hamann's writings which he owned, it becomes apparent that there are vast aspects of Hamann's thought which do not figure into Kierkegaard's authorship just as Kierkegaard addresses themes which are not explicitly present in Hamann.

Finally, I do not address the importance of Hamann and Kierkegaard to contemporary questions and concerns. This is important work, best left to a published monograph. I do not, in this respect, show how Hamann and Kierkegaard anticipate current concerns in their writings, for example how their writings relate to later thinkers or questions and topics which form the current theological and philosophical debates. Nor do I indicate how Kierkegaard and Hamann can be seen to be forerunners of various twentieth and twenty-first century movements – such as the linguistic turn, postmodernity and post-secularism.

I concentrate primarily on a focussed selection of Kierkegaard's writings and, apart from *The Concept of Irony, For Self-Examination*, and the *Journals*, these are predominantly from the pseudonymous authorship with specific emphasis on *Postscript* and *The Sickness Unto Death*. However, I have not employed the names of the individual pseudonymous authors but have opted instead for attributing the arguments to Kierkegaard. While this position is not without its problems and its detractors, I believe that it is wrong simply to assume that because a particular view is advanced by a pseudonymous author that it cannot be attributed to Kierkegaard directly. I hold there to be a set of unifying arguments that Kierkegaard pursues throughout his authorship and the arguments that I take up fall, I believe, within this category. In this regard, I have established basic criteria for attributing to Kierkegaard a set of views which appear in his pseudonymous writings.

First, I take it as reasonable to attribute to Kierkegaard a position which is repeated by various pseudonyms, is attested to his in *Journals and Papers* and which find agreement – where possible – in his signed writings. In this respect, I view Kierkegaard as advancing a set of substantially unified and stable arguments across his writings. While emphases do vary and vocabulary is changed, I believe that Kierkegaard does offer a set of arguments and positions which one could attribute to him. However, this is not to say that pseudonymity is not an important authorial strategy adopted by Kierkegaard. I will touch on this briefly in chapter one where I discuss Kierkegaard's authorial strategy and its similarities to Hamann who, too, adopted pseudonyms. This is not to downplay the significance of pseudonymity, nor am I suggesting that there are not differences between the arguments and argumentative strategy which Kierkegaard pursues under the different pseudonyms. Instead, my concern is with attempting to present a set of arguments that Kierkegaard takes up, which he draws from Hamann as a significant resource, which have

attestation across his authorship, and which accord with his unpublished *Journals and Papers*.<sup>6</sup> Of course, this is an area of contention in Kierkegaard studies, and it goes against Kierkegaard's own pleas that his readers should use the pseudonymous author's name and not his own when quoting from a particular work. My position finds support more recently in the work of George Pattison and Michelle Kosch and I follow their rationale in opting for crediting Kierkegaard with certain pseudonyms.<sup>7</sup>

Any work which takes up a presentation of Kierkegaard's thought, as with any other major figure, is faced with the insurmountable secondary literature devoted to his corpus. As such, one must carefully choose one's sources and apprise oneself of the best commentators in the field. I have drawn most heavily upon those Kierkegaard scholars which I believe represent the most advanced and up-to-date scholarship available. Only on rare occasions do I attempt to intervene in debates among Kierkegaard scholars: my concern is not with judging between the various competing interpretations that exist presently, but rather with presenting Kierkegaard's writings in light of his reception of Hamann.

Similar issues arise in relation to Hamann. The vast majority of Hamannian scholarship has been produced in Germany, with much work occurring within the last thirty years. In this respect, the English scholarship is still very much in its infancy. I make use of recent studies by Dickson and Betz,<sup>8</sup> but many of my arguments depend on untranslated German scholarship. In so doing, I hope to provide my reader with the opportunity to become more familiar with this literature and through this encourage further study of Hamann.

There are significant aspects of Hamann's thought and writings that I do not address in this thesis. There are two reasons for this: (a) Kierkegaard's reception of Hamann, while significant, is also limited in scope. While I do not claim to have

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<sup>6</sup> For a discussion of the use of Kierkegaard's *Journals* in interpreting his writings see Richard Purkardhofer, " 'Suppose I would die tomorrow': Possible Uses of Kierkegaard's Journals and Notebooks for Research", in *Kierkegaard Studies Yearbook 2003*, ed. Niels Jørgen Cappelørn, Hermann Deuser and Jon Stewart (New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2003), p.202-213.

<sup>7</sup> George Pattison, *The Philosophy of Kierkegaard* (Chesham: Acumen, 2005), p.10-11; Michelle Kosch, *Freedom and Reason in Kant, Schelling, and Kierkegaard* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), p.11-13.

<sup>8</sup> Gwen Griffith Dickson, *Johann Georg Hamann's Relational Metacriticism* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1995); John Betz, *After Enlightenment: The Post-secular Vision of J.G. Hamann* (Chichester, UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009).

exhausted this relation, I have maintained a presentation of Hamann which remains focussed on the questions that I see Kierkegaard pursuing; (b) Hamann's authorship is wide and varied, and it is obvious that there are a number of questions which Hamann takes up at length in his writings which are not replicated in Kierkegaard. Where Hamann advances an argument in relation to a topic found in Kierkegaard, but which he takes up through alternative means, I have attempted to indicate this to the reader. I indicate those points where Hamann presents an argument which is necessary to understanding his arguments but which has not been reproduced by Kierkegaard. Further, as with Kierkegaard, I do not adjudicate the scholarly debates that exist within Hamann studies. When appropriate I direct my reader to alternative interpretations to the ones I advance.

A final point regarding Kierkegaard's reception of Hamann is required. This relates to the historical distance between them and therefore the different intellectual environments in which they both, respectively, were addressing their concerns. In short, Kierkegaard's reception of Hamann is complicated not only by the paucity of direct and explicit references in his writings but also because of the historical distance that exists between the two thinkers. There is a space of fifty years between the time of Hamann's death (1788) and Kierkegaard's first writing (1838). This time span is significant and must be borne in mind by anyone interested in taking up Kierkegaard's relation to Hamann. Several things regarding the chronological distance between them are worth commenting on.

The fifty years which separate them saw seismic shifts in the intellectual landscape of Europe. Particularly, Hamann's writings were penned predominantly during the pre-critical period of German philosophy. Thus, only in the last years of Hamann's life did he witness the changes that were being wrought in the intellectual life of Europe. Kierkegaard, on the other hand, was writing in the waning period of post-Kantian Idealism and Romanticism. These two dominant movements were in their infancy during the last stages of Hamann's life. In this respect, Hamann and Kierkegaard lived in very different intellectual climates and being cognisant of this fact is of paramount importance in order to properly appreciate Kierkegaard's relation to Hamann. Moreover, many of Hamann's insights were taken up by leading post-Kantians, an area of Hamann studies which is largely unexplored. In this respect, some of Hamann's insights were likely mediated to Kierkegaard indirectly via a complex route. Some of the arguments that Kierkegaard advances may have

originally had their genesis with Hamann but came to Kierkegaard via alternative routes. I will not offer any detailed analysis of these differing routes of reception, as this falls outwith the bounds of the current work. I will however attempt to show what questions Kierkegaard takes up in relation to post-Kantian philosophy and how he discharges his response to these questions in light of his reception of Hamann. When appropriate I will indicate to my reader alternative possibilities for Kierkegaard's inheritance of themes similar to those found in Hamann.

A word regarding translations. For Kierkegaard, I use the Hong edition of his writings. However, occasionally I depart from these texts and alter the current translation. I will indicate when this is the case and provide the *SKS* reference after citing the Hong edition. All translations of Hamann are my own, unless otherwise stated, with the exception of *Socratic Memorabilia* where I follow James C. O'Flaherty's translation.

# Chapter One

## Style, System and Socrates: Kierkegaard's Early Reception of Hamann

### Introduction

On October 18th, 1827 Goethe received Hegel into his home and hosted an afternoon tea in honour of his distinguished guest. The topic of conversation upon which they found agreement and occupied a significant portion of their time together was the writings of J.G. Hamann. As Eckermann recounts the discussion over tea: “A great deal was said about Hamann, with respect to whom Hegel was chief spokesman, displaying a deep insight into this extraordinary mind, such as could have arisen from a most earnest and scrupulous study of the subject.”<sup>1</sup>

That Hamann was the topic of discussion amongst this illustrious gathering was only made possible by the recent availability of his collected writings, which Frederick Roth had completed in 1825. Roth’s edition was in seven volumes<sup>2</sup> and contained Hamann’s journals, personal correspondence and published and unpublished works.<sup>3</sup> Prior to Roth’s critical edition, Hamann’s writings were only accessible to a few individuals in fragmentary form and made available in small, heavily edited pieces via separate publications.<sup>4</sup> During his lifetime, Hamann was encouraged by some of his closest friends, most notably Herder, to publish his

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<sup>1</sup> *Conversations of Goethe with Eckermann and Soret*, vol. II; trans. John Oxenford (London: Smith, Elder & CO., 1850), p.35; see also O’Flaherty, SM, p.17 and also Karlfried Gründer, “Geschichte der Deutungen” in *Johann Georg Hamanns Hauptschriften Erklärt*, vol. I; ed. Fritze Blanke and Lothar Scheiner (Gütersloh: Carl Bertlesmann, 1956), p.22.

<sup>2</sup> The eighth volume, which Roth intended to bring to publication but was unable to before his death, was published in two parts in 1842/43 under the direction of Dr. Gustav Wiener. The two part eighth volume contains commentary on selected texts (some from Hamann himself) and an index.

<sup>3</sup> The Roth edition was invaluable in making Hamann’s writings available to the wider reading public. However, as Gründer notes, this edition was incomplete and lacked precision; Gründer, *HH*, p.15. The Nadler edition (1949-1957) of Hamann’s writings and the ZH/H edition of his correspondence (1955-1979), by contrast to the Roth edition, are comprised of six volumes and seven volumes respectively. The recent edition of Hamann’s correspondence was the result of a collaboration between Walther Ziesemer and Arthur Henkel (vol.1-3) and completed, after Ziesemer’s passing in 1951 by Henkel alone (vol.4-7). For an account of the Nadler and ZH/H editions see Gründer, *HH*, p.14-17.

<sup>4</sup> See Gründer, *HH*, p.14-15.

writings.<sup>5</sup> However, despite Hamann's amenability to the idea,<sup>6</sup> this did not materialise and various individuals (including Herder, Jacobi, and Goethe) who were in the position to produce a critical edition failed to bring the project to fruition for a variety of reasons.<sup>7</sup> In the early nineteenth century, Roth made Jacobi's acquaintance and the two became close friends.<sup>8</sup> It was through Jacobi, and with the help of Nicolovius, that Roth was granted access to the manuscripts and encouraged to produce a critical edition.<sup>9</sup> The first full volume of the collected works was made available in 1821 and contained Hamann's early writings as well as correspondence from this period.<sup>10</sup> The remaining six volumes appeared over the next four years, being completed in 1825. Each of the volumes contained Hamann's writings and a selection of his correspondence ordered in chronological periods. With the publication of the seven volumes (and a promised eighth volume), Hamann's work was now available to a wider audience and made possible studies of this enigmatic figure who had aroused the significant interest of the leading men of letters.

The discussion over tea, which Hegel appeared to dominate and in which he demonstrated intimate knowledge according to the contemporaneous account, culminated in his review of the Roth edition twelve months after the engagement at Goethe's residence. The review appeared in the *Jahrbüchern für wissenschaftliche Kritik*.<sup>11</sup> It was met with approval from Goethe, shortly after its publication, who

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<sup>5</sup> See Dickson, *Relational Metacriticism*, p.21. Dickson points out that Hamann himself did not own some copies of his own writings.

<sup>6</sup> See Nadler's concluding remarks in N I, p.320: "To collect and publish his writings was Hamann's last ambition. His untimely death and the clumsiness of his hands made this wish impossible to fulfill."

<sup>7</sup> Gründer, *HH*, p.15.

<sup>8</sup> Bayer & Weissenborn, *LS*, p.25. Roth provides his own account of how the edition under his editorship came about in the introduction to the first volume; see R I, p.x-xii.

<sup>9</sup> Gründer, *HH*, p.15.

<sup>10</sup> In 1816 Roth had published a substantially abbreviated edition of Hamann's *Biblical Meditations – Hamanns Betrachtungen über die Heilige Schrift*; see Bayer & Weissenborn, *LS*, p.25.

<sup>11</sup> See Gründer, *HH*, p.22. Hegel's review first appeared as 'Hamanns Schriften' in *Jahrbücher für wissenschaftliche Kritik*; October and December 1828, n.77-80, and 107-14. It is found in the first edition of the collected works as 'Ueber Hamanns Schriften', vol. XVII, 38-110, 1835. See *Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel's Werke: Vollständige Ausgabe*, I-XVIII, ed. Philip Marheineke et al. Berlin: Duncker und Humbolt, 1832-45. Kierkegaard owned this edition Hegel's collected works; see *ASKB* 549-65. In the present work passages and references to Hegel's review are drawn from the recent English translation: *Hegel on Hamann*, tr. with introduction by Lisa Marie Anderson (Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 2008); hereafter cited as Hegel, *Review*, p.xx.

remarked to Eckermann: “Hegel has written a review of Hamann in the *Berliner Jarhbuchern* which I have read and reread recently and which I must highly praise. Hegel’s judgments as a critic have always been good.”<sup>12</sup> This review marks the beginning of formal Hamannian scholarship.<sup>13</sup>

Eight years after Hegel’s review, in 1836, Kierkegaard (owner of the Roth edition) recorded the first entry discussing Hamann in his *Journals*.<sup>14</sup> Over the next several years he appears at regular intervals, and is particularly present in a concentrated set of entries from 1837. Where Hegel had provided a substantial review of Hamann’s works,<sup>15</sup> clearly articulating his disagreements and a “certain qualified stamp of approval”<sup>16</sup> in recognising Hamann’s originality and genius, Kierkegaard’s early appraisal of Hamann is scattered in the *Journals*, found in fragmentary fashion and in need of reconstruction; a task which I set out to accomplish in this chapter. The topics which most concern Kierkegaard in his early reception of Hamann are humour, irony, the nature of Hamann’s writings (particularly their non-systematic form) and the figure of Socrates. Kierkegaard’s interest in these specific topics, as opposed to, for example, specific interest in Hamann’s treatment of language, raises the following question: why was Kierkegaard interested in these issues at this early stage of his intellectual and authorial development? It is my contention that his particular interest in just these aspects of Hamann’s writings rests in Kierkegaard’s attempts to conceptualise his

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<sup>12</sup> Quoted in Gründer, *HH*, p. 26. See also *Conversations with Goethe*, p.134; and O’Flaherty, *SM*, p.17.

<sup>13</sup> Betz, *After Enlightenment*, p.14. For a discussion of the relation between Friederich von Roth and G.W.F. Hegel, see Karlfried Gründer, “Nachspiel zu Hegels Hamann-Rezension,” *Hegel-Studien 1*, (1961): 89; see also Gründer, *HH*, p.21: “The first scholarly monograph about Hamann was occasioned by the Roth edition.”; see also fn3: “Hegel was personally acquainted with Roth in Nürnberg”.

<sup>14</sup> JP 1539/I A 100/AA:14; September, 10.1836. Kierkegaard owned the Roth edition, *ASKB* 536-544; and Jacobi’s collected works which contain the correspondence between Jacobi and Hamann, *ASKB* 1722-1728.

<sup>15</sup> Betz, *After Enlightenment*, p.14. O’Flaherty characterises Hegel’s review as “an exhaustive and brilliant review of Hamann’s collected works”; see O’Flaherty, *SM*, p.18. For an alternative view which claims that Hegel had read very little of Hamann’s writings, see Nadler, *Johann Georg Hamann: Der Zeuge des Corpus mysticum* (Salzburg: Otto Müller, 1948), p.483.

<sup>16</sup> Dickson, *Relational Metacriticism*, p.325. Frederick Beiser has claimed, different from that which I will argue in this chapter, that “Hegel...gave a flattering review of the first edition of Hamann’s works.” See Frederick C. Beiser, *The Fate of Reason: German Philosophy from Kant to Fichte* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1987), p.17.

own task as an author, a task which was still embryonic and without, as of yet, any distinct shape.

Kierkegaard, in this early period, was beginning to articulate a series of dissatisfactions with the dominant trends of Danish Hegelianism, dissatisfactions which would be developed more fully in his authorship. Thus, it is in this early period that one witnesses Kierkegaard's informal attempts to conceptualise what type of shape his authorship might possibly take in light of his early suspicions of the systematisers and speculative thinkers. Or, asked as a question: what route would a post-Kantian pursue who was not inclined to follow the philosophy-as-science path of which he was beginning to formulate some early criticisms?

I will devote this chapter, therefore, to exploring Kierkegaard's early reception of Hamann in light of these issues. That is, I see Kierkegaard's interest in Hamann from this period as stemming from his own concerns regarding how he might frame not only his criticisms but also the form that he would pursue in communicating these criticisms. And for Kierkegaard, this also concerned his own role. What place might such an author occupy or how might one conceive of one's task in relation to one's contemporaries?

Also in this period one witnesses the beginnings of his philosophical differences from those of his Hegelian contemporaries. Of course, it would be some time before Kierkegaard brought these insights to fruition in his mature thought (particularly in CUP and SUD), but it is possible to detect his interest in these issues at this early stage and in relation to his reception of Hamann. Specifically, one notes the interest in *the particular* and *individual* which for Kierkegaard cannot be conceptualised within a system. Related to this, Kierkegaard also articulates his interest in the nature of existence as grounded in mystery which, as I will show, he associates with a brand of humour attributed to Hamann, in contrast to clear, conceptual disclosure which he detected at the centre of Hegelianism. These topics and questions, I propose, are just beneath the surface of Kierkegaard's early encounters with Hamann.

This chapter, therefore, will be structured by contrasting Hegel's reception of Hamann, encapsulated in his review of the Roth edition of Hamann's collected works, with Kierkegaard's articulation of similar issues primarily from the early Journals. I will show that dominant themes in Hegel's review are also prominent in

Kierkegaard's scattered entries. While it could be said that Kierkegaard is in some way responding to Hegel's criticisms of Hamann, I will not focus on Kierkegaard's early reception of Hamann as a direct response to Hegel or as a defense of Hamann. And while some have held that Kierkegaard likely came to Hamann via Hegel's review, I believe that this is less likely than their shared interests make it appear (a point that I will address at the conclusion of this chapter). Instead, I will show how Kierkegaard's budding conception of his own task can be highlighted and thereby differentiated from the form of post-Kantian philosophy which Kierkegaard held to be paradigmatic of his era, Hegel being the chief representative and the father of Kierkegaard's immediate Danish contemporaries. While Hegel was perhaps not the direct recipient of Kierkegaard's attacks, his Danish followers were.<sup>17</sup> It is my view that by exploring the differences between Kierkegaard and Hegel in their receptions of Hamann, one can see how Kierkegaard was distinguishing his own embryonic authorship from those of his Hegelian contemporaries.

I have divided this chapter into two sections. In the first section, I will focus on issues of style and authorial task. To begin, I will outline Hegel's critique of Hamann's style and authorial strategy, highlighting Hegel's treatment of the peculiar nature of Hamann's writings and the Socratic office which he takes up. Following from this, I will show how Kierkegaard appraises these issues and argue that where Hegel was critical of Hamann, Kierkegaard not only positively assessed Hamann's style and self-designated Socratic task but attempted to instantiate these in his own, later, authorship. Thus, where Hegel sees an 'unruliness' at work in Hamann which he associates with his personality, Kierkegaard instead views this as an intentional authorial strategy with specific Socratic aims.

In the second section, I will turn to Hegel's philosophical critique of Hamann and focus on his criticism pertaining to the lack of philosophical development in Hamann, his failure to develop a scientific system and the relation that Hegel draws between these perceived deficiencies and Hamann's notorious humour. Turning to Kierkegaard, I will again show that he not only positively appraises Hamann where Hegel is quick to criticise but that he also, as above, takes up these themes in his authorship. Contrary to Hegel, as I will demonstrate, Kierkegaard is appreciative of

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<sup>17</sup> For a detailed discussion of Kierkegaard's relation to Hegel, particularly as it pertains to philosophical concerns and conception of authorship see Jon Stewart, *Kierkegaard's Relations to Hegel Reconsidered* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p.620-650.

Hamann's non-systematic approach which he also associates with Hamann's humour. Rather than chiding Hamann, Kierkegaard envisages Hamann as articulating the fundamental incommensurability at the centre of human existence which is not amenable to speculative disclosure but is more appropriately described or rendered through the employment of humour. Further, I will also show how Kierkegaard understands humour as a vehicle for criticism and awakening which furthers our understanding of his positive appraisal of Hamann's use of humour. This section will conclude with a discussion of Kierkegaard's apparent similarities to Hegel's critique of systematicity. Where some have argued that Kierkegaard repeats Hegel's criticism regarding the lack of systematic development in Hamann, I will show that this is not the case and that this view, while popular, should be reconsidered and ultimately abandoned. In the conclusion I will revisit briefly the topic of Kierkegaard's introduction to Hamann and examine the possibility that Hegel was the conduit. I will examine Kierkegaard's well-known interest in Hamann's marriage of conscience [*Gewissesehe*] and show that attention here casts serious doubts on the genealogy of transmission of Hamann to Kierkegaard via Hegel which some have conjectured.

In this chapter, therefore, I will not examine any detailed arguments that Kierkegaard advances against his opponents (leaving this, instead, for the remaining chapters) neither will I identify the specific grievances that Kierkegaard registers, nor will I look at his reparative work. Instead, I will look at how his early reading of Hamann was formative in conceptualising his task as an author, the form and style he sought to employ and the general questions and concerns that would remain at the heart of his authorship. This will provide a basis by which to explore the formal arguments that Kierkegaard advances against post-Kantian variations (of the *Idealist* and *Romantic* varieties) under Hamann's influence in the remaining chapters.

## **I. Style and Socrates**

Hegel's review begins by discussing the socio-philosophical milieu in which Hamann wrote by contrasting two divergent strands that emerged in Germany during in the eighteenth century. On the one hand, there was the majority of Enlightenment thought which "was pursued with dry understanding, with principles of bald utility and on the other, all that "which unfolded from genius, talent, or purity of spirit and

mind.”<sup>18</sup> In Hegel’s assessment the former “stood in harassing...opposition” to the latter. He distinguishes these two dominant strands respectively as the centre and the periphery. Accordingly, he locates Hamann in the second category. The centre was dominated, in Hegel’s view, by a collective group which produced *the Work* [*das Werk*], a single unified effort devoted to the principles of Enlightenment.<sup>19</sup>

Conversely, the periphery was not a collectively definable group but is distinguished by “a wreath of original individualities” who have given to posterity *the Works* [*die Werke*]. Even amongst such a varied group of exemplary and talented individuals Hamann is recognised by Hegel to be not merely original but “*an Original* [*ein Original*]”;<sup>20</sup> high praise indeed. The recognition of Hamann’s unique talent is soon tempered when Hegel turns to discuss the nature of the writings and Hamann’s own self-designated Socratic task.

The beginning of Hamann’s authorship is universally recognised as commencing with *Socratic Memorabilia* (*SM*), a point which Hamann himself makes and which Hegel repeats.<sup>21</sup> The catalyst of *SM* resulted from the relationship that existed between Hamann and Berens and (largely through Berens) Kant.<sup>22</sup> Hamann had returned to the Berens house in Riga from an unsuccessful venture to London on behalf of the Berens family. In London and destitute, Hamann had experienced his well-known conversion to Christianity.<sup>23</sup> Berens attempted to win Hamann back to the cause of his previously held principles of the Enlightenment which he had given up upon his conversion. In his attempts to ‘reconvert’ his friend, Berens enlisted the help of Immanuel Kant. The three met on two occasions which, for Berens and Kant, was of little success. Nor was it successful for Hamann who countered the attempts

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<sup>18</sup> Hegel, *Review*, p.5.

<sup>19</sup> Hegel suggests that while the centre was comprised of an entire host of thinkers there remains little to distinguish their work beyond ‘unimportant peculiarities’; Hegel, *Review*, p.5-6.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

<sup>21</sup> Prior to *Socratic Memorabilia*, Hamann had written his *Biblische Betrachtungen, Gedanken über meinen Lebenslauf* but these were not intended for publication but only to be read by his brother, father and a number of close friends; see Dickson, *Relational Metacriticism*, p.28-29.

<sup>22</sup> Hegel’s assessment here echoes Hamann’s own views on the matter. For a recent discussion of the relation between the writing of *SM* and his relationship with Berens and Kant, see Dickson, *Relational Metacriticism*, p.29-33; see also Betz, *After Enlightenment*, p.32-37.

<sup>23</sup> See Betz, *After Enlightenment*, p.30-31.

by his two friends with his own effort at convincing them of their waywardness.<sup>24</sup> It seems that the relationship between them deteriorated further and it was this setting, as Hegel notes, which was the impetus behind the beginning of the authorship and the development of his particular style and self-conceived task as a Socratic author.<sup>25</sup>

Hegel notes that Hamann had learned from his experiences with Berens and Kant in their personal interactions and correspondence insofar as he gave up his desire to subject, confrontationally and personally “himself, with his friends, to the community of scrutiny” because after this episode “we see in him a modified, sensible demeanor toward Lindner...and toward later friends – a demeanor which is predicated on the equality of the right of moral and religious features, an which leaves the freedom of his friends unimpaired and unharried.”<sup>26</sup> Hegel suggests, however, that Hamann had not really given up on his self-perceived task of challenging the commitments, wisdom, and prejudice of his friends. Rather, Hamann took up this task in his writings.

As Hegel writes, Hamann’s “drive to be recognized as a teacher and a prophet is now directed (since he must give it up in his correspondences) toward another means by which he can have his say: by means of his publications.” Hegel argues that Hamann first takes up his task of confronting his friends in the work that Hamann himself viewed as the beginning of his authorship,<sup>27</sup> *Socratic Memorabilia*.<sup>28</sup> For Hegel, the failure to win over Kant and Berens was the catalyst which lead to the writing of *SM*. But more than that, Hegel sees this period, encapsulated in the events of Hamann’s friendship with Berens and Kant, as the paradigmatic feature of Hamann’s entire authorship. In this period, Hamann’s methods and choice of writing is crystalised. The writing of *SM* marks therefore an authorial method and strategy which infuses Hamann’s understanding of his authorship in its entirety. Hegel writes that “not only does this work express the

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<sup>24</sup> For an account Hamann’s post-London period which lead to the writing of *Socratic Memorabilia*, see Dickson, *Relational Metacriticism*, p.28-31.

<sup>25</sup> Hamann’s interest in Socrates, however, predates his experiences in London and the confrontation this lead to with Berens and Kant; see Albert Anderson, “Hamann” in *Bibliotheca Kierkegaardiana*, vol. 10, ed. Niels Thulstrup and Marie Mikulova Thulstrup (Copenhagen: C.A. Reitzels, 1982), p.122-123.

<sup>26</sup> Hegel, *Review*, p.18.

<sup>27</sup> N III, p.349/R VII, p.73-74.

<sup>28</sup> Hegel, *Review*, p.18; see N II, p.57-82/R II, p.1-50.

general impetus behind Hamann's collected works, [but] from it are also created the principles which later brought forth a general effect."<sup>29</sup>

A central feature of Hamann's authorship which began with *SM*, as Hegel points out, is the presence of Socrates in Hamann's self-conception of his authorship.<sup>30</sup> Discussing Hamann's *Socratic Memorabilia*, Hegel suggests that one finds "the execution and explicit exposition of the position he wishes to take: that of Socrates, who had been unknowing and had exposed his ignorance in order to draw his fellow citizens in and to lead them to self-knowledge and to a wisdom which lies hidden." More than simply adopting the role of Socrates, Hegel notes that Hamann grouped "Socrates and himself together stylistically as well".<sup>31</sup> The self-identification with Socrates extends beyond the single work written in 1759, and becomes a key feature of Hamann's self-conceived authorship.<sup>32</sup> Hegel correctly points out that it was a theme to which Hamann returned and finds evidence for this not only in his writings but also in the personal correspondence.<sup>33</sup>

If Hamann's stated intentions were to confront his friends in such a manner, and if Hamann cloaked himself in the mantle of Socrates, then how were his writings received? An important point that Hegel makes in his assessment of the tenor and nature of Hamann's writings is that they proved ineffective in convincing his readers of the need to abandon their commitments to enlightened rationalism and submit themselves to searching scrutiny. Hegel, therefore, argues that Hamann's Socratic mission proved ineffective as it did not appear to have any "further effect on Kant" (one of two targets of *SM*, the other being Berens) and "it seems that [it] incurred...only the contempt and scorn of his" intended recipients.<sup>34</sup> In this respect,

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<sup>29</sup> Hegel, *Review*, p.20. On the following page, Hegel continues: "The tenor of Hamann's other writings is not as wholly personal as the tenor, content, and purpose of this text (although it is given, for the public, the appearance of an objective content), but in all of them we find the interest and the tenor of his personality more or less mixed in."

<sup>30</sup> For an examination of the source of Hamann's view of Socrates and his Socratic authorship, see O'Flaherty, *SM*, p.58-60.

<sup>31</sup> Hegel, *Review*, p.20.

<sup>32</sup> N III, p.111-14/R IV, p.97-101. To this, Dickson has noted the following: "The figure of Socrates...justifies Hamann's eccentric mode and approach to philosophy to the methods of Berens and Kant." Dickson, *Relational Metacriticism*, p.32.

<sup>33</sup> R I, p. 48/ZH III, p.67; see Hegel, *Review*, p.33. Hegel correctly identifies this in a letter from Hamann to Herr von Moser, December 1, 1773: "Socrates' calling...accords with my own".

<sup>34</sup> Hegel, *Review*, p.19.

Hamann is considered to have failed to achieve his goals.<sup>35</sup> However, in failing to achieve his goals, Hamann himself did not see this as a reason to question his Socratic mission. Instead, as Hegel correctly identifies, this perceived setback emboldened Hamann as this was viewed as a confirmation of the correctness of his path: “The calling which God has assigned him, namely helping his friends along toward self-knowledge, he further confirms by claiming that just as the tree is known by its fruits, so he knows himself to be a prophet – by his *fate*, which he *shares with all witnesses*, to be slandered, persecuted, and despised;<sup>36</sup> the highest level of *worship* which *hypocrites bring to God* (he tells his friends another time) consists in the *persecutions of true confessors*.”<sup>37</sup>

Hegel, though, is not willing to accept Hamann’s self-proclaimed Socratic or prophetic mission as evidence of success in light of obvious failure. Firstly, Hegel is suspicious – and rightly so – of such a self-stylised view and argues that it was Hamann’s contrarious nature which led to such an elevated status. Hegel, though, makes a second point which is equally central to his overall assessment of Hamann. He argues that Hamann’s literary style, as a reflection of his personality, is equally responsible for the lack of success in his Socratic mission:

The incomprehensibility of Hamann’s writings, where it is not related to the content presented (which itself remains incomprehensible for many), but rather to the formulation thereof, is in and of itself unpleasant, but all the more so in that it seems to the reader to be unavoidably linked with a contrarious impression of intentionality. One senses here that Hamann’s original surliness is his inimical sentiment toward the public for which he writes. Having addressed a deep interest in the reader and thus placed

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<sup>35</sup> See also Betz, *After Enlightenment*, p.37: “Needless to say, Kant never recanted his allegiance to the Enlightenment (nor, so far as we know, did Berens), and to this extent, aside from having powerfully defended the principle of faith, the *Socratic Memorabilia* was a failure.”

<sup>36</sup> R I, p.441/ZH I, p.379; (to Lindner, 27.4.1759).

<sup>37</sup> R I, p.395/ZH I, p.341; (to Lindner, 5.6.1759). See also *SM*, where Hamann concludes the third section with the following: “Plato interpreted the voluntary poverty as a sign of his [Socrates’] divine mission. A greater one is his sharing in the final destiny of the prophets and the righteous.” *SM*, p.183; N II, p.81/R II, p.49. Dickson remarks: “If Socrates was the prophet of the pagans, one should expect that he would meet the prophets’ fate: misunderstanding, persecution and finally death at the hands of his contemporaries, to whom he was sent by God. Hamann thus claims Socrates’ prophetic witness, his divine sending, his mission to convert his people, as his most important, most salient characteristics – not his wisdom, his fathering of philosophy or whichever other traits were so attractive to Hamann’s enlightened contemporaries.” Dickson, *Relational Metacriticism*, p.59-60.

himself in community with him, he strikes him immediately with a grimace, farce, or scolding which is not made better by his use of biblical expressions, a certain derision, and self-mystification, and which destroys in a spiteful manner the sympathy which he awakens, or at least makes it more difficult, and frequently in an insurmountable way, since he tosses around and screws together baroque and disparate expressions in order to mystify the reader completely, such that only very platitudinous particularities are buried beneath, where he had awakened the semblance or expectation of a depth of meaning.<sup>38</sup>

Hegel's literary critique of Hamann is marked by an appreciation for the genius at display in the writings but also by a critique directed at Hamann's inability to direct and control his genius. The favourable view that Hegel evinces, to recall from above, is tempered by a critique of Hamann's peculiar style. He suggests that the nearly impenetrable nature of his works was intentional insofar as it appears as if he wished to confound his readers. However, this is rooted not in a concern for the establishment of a deep relationality between the author and reader, as Hamann himself wished,<sup>39</sup> but in Hamann's own character. In the end, the difficult and obscure nature of the writings suggest to Hegel that although Hamann demonstrated a "fine power of judgment, has read and digested much, shows sparks of genius, and has the kernel and force of the German language in his power", he "was seduced by his *desire* to be an original and thus became one of the most *reproachable*."<sup>40</sup> In Hegel's estimation, the writings are "tiresome riddles" owing to the "individuality of the author."<sup>41</sup> Hegel does admit that there may be an authorial intention behind the peculiar nature of Hamann's writings, which Hamann himself claims, but he views this strategy in a negative light. Hegel, therefore, characterises Hamann's style in relation to his authorial intention and casts a general criticism of his Socratic mission – it failed to achieve its goals – and the style he employs alienates the reader. Rather

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<sup>38</sup> Hegel, *Review*, p.40.

<sup>39</sup> See Oswald Bayer & Christian Knudsen, *Kreuz und Kritik. Johann Georg Hamanns Letztes Blatt. Text und Interpretation* (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck), 1983), p.5-6; I will return to this point below in relation to Kierkegaard.

<sup>40</sup> Hegel, *Review*, p.42.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, p.6-7. In a similar fashion, Hegel claims that "one soon learns that mysteriousness itself belongs to the characteristic temperament of Hamann's writing and individuality, and constitutes an essential current thereof"; *Ibid.*, p.4.

than drawing the reader into critical engagement as Hamann intended and as Hegel acknowledges, he is criticised for alienating and repulsing the reader owing to his convoluted and peculiar style.

Like Hegel, Kierkegaard identifies an indissoluble link between the person and the writings. That is, both have a view regarding the nature of Hamann's character as well as the writings which are superficially similar and in which Hegel's language appears to be repeated by Kierkegaard. For example, Kierkegaard writes of "the originality of his genius" and the concentrated singularity of his thought and Hegel suggests that in an era of original, creative personalities "*Hamann* is not only also original, but, what is more, *an Original [ein Original]*, in that he persisted in a concentration of his deep particularity".<sup>42</sup> Hegel characterises the writings in the following way: "The French have a saying: *Le stile c'est l'homme même*; Hamann's writings do not so much *have* a particular style as they *are* style."<sup>43</sup> Kierkegaard raises a similar point in CUP, albeit not in direct relation to Hamann: "The subjective *thinker's form*, the form of his communication, is his *style*."<sup>44</sup>

But these superficial similarities mask deep divisions between Hegel and Kierkegaard in their evaluation of Hamann. In particular, there are two areas which highlight the distance between them: the Socratic nature of Hamann's authorship and his peculiar style. I shall take these in turn. It must be recognised, however, that while Kierkegaard does not provide any elaboration with regard to Hamann as his positive appraisal is found in a fragmentary fashion – a tribute fitting to Hamann – he does approvingly evaluate the Socratic nature of Hamann's texts and his peculiar style in scattered entries and brief passages in his published writings. For example, he notes the continuity between Socrates and Hamann in a journal entry: "Hamann's relationship to his contemporaries – Socrates' to the Sophists (who could say something about *everything*)"<sup>45</sup>; and offers unqualified praise in a separate entry:

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<sup>42</sup> Hegel, *Review*, p.6.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid. Again, though, Hegel is merely picking up on themes discussed and treated by Hamann; see N IV, p.424/R IV, p.463. Hegel continues with his dominant theme of tracing the peculiar style of Hamann's writings to Hamann's personality: "In everything which came from Hamann's quill, his personality is so extremely intrusive and absolutely preponderant that the reader is referred at every point more so to it than to that which might be interpreted as content." See also Betz, *After Enlightenment*, p.8.

<sup>44</sup> See CUP, p.357; see also JP 1724/ III B 5: "That it [irony] is not an esthetic concept – but the *molimina* for a life-view – personality – *the style is the man...*"; emphasis mine.

<sup>45</sup> JP 1547/III B 17; 1840-41.

“yet my soul clings to Socrates, its first love, and rejoice in the one who understood him, Hamann;”.<sup>46</sup>

However, this tribute to Hamann indicates a deeper level of agreement with Hamann because Kierkegaard enacts a Socratic-Hamannian method in his own authorship. Thus, the influence of Hamann on Kierkegaard, and the latter’s recognition of this appears through a wider programmatic instantiation and not through any detailed discussions. In this way, Kierkegaard’s substantial disagreement with Hegel’s assessment of the Socratic nature and style of Hamann’s writings takes the form of imitation of Hamann and does not appear as a direct counter-argument against Hegel. Which is to say, that it is *indirect*. This is seen in two ways.

Firstly, Kierkegaard develops a broadly Socratic programme in his conception of his authorial task. Just as Hamann, in taking up the role of Socrates, sought to confront his contemporaries and engage them in uncovering and unmasking their faulty allegiances and prejudicial commitments,<sup>47</sup> so too does Kierkegaard envision his role in this way. Which means that “[l]ike Socrates, Kierkegaard conceives of his goal as goading his fellow countrymen into reflection and critical thinking”<sup>48</sup>. As Pattison describes this central feature of Kierkegaard’s writings, “...the Socratic aspect of Kierkegaard’s work...was simply the passion for tricking, teasing or arguing his readers into thinking for themselves about the values, relationships and goals that govern their lives, and, in doing so, to strip them of the self-flattering illusions to which both the age and their own inclinations made them prone.”<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> JP 1555/V B 45; 1844.

<sup>47</sup> Hamann’s authorial character has been described by Dickson as a metacritical one, which is drawn from Hamann’s own self-designation employed towards the end of his authorship and in response to Kant’s critical turn; see Dickson, *Relational Metacriticism*, p.21-24. This, in my view, does not run against describing Hamann’s task as Socratic. Moreover, it is obvious that Kierkegaard did not consider Hamann in these terms, that is as a *metacritic*, but as Socratic. In this way, it is appropriate to maintain the description of Hamann and Kierkegaard’s self-conceived authorial task as Socratic while acknowledging that other descriptions provide complimentary rather than contradictory insights into the programmatic nature of their writings. Moreover, Dickson’s description of Hamann’s task as metacritical addresses the philosophical and theological dimensions of his ‘arguments’ and not, for example what might be termed the existential import of Hamann’s writings. I will discuss Hamann’s metacritical positioning in the second chapter.

<sup>48</sup> Stewart, *Relations to Hegel*, p.643. It should be pointed out that Stewart does not draw the connection to Hamann.

<sup>49</sup> Pattison, *Philosophy*, p.182-183.

Secondly, Kierkegaard's enactment of a Socratic form in his authorship has direct parallels to Hamann. The significance of Hamann in providing Kierkegaard with a model to imitate<sup>50</sup> is a well-acknowledged topic which has received ample treatment.<sup>51</sup> Thus, Kierkegaard's positive appraisal of the Socratic nature of Hamann's authorship comes in the form of imitation. Again, this is an indirect rebuttal of Hegel's critique.

There exists, however, a more direct, instantiative argument that Kierkegaard advances, which differentiates Kierkegaard's views from Hegel, with regard to the Socratic task. This is an argument regarding *failure* and *marginalisation* with respect to Hamann's self-designated Socratic role outlined above. In the lengthiest passage devoted solely to Hamann in the entire Kierkegaardian corpus this theme is developed explicitly. Kierkegaard writes "that there is nevertheless something to living for a posterity and being misunderstood by contemporaries."<sup>52</sup> The comparison made is between the mass or the public, who follow a path of compliance and have "pawned their reason for the motto: Conform to the age."<sup>53</sup> Hamann, by contrast, is a unique individual who stands in contrast to such conformity, whose individuality "on the whole in its immediate origin from the depths of character are the *hyperbole* of all life."<sup>54</sup> Kierkegaard's views here not only counter those made by Hegel but importantly follow Hamann's own self-assessment: "An honest man may sometimes

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<sup>50</sup> For a discussion of Lessing as a model of a Socratic authorship upon which Kierkegaard drew, see Pattison, *Philosophy*, p.181-182. Harald Steffes has also pointed out the possible influence of P. Møller; see Harald Steffes, "Erziehung zur Unwissenheit? Kierkegaard's 'Über die Kunst, Kindern Geschichten zu erzählen' und Johann Georg Hamanns *Fünf Hirtenbriefe das Schuldrama betreffend*" in *Kierkegaard Studies Yearbook 2006*, ed. Niels Jørgen Cappelørn, Hermann Deuser, and K. Brian Söderquist (New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2006), p.168-169. See also Ringleben, *Kierkegaard as a Reader of Hamann*, p.208.

<sup>51</sup> The first mention and recognition of Kierkegaard's Socratic task and its relation to Hamann appeared in 1856, within a year of Kierkegaard's death; see Zahle, *In memory*, p.11. This theme has a long trajectory and is repeated universally whether in passing acknowledgement or in more detailed studies; see Rodemann, *Hamann und Kierkegaard*, p.36-92; Ronald Gregor Smith, "Hamann and Kierkegaard" in *Kierkegaardiana V*, ed. Niels Thulstrup (Copenhagen: Munksgaard, 1964), p.63-64; Steffen Steffensen, "Kierkegaard und Hamann", *Orbis Litterarum* 22/1 (Mar. 1967): p.401; Albert Anderson, *Hamann*, p.134. Sergia Karen Hay, *Sharing Style*, p.107; Betz, *Hamann before Kierkegaard*, p.310-311. This theme is also referenced in works devoted solely to excavating and explicating Hamann's thought; see for example, Oswald Bayer, *Zeitgenosse im Widerspruch. Johann Georg Hamann als radikaler Aufklärer* (München: Piper, 1988), p.43; Bayer and Knudsen, *Kreuz*, p.5.

<sup>52</sup> JP 1541/ I A 340/CC:25; 1836-1837; see also JP 1291/ VI A 21/JJ:307; 1845.

<sup>53</sup> JP 1541/ I A 340/CC:25; 1836-1837.

<sup>54</sup> JP 1543/ II A 623/FF:60.

need a writing style which permits him to be scorned but not misused because he would rather be understood not at all than be understood incorrectly.”<sup>55</sup> As Kierkegaard comments, “the tragedy is that whenever a rational man opens his mouth there immediately are millions ready posthaste – to misunderstand him.”<sup>56</sup> Rather than viewing Hamann’s Socratic ineffectiveness as an indication of failure, Kierkegaard argues differently to Hegel by claiming that it is a mark of the Socratic task. For Kierkegaard to judge Hamann according to a criterion based on effectiveness, measured by the achievement of a desired outcome, is to apply a faulty type of criteria in the case of a Socratic mission. In this way, Kierkegaard remains in agreement with Hamann’s own self-assessment and judges it favourably.

Not only does Kierkegaard fundamentally differ from Hegel in his assessment of the fate of the Socratic author, but one could argue that he himself viewed his own authorship in these terms. That is, his own social marginalisation particularly encapsulated in the corsair affair is seen by Kierkegaard to be confirmation of his role as a Socratic writer. The issue of Kierkegaard’s view of Hamann as a marginalised figure seems to have played a decisive role in Kierkegaard’s own conception of his experience of marginalisation in his later years.<sup>57</sup> This is particularly seen in the concluding section of *Point of View*, where Kierkegaard has his *poet* imaginatively eulogise him after his death: “The martyrdom this author suffered can be described quite briefly in this way: He suffered being a

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<sup>55</sup> ZHI, p.335. Quoted in Joachim Ringleben, *Kierkegaard as a Reader of Hamann*, p.212. It is interesting to note, and perhaps not coincidental, that Kierkegaard begins to identify himself with such a view after the Corsair affair. Until that time Kierkegaard seems to have held to the belief that he would be included in the literary and intellectual elite of Copenhagen. As his authorship progresses, even in the pseudonymous writings prior to the Corsair affair, one can detect this sentiment in his own self-assessment.

<sup>56</sup> JP 1541/ I A 340/CC:25; 1836-1837.

<sup>57</sup> R.G. Smith has argued that while Kierkegaard’s conception of marginalisation was similar to that of Hamann’s, in distinction to Hamann, Kierkegaard ultimately inhabited a ‘wilderness’ of solitude of his own making; Smith, *Hamann and Kierkegaard*, p.62-63. I disagree with Smith in his final analysis, as his view of Kierkegaard rests on an outdated interpretation of Kierkegaard’s notion of the single individual alone before God. Recent work, particularly that of M. Jamie Ferreira, has argued convincingly for a view of inter-personal relationality at the centre of Kierkegaard’s conception of the God-human relation; see M. Jamie Ferreira *Love’s Grateful Striving. A Commentary on Kierkegaard’s Works of Love* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001).

genius in a market town...But it comforts him in eternity that he has suffered this, that he voluntarily exposed himself to it...”<sup>58</sup>

The Socratic enactment does not guarantee success, as Kierkegaard acknowledges. This runs counter to Hegel’s evaluation of the efficaciousness of Hamann’s writings. Hegel, to recall what was said above, argued that Hamann failed to achieve his goal in relation to Berens and Kant, and implies by extension that this was a general response to the Socratic nature of his writings. Hamann, again returning to the earlier discussion, had claimed that the lack of success indirectly proved the validity of his self-imposed office. In a similar fashion, Kierkegaard also signals his agreement with Hamann and in so doing, counters Hegel’s claims. Which is to say, the occupier of the Socratic office – given its nature of confronting and challenging deeply held views – is likely to encounter opposition and misunderstanding. Again, this image of the fate of the holder of the Socratic office is one which Kierkegaard increasingly attributes to himself.

The second issue which separates Kierkegaard’s evaluation from that of Hegel, is seen in Kierkegaard’s fragmentary approval of Hamann’s style. In this respect, Kierkegaard quotes Hamann favourably, appropriating him directly: “since I, following Hamann’s example, ‘mit mancherlei Zungen mich ausdrücke, und die Sprache der Sophisten, der Wortspiele, der Creter, und Araber, Weiszen und Mohren und Creolen rede, Kritik, Mythologie, *rebus* und Grundsätze durch einander schwatze, und bald *χατ’ ἀνθρωπον* bald *χατ’ ἐξοχην* argumentire’.”<sup>59</sup> Again,

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<sup>58</sup> See also Kierkegaard’s discussion of martyrdom in *Without Authority, Should One Suffer Death for the Truth*, ed. and tr. Howard V. Hong and Edna Hong (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997), p.79; he writes: “Among the many ludicrous things in these foolish times, perhaps the most ludicrous is the comment I have frequently read, written as wisdom and admiringly heard as felicitous: that in our age one cannot even become a martyr, that our age does not even have the energy to put someone to death...It is not the age that is to have the energy to put someone to death or make him a martyr; it is the martyr, the prospective martyr, who is to have the energy to give the age passion, in this case the passion of indignation, to put him to death.” Kierkegaard identifies himself with Socrates in a later journal entry; he writes: “The Sophists can be radically slain only by the Socratic; this radicality is again too much for the old order, for something old and a radical cure are not compatible. My own life has taught me this, even if on a smaller scale.” JP 4294/X<sup>5</sup> A 69/NB27:68; 1853.

<sup>59</sup> Søren Kierkegaard, *Repetition*, ed. and tr. Howard V. Hong and Edna Hong (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1983), p.149; SKS 4, 26. In Hamann, R I, 467/ZH I, 396. See also Ringleben, *Kierkegaard as a Reader of Hamann*, p.211. The translated text is provided by the Hong: “express myself in various tongues and speak the language of sophists, of puns, of Cretans and Arabian, of whites and Moors and Creoles, and babble a confusion of criticism, mythology, *rebus*, and axioms, and argue now in a human way and now in an extraordinary way.” See also *Repetition*, note 39, p.366.

Kierkegaard does not provide any type of elaboration, in what ways he might approve of Hamann's style and what makes it so compelling that he identifies his pseudonymous authorship with Hamann. The key, I believe, to understanding this is to appreciate the intentionality with which Hamann himself proceeded to use, strategically, such a style.

Hamann's adoption of his difficult and abrasive style is grounded in his dedication and intentional approach to the author-reader nexus. Thus, where Hegel sees a "Widerborstigkeit" (unruliness, rebelliousness) in his lack of control over his style and therefore evincing a lack of care towards his readers, Hamann precisely chooses such a method in order to maintain a healthy author-reader relation. In this respect, the *style* employed by Hamann is meant to awaken, confront, and unsettle, particularly so that the reader does not bind him or herself to the personality of the author but rather can come to their own independent judgment.<sup>60</sup> As Bayer and Knudsen have argued, then, not only is such a use of language a particular strategy but "an alienating style is necessary". In this respect, Hamann's language renders mere repetition or imitation difficult. He is continuously and consciously pointing authority away from his authorship so as not to procure disciples or to become the founder of a movement. Hamann is thereby intentional in his authorial strategy when one considers that he has in view the relationship between the author and reader, a relationship that must be maintained through the distinct individuality, yet relationality, of the participants. As Hamann writes, "Author and reader are two halves, whose needs correlate [sich aufeinander beziehen], and their union has a common goal".<sup>61</sup> As Dickson remarks, "this challenging style...forces a strong personal response from its readers: either one rejects him, without having invested a great deal in the relationship; or one brings to it the patient involvement in intricacy...Hamann's readers must work to arrive at their insights".<sup>62</sup> It would seem

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<sup>60</sup> Bayer & Knudsen, *Kreuz*, p.5.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, p.3-4. See N II, p.347/R II, p.409-410.

<sup>62</sup> Dickson, *Relational Metacriticism*, p.27; she continues: "...the resulting meaning found in the essay cannot be with an easy conscience be ascribed to Hamann or the *mens auctoris*, pure and simple. Hamann's interpreters must co-create Hamann's meaning in partnership with the author himself – an uneasy but inescapably 'relational' hermeneutical activity. This, arguably, is the least appreciated stroke of Hamann's relational genius." For a discussion of *mens auctoris* in relation to Kierkegaard, see Merold Westphal, *Becoming a Self: A Reading of Kierkegaard's Concluding Unscientific Postscript* (Indiana: Purdue University Press), p.9, 13-15.

that with regard to their respective assessments of Hamann's style that Hegel could be considered as exemplifying the former and Kierkegaard the latter response.

Again, Kierkegaard briefly alludes to this fundamental feature of Hamann's authorial intention when he quotes him approvingly: "aus Kindern werden Leute, aus Jungfern werden Bräute, aus Lesern werden Schriftsteller."<sup>63</sup> However, Kierkegaard does not elaborate specifically on this Hamannian theme further. I would argue, again, that Kierkegaard's distance from Hegel's assessment is seen in his own attempt to enact such a positive author-reader relation programmatically in his own authorship. This can be seen in what is generally referred to as Kierkegaard's employment of Socratic maieutic (midwifery), which Kierkegaard identifies with his programme of indirect communication in which the employment of pseudonymity plays such an important role.<sup>64</sup> The central feature of the maieutic method is an attempt to maintain the dignity between teacher and pupil. The aim is to allow individuals to come to the truth themselves rather than simply accepting what they are to think or to do solely by virtue of the authority of the teacher. In normal circumstances the teacher-pupil relation is an asymmetrical one whereas the maieutic method attempts to realign the relation towards an equilibrium. Moreover, the maieutic method creates a bond between author and reader, a relation, such that the integrity of both is maintained.<sup>65</sup> Just as Kierkegaard naturally identifies the art of authorial midwifery with Socrates,<sup>66</sup> so too does Hamann make the same point in *SM*<sup>67</sup> and identifies himself specifically with such a task.<sup>68</sup> In a letter to Lindner,

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<sup>63</sup> E/O I, p.245/ SKS 2, p.238; quoted from N II, 341/R II, 397. Kierkegaard modified the text slightly; the original appears as: "Aus Kindern werden Leute, aus Jungfern werden Bräute, und aus Lesern entstehen Schriftsteller." "From children grow men, from virgins become brides, out of readers arise authors."

<sup>64</sup> Westphal, *Becoming a Self*, p.12. See also JP 649/VIII<sup>2</sup> B 81;1847:

Indirect Communication

Double Reflection

The Maieutic

The marginalia contains the following: "Socrates said he could not give birth but could only be a midwife."

<sup>65</sup> Westphal, *Becoming a Self*, p.61-63

<sup>66</sup> See PF, p.10, 19.

<sup>67</sup> N II, p.66:1-19/R I, p.21-22.

Hamann wrote: “the art of the midwife, the handles of the sculptor [*die Bildhauer handgriffe*], which Socrates supposedly *stole* from his two parents [*abgestohlen*] - - These must always be the final aim of our task.”<sup>69</sup>

Insofar as Kierkegaard and Hegel both, in similar ways, identify central themes related to Hamann’s writings, they do differ in their final appraisals. Where Hegel had seen a failure in the fulfillment of his self-designated Socratic task, Kierkegaard saw this *failure* as confirmation of the Socratic office at the centre of Hamann’s literary productions. That Hamann did not fulfill typical expectations of a literary career, failed to have a converting effect on his contemporaries, engaged in polemicising and adopted a peculiar language and style are the reasons that Hegel suggests that Hamann’s writings have little merit for contemporary readers. Kierkegaard conversely saw at work in Hamann a deeply Socratic calling which necessitated adopting a controversial authorial strategy. For Kierkegaard the need for a Hamann (or a Socrates) is essential for the times. It is to Hamann’s merit as an author that he maintained “down to his last drop of blood”<sup>70</sup> such a sustained effort in challenging the status quo of the Aufklärung. To Kierkegaard, Hamann would serve as an important model to which to aspire as he attempted to confront the challenges of post-Kantian speculative Idealism in his native Denmark. Thus, it is not surprising that Kierkegaard comes to a series of different conclusions from those of Hegel. Kierkegaard, in this period, was in the midst of coming to terms with the nature of his own authorship, or what shape a future authorship might take in light of his emerging dissatisfactions with Hegelianism.

## II. Systematicity and Humour

In this section I will examine the second main feature of Hegel’s review. This is his critique of Hamann’s lack of systematicity and therefore his limited philosophical value. For Hegel, Hamann failed to develop his thought, to produce a

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<sup>68</sup> Dickson, *Relational Metacriticism*, p.67. See also Albert Anderson, “Philosophical Obscurantism: Prolegomena to Hamann’s Views on Language”, *Harvard Theological Review* 62/3 (Jul. 1969): p.267.

<sup>69</sup> ZH I, 277; (to Gottlob Immanuel Lindner, Oct./Nov., 1758). See also Anderson, *Hamann*, p.116.

<sup>70</sup> See CUP, p.250.

coherent system which in Hegel's consideration is a serious fault despite any other subsidiary merits that Hamann's writings may evince. In short, Hegel's critique is philosophical, as it centres on what counts as philosophy. He states unequivocally that "from the various claims of his writings and concepts, and from his particularity in general, that the need for any *scientificity*, the need to become aware of the content of thought and to see this content developed and preserved in thought...was completely foreign to Hamann".<sup>71</sup> Hegel's precise criticism is that Hamann did not "go to the effort...to unfold [entfalten] in reality the balled core of truth...into a system of nature, into a system of state, of justice and morality, into a system of world history, into an open [*offnen*] hand with fingers outstretched".<sup>72</sup>

Hegel's criticism that Hamann did not develop a system and that "scientificity...was completely foreign to Hamann" is both dismissive of his writings and an obvious conclusion to draw. But what is Hegel's precise claim? This goes to the centre of what Hegel understood to count as science in a philosophical conception. In general, philosophy-as-science is the task of constructing a theory of knowledge which would avoid the skeptical conclusion by providing the absolute ground upon which all knowledge is based and derived. As Pinkard notes, "The theory of such a 'ground' would be a 'science' in the German sense of *Wissenschaft* – that is, a kind of structured theoretical knowledge of some circumscribed domain."<sup>73</sup> In this respect, Hegel's notion of science is to give an account of the various ways or other accounts of the way we ground our claims. In such an enterprise, all accounts must be held as competing, including the account one is giving of the other accounts and in so doing providing an authoritative account which grounds all others, including the one being given. The achievement of philosophy-as-science is the completion of the system which would produce just such a result.<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> Hegel, *Review*, p.39. Emphasis mine. In an earlier place, Hegel argues that "It is the ingeniousness of the form that gives the compact content its brilliance, and produces at the same time not an exposition, but merely an expansion consisting of subjective particularities..."; see also *Ibid.*, p.33.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, p.39.

<sup>73</sup> Terry Pinkard, *Hegel's Phenomenology: The Sociality of Reason* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p.4.

<sup>74</sup> As Pinkard comments: "...if Hegel is right, only a theory that does exactly that could claim to be an authentic *Wissenschaft*, a well-grounded, structured theoretical account of knowledge and not just a restatement or a refinement of principles that a given community...already takes for granted. The task of a theory of knowledge must be to produce some way of evaluating what kinds of reasons for belief (or for action) can count as *authoritative* reasons, and it must be able to show that the reasons it gives

Hegel expands his philosophical criticism when he turns his attention to the impetus behind Hamann's writings. Hegel's criticism of Hamann is that his works are much too particular, having arisen out of specified situations with his contemporaries. Quoting from Roth, with whom he is in agreement ("his apt characterization of Hamann's writings"<sup>75</sup>), Hegel notes that the writings are "truly occasional texts, full of personality and locality, full of relation to contemporary events and experiences".<sup>76</sup> That his works are written in response to central issues of the Enlightenment and in response to leading figures of the *Aufklärung*, such as Herder, Mendelssohn and Kant, is acknowledged but according to Hegel the writings provide "only particular passages which have any content." Hegel suggests that a collection of these passages would "grant the public access to that which is truly of worth within them." Although he is ultimately wary of even this: "it would always be difficult to lift out passages in a manner that would purify them from the nasty elements which Hamann's writing style is everywhere afflicted."<sup>77</sup>

Because Hamann did not pursue a scientific (that is, philosophical) course, Hegel claims that at most Hamann is, for some, "not just an interesting and engaging phenomenon but a stronghold and fulcrum when, in their desperation at the times, they needed one." However, posterity "must...lament that he did not find prepared in a spiritual form in which his genius could have fused and produced true creations for the pleasure and satisfaction of his contemporaries and successors, or that fate did not grant him the bright and benevolent sense to cultivate himself for such objective creation."<sup>78</sup> As Dickson remarks, "Hegel's...charge is...that even within his essays, or in his essays taken as a whole, he did not expand and develop his insights; he

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for counting those reasons as authoritative reasons are *themselves* authoritative reasons, and it must do this while at the same time regarding all claims, including the one it itself makes, as being only 'appearances'." Ibid., p.5. For the remainder of the discussion which relates Hegel's understanding of science in relation to the project the *Phenomenology* and its relation to his later corpus, see also Ibid., p.3-17. Also see Robert B. Pippin, *Hegel's Idealism. The Satisfaction of Self-Consciousness* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989), p.3-41.

<sup>75</sup> Hegel, *Review*, p.31.

<sup>76</sup> R I, p.viii; quoted in Hegel, *Review*, p.31.

<sup>77</sup> Hegel, *Review*, p. 35.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., p.43.

presented the reader with a balled fist and refused to unroll it himself for their benefit.”<sup>79</sup>

Hegel argues that whatever other types of merits Hamann’s writings may have, his works provide no type of objective content because he did not pursue philosophy according to the standards of post-Kantian Idealism. This is because, according to Hegel, philosophy should endeavour to be Science [*Wissenschaft*]. And it is the feature which he finds decidedly lacking in Hamann. This claim is one which must find agreement amongst anyone who has had the opportunity to read in Hamann. To argue that Hamann is not a nineteenth century philosopher in the tradition of Fichte, Hegel, and Schelling (or an eighteenth century rationalist in the Wolffian tradition) is an obvious conclusion to draw. Had Hegel merely made this claim, then, not only would it have been strange given the obviousness of it but it would have been both redundant and anachronistic. However, the issue is not that he merely pointed out the obvious but that this judgment extends into his appraisal of the overall value and worth of his work in general. According to Hegel, because Hamann did not pursue a scientific course, his works are of limited value, philosophically speaking. Even in a literary sense, though, Hamann comes under Hegel’s scrutiny and his attempts at an original humorous authorship ultimately fail. Hegel’s critique of non-systematicity in Hamann deals with the form and the content. His writings are peculiar, do not evince an attempt to expand central themes into larger treatises and are much too focussed on the particularities rather than providing a conceptual analysis of themes he raises. As with the literary critique so with the philosophical critique – according to Hegel the problematic element is Hamann’s personality. His personality intrudes upon his writings, neither allowing him to develop as an accomplished author nor as philosopher: “Hamann’s own spiritual depth lingers in completely concentrated intensity and arrives at no sort of expansion, be it in fantasy or in thought ...Singularity can bring forth neither any kind of work of art nor any scientific works.”<sup>80</sup> In this way, for Hegel the literary form is tied inextricably to the philosophical content and the merits thereof. It is not just that

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<sup>79</sup> Dickson, *Relational Metacriticism*, p.327.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, p.31. Karl Gründer has stated that Hegel’s complaint is purely philosophical and is not a judgment regarding the character or personality of Hamann; Gründer, *HH*, p.25. I agree with Gründer that the criticism raised here is by and large a philosophical issue of method, but I would argue that the criticism is also dependent upon Hegel’s interest in and focus on the personality of Hamann.

Hamann's style was not to Hegel's particular taste, as Dickson notes, "but an actual barrier to its [Hamann's philosophical] full development,...an indication of the limit to his thought; a sign of how far away he was from the true realization of philosophy."<sup>81</sup> Hegel expresses this view particularly forcefully in the course of addressing Hamann's notorious humour:

Locked up in the particular subjectivity in which Hamann's genius could not flourish into thinking or artistic form, it could only become *humor*, and what is even less fortunate, a humor besieged by much contrariety. Humor is in itself, given its subjective nature, all too ready to pass over into smugness, subjective particularities, and trivial content if not mastered by a well-mannered, well-bred, great soul. In *Hippel*, Hamann's fellow citizen, kindred spirit, and acquaintance or perhaps friend of many years, who may arguably be called the most excellent German humorist, humor blossoms into clever form, into a talent marked by the most individual shapes, the finest and deepest sentiments and philosophically conceived thoughts and original characters, situations and fates. Hamann's humor is rather the opposite of this *objective* humor, and the expansion which he thereby gives to his perpetually concentrated truth and uses to amuse himself cannot appeal to true taste, but only to accidental *gustus*.<sup>82</sup>

In Hegel's criticism of Hamann's humour one immediately notes the distinction that he draws between Hamann's lack of systematic development – Hamann is "Locked up in the particular subjectivity" – and how this, in a causal fashion according Hegel, results in humour. For Hegel, the avenue available for Hamann in his subjective particularity was humour. But this is the result not of a conscious choice but arose out of Hamann's personality, returning to a theme that is prevalent in Hegel's review, as I have already highlighted. In contrasting Hamann with Hippel, Hegel claims by implication that Hamann's humour degenerates "into smugness, subjective particularities, and trivial content" because Hamann lacks the qualities of a "well-mannered, well-bred, great soul." Furthermore, the contrast with Hippel is meant to show that humour when practiced under the talents of such an exemplary individual can in fact lead to a form of *objective* content. But this is what

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<sup>81</sup> Dickson, *Relational Metacriticism*, p.325.

<sup>82</sup> Hegel, *Review*, p.42-43.

is missing in Hamann. The critique of Hamann's humour is a final confirmation of Hegel's critique of the lack of proper development in Hamann's writings. Which is to say that, according to Hegel, Hamann's humour is indicative of his unsystematicity.

Kierkegaard, like Hegel before him, addresses the humour present in Hamann's writings. But Kierkegaard's treatment is more thorough and takes central place in a series of journal entries from 1837 (journals BB and DD). This concentrated period, as I will discuss shortly, sees Kierkegaard vacillate between praising Hamann for his humour while also registering deep concerns with blasphemous elements of this humour. Ultimately, however, the judgment is cast favourably. In order to appreciate Kierkegaard's reception of Hamann under the category of humour, I will proceed in three steps.

First, I shall outline the transition from irony to humour in Kierkegaard's view of Hamann as it appears in a set of entries from 1837. Second, I will turn my attention to the topics of the identification of the humourist as the non-systematic thinker in terms of the limits and possibility of describing subjectivity. As a result of this discussion I will highlight the specific ways in which Kierkegaard assesses Hamann in relation to humour: the work of humour in being written, the personality of Socrates, and humour as illuminating the difficult aspects of the self which cannot be conceptualised through system. Thirdly, and finally, I will discuss the manner in which Kierkegaard takes up humour in his own writings and implements insights which are traceable to his early discussion of Hamann's humour.

Two entries from BB (27 and 37), written within a space of a few weeks from one another, mark the beginning of Kierkegaard's interest in the nature of Hamann's authorship and introduce the theme of humour.<sup>83</sup> The first entry, BB:27, Kierkegaard states: "Is it not the highest degree of irony when somewhere Hamann states that he would rather hear the truth from the mouth of a Pharisee against his will than from an apostle or an angel."<sup>84</sup> This is followed by BB:37 where Kierkegaard, paraphrasing

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<sup>83</sup> Penned between 16 January, 1837 and 19 March, 1837. While these entries are left undated by Kierkegaard (a common feature of his journals and notebooks) they can be dated to within a four week period – from the end of January 1837 to near the beginning of March; see SKS BB, Tekstredøgørelse.

<sup>84</sup> BB:27/II A 2/JP1542; R I, p.497/ZH I, p.431; (letter to J.G. Lindner, 12.10.1759).

an almost identical passage, proceeds in casting the following judgment: “His polemic goes too far and involves at times, so it seems to me, something blasphemous, something, by means of which it appears as if he wished tempt God.”<sup>85</sup> Thus, in a short period of time Kierkegaard, identifying the same passage in Hamann, claims on the one hand that he has embodied the highest degree of irony and on the other hand that he approaches blasphemy.

These themes are repeated again in two further entries. Kierkegaard, in a familiar passage, pronounces the verdict which declares Hamann to be “the greatest humourist in the world”.<sup>86</sup> Not long after the declaration of Hamann’s unparalleled stature, Kierkegaard returns to his earlier judgment and again asserts that Hamann’s humour approaches blasphemy.<sup>87</sup> A third entry, written within four weeks of the above, clearly signals the return to praise. It follows swiftly and unqualified and marks Kierkegaard’s final assessment: “No, Hamann is still the greatest and most authentic humorist, the genuinely humorous Robinson Crusoe, not on a desert island but in the noise of life; his humor is not an esthetic concept but life, not a hero in a controlled drama.”<sup>88</sup> The turn from describing Hamann’s position as irony to humour

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<sup>85</sup> BB:37/II A 12/JP 265; translation mine.

<sup>86</sup> DD:3/ JP 1681/II A 75. Although he makes such a declaration, this entry also contains some qualified reservations.

<sup>87</sup> DD:18 / JP2 1693/II A 105; July 1837: “Humoren kan derfor nærme sig det Blasphemiske Hamann vil hell. høre Viisdom af Bileams Æsel ell. af en Philosoph mod sin Villie end af en Engel ell. en Apostel.” In this passage, where Kierkegaard mentions Balaam’s Ass, which he also raised in BB:37 (see above), he is combining two separate sections from Hamann. With reference to the Pharisee (which he now interchanges in the current passage with ‘a Philosopher’) this occurs in the letter to Lindner; see above fn14. The reference to Balaam occurs in *Brocken* §3; see R I, p.138-139 /N I, p.304 /LS, p.412; see also Betz, *After Enlightenment*, p.59-60.

<sup>88</sup> DD:36 / JP 1699/II A 136; 4 August, 1837. It is interesting that Kierkegaard rarely mentions Hamann’s humour after this entry, although humour remains a central theme in his own authorship. However, the famous statement that he was both attracted to and terrified by Hamann could possibly be seen as stemming from this vacillation in relation to the blasphemous and humorous: “It applies well to Hamann that which is written on a tile stove at Kold’s [Tavern] in Fredensborg: allicit atque terret.–”; EE:82/ JP 1546/II A 215; May 20, 1839. To date (to my knowledge) a detailed examination of the development of Kierkegaard’s attraction and terror to Hamann has not been undertaken. A major reason for this is because of the way in which Kierkegaard’s journals and papers have been organised previously. Our ability to reconstruct Kierkegaard’s views is a result of the work of SKS, and particularly their reorganisation of the journals, papers and notebooks. Therefore, in my view, our understanding of the attraction and terror that Kierkegaard felt toward Hamann is aided in light of the chronology in Kierkegaard’s journal entries from 1837. I believe that Kierkegaard’s attraction and terror, therefore, stems from his initial exposure to Hamann and his attempt to understand the form and function of the humour, which Kierkegaard thought could approach the blasphemous, that permeates the writings.

and the positive assessment that this receives in Kierkegaard is a view that Kierkegaard maintains throughout his life; a fact which is attested to in his journals.<sup>89</sup>

Kierkegaard's assessment of Hamann's humour, one immediately recognises, is markedly different to that of Hegel's. Where Hegel had claimed that Hamann's humour degenerates into smugness and was indicative of a lack or inability at systematic development, Kierkegaard claimed that Hamann was "the greatest and most authentic humorist". But on what does such a divergence rest? Is it merely a matter of taste – the difference between one individual finding something humorous and another not? I believe that the significance of their differences in assessment is grounded in issues of systematicity. Thus, where Hegel chides Hamann for his lack of systematic development for which he finds evidence in his humour, Kierkegaard argues that it is precisely this enactment of humour for which Hamann is to be commended. In 1837 (likely mid-August) in the midst of Kierkegaard's interest in Hamann's writings and particularly his humour, detailed above, he wrote the following:

genuine humor cannot be caught in a novel and why it thereby ceases to be a life-concept, simply because not-to-write is part of the nature of the concept, since this would betray an all too conciliatory position toward the world (which is why Hamann remarks somewhere that fundamentally there is nothing more ludicrous than to write for the people).<sup>90</sup> Just as Socrates left no books, Hamann left only as much as the modern period's rage for writing made relatively necessary, and furthermore only occasional pieces.<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>89</sup> The last mention that Hamann's humour receives is in 1849, where he no longer describes it as approaching blasphemy but rather takes a less direct tone and suggests that there something 'more careless and to that extent less earnest' about his humour than that of Luther's. This demonstrates that the nature of Hamann's writings remained a topic of consideration in Kierkegaard's thought for many years. We should not conclude from this that Kierkegaard had significantly changed his assessment of Hamann as *the* humorist; see JP 2489/X<sup>1</sup> A 324/NB 11:29; 1849.

<sup>90</sup> The particular passage which Kierkegaard references here in Hamann has not been located in the Roth edition.

<sup>91</sup> JP 1700/ II A 138/ DD: 37; 1837. See also JP 1713/II A 658/FF: 89; 1837; see also *Prefaces*, p.46; here Kierkegaard quotes from H V, p.350/R VII, p.205; (letter to Herder, 6.2.1785): "It is not my concern in life to become an author, it is not my desire to swindle people out of their money; therefore I promise, if this is proved, to return his money to every purchaser. I say with Hamann: *Nicht eine bloße óρμη sondern ein furor uterinus hat mich zu den meisten Aufsätzen getrieben. Anstatt Geld zu nehmen, hätte ich lieber Geld gegeben, und das Wiederspiel von andern Schriftstellern getrieben.*" See Hay, *Sharing Style*, p.104.

This passage from Kierkegaard aids in explaining his view of Hamann with particular emphasis on humour and the nature of Hamann's writings. Kierkegaard argues that the proper form which humour should take is not a systematic shape – “genuine humor cannot be caught in a novel” – but can only be conveyed in “occasional pieces”. But what does this mean? I would argue that for Kierkegaard the nature of Hamann's writings (as was discussed above under style) cannot be separated from his humour. In this respect, Kierkegaard argues similarly to Hegel. But unlike Hegel, Kierkegaard has a positive appraisal of Hamann's humour. Rather than humour resulting from a lack of control and thus leading to a particular form of writing as Hegel argues, Kierkegaard suggests that it is because of Hamann's humour that he chooses the form which he does; a form which is different from a novel, or a *system*. Thus, Kierkegaard and Hegel both see Hamann's writings as rooted in his humour but understand the causal relation between these two in differing, that is, reverse order. For Hegel, Hamann's writings devolve into humour and subjective particularity because of his lack of control and want of systematic ability. Conversely, for Kierkegaard, Hamann's humour operates as the causal force which gives rise to an intentional authorial form and strategy. In this respect, humour cannot be turned into a system (again returning to the reference to the novel). Where Hegel had seen Hamann's turn to humour as indicative of his inability to pursue a systematic course, Kierkegaard instead views humour as more fundamentally natural (perhaps even quasi-ontologically) to Hamann. While such a view advanced by Kierkegaard appears odd, it does fit with his overall view that humour is not a concept<sup>92</sup> – as the earlier entries also claim and which he repeats in later writings<sup>93</sup> – and is therefore not in the first instance a literary ploy executed for particular purposes or because of literary deficiency in other areas.

This last point comes into focus by paying attention to Kierkegaard's claim regarding Hamann's “occasional pieces”. The term that Kierkegaard employs here is significant because the Danish word – *Leilighedsskrifter* – is the direct equivalent of

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<sup>92</sup> This may explain why Kierkegaard never produced a treatise on humour. Humour is something which is enacted or lived and cannot be brought under conceptualisation. The only means to discuss humour (which shall become evident below) is by considering the ways in which it is put to work, what function it performs. Such a focus is different than explicating humour in a conceptual analysis. This is in obvious contrast to his dissertation *The Concept of Irony*.

<sup>93</sup> For example, see CUP, p.521: “Humor has the comic *within itself*, is legitimate in the existing humorist (for humor *in abstracto* is, like everything abstract, once and for all illegitimate; the humorist gains legitimation by having his life in it).”

the German term employed by Hegel (which he quotes from Roth) - *wahre Gelegenheitsschriften* (“truly occasional writings” or “pieces” as the translator of Hegel’s review has it).<sup>94</sup> Whether Kierkegaard is recalling Roth or Hegel is not to be decided here. What is important is the connection that Kierkegaard draws – as Hegel had – between the particular form of Hamann’s writings and their content (as discussed earlier). But the conclusions that Kierkegaard draws from the nature of the writings and the relation to humour are markedly different. In particular, Kierkegaard argues that this is tied to Hamann’s Socratic task; a point that Hamann made earlier in his *Socratic Memorabilia*.<sup>95</sup> Specifically, Kierkegaard binds the calling of Socrates embodied in his irony with that of Hamann embodied in his humour and in a later entry speaks of them joining together, “the greatest master of irony and the greatest humorist, separated by 2000 years”.<sup>96</sup> Furthermore, in keeping with themes that were discussed earlier, Kierkegaard identifies Hamann the humourist with marginalisation (“this would betray an all too conciliatory position toward the world”).<sup>97</sup>

The relation of humour, the form of writing and the reiteration of the Socratic task clearly shows that Kierkegaard not only praised Hamann’s use of humour but came to conclusions directly opposite to those of Hegel. However, these considerations say nothing specific regarding the connection that Hegel makes between humour and the lack of systematicity in Hamann. Perhaps not surprisingly

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<sup>94</sup> Hegel, *Review*, p.31; R I, p.viii.

<sup>95</sup> Of significance in this context is Hamann’s treatment of Socrates and the fact that he did not produce any writings. In *SM*, Hamann wrote the following: “Socrates, however, did not become an author and in this regard he acted in harmony with himself...His philosophy was suitable for every place and every situation. The market, the field, a banquet, the prison were his schools, and whatever medley of human life and intercourse he happened to encounter served him as a place to sow the seed of truth...Hence, his books would probably have looked like his soliloquies and monologues...That Socrates did not have the talent of a scribe could also be suspected from the attempt he made in prison to give an account of a dream in lyrical verse form. On this occasion he discovered in himself an aridity with regard to invention...In comparison with that of Xenophon and Plato the style of Socrates would perhaps have appeared as if executed by the chisel of a sculptor, and his manner of writing would perhaps have been more plastic than picturesque. The critics were not satisfied with his allusions, and censured the similes of his oral discourse at time as being too farfetched and at another time as vulgar.” See *SM*, p.177-181.

<sup>96</sup> See JP 1554/V B 44; 1844. This is drawn from an earlier draft for the motto of *The Concept of Anxiety*.

<sup>97</sup> See JP 1671/ I A 154; 1836. In this entry which does not mention Hamann specifically, Kierkegaard describes the humorous individuality that does not conform to the demands of the times, and “for precisely this reason is ridiculed by the world.” See also JP 1719/II A 694/FF:173; January 13, 1838. Kierkegaard writes that “The humorist, like the beast of prey, always walks alone.” This recalls the earlier discussion regarding the nature of the Socratic task and marginalisation.

Kierkegaard addresses humour and its relation to an intentionally non-systematic approach in the marginalia of the journal entry quoted earlier:

the humorist can never actually become a systematizer [*Systematiker*], either, for he regards every system as a renewed attempt to blow up the world with a single syllogism... whereas the humorist himself has come alive to the incommensurable which the philosopher can never figure out and therefore must despise. He lives in the abundance and is therefore sensitive to how much is always left over, even if he has expressed himself with all felicity (therefore the distinction to write). The systematizer [*Systematikeren*], believes that he can say everything, and that whatever cannot be said is erroneous and secondary.<sup>98</sup>

Contrasting the systematiser with the humourist – which given its association with the earlier entry identifies Hamann as a humourist – Kierkegaard signals that systematic philosophy misses something fundamental about the nature of existence, overlooks the abundance which remains even after “writing”.<sup>99</sup> The things that the systematic philosopher deems “erroneous and secondary” because they cannot be systematised are precisely those aspects of existence which the humourist becomes aware of. As Kierkegaard makes clear, the philosopher must despise this – a reference to Hegel perhaps? Does not Hegel despise the non-systematic nature of Hamann’s writings and does he not suggest that Hamann’s humour is a literary ploy – in fact criticising Hamann for his failure to control his humour – failing to recognise the potential illuminative nature of such a dispositive descriptive design? In making the distinction between the humourist and the systematic thinker, Kierkegaard in my opinion clearly signals his positive appraisal of Hamann contra the systematisers under the notion of humour. Moreover, Kierkegaard suggests that the humourist regards the systematic project as itself humorous: “for he regards every system as a renewed attempt to blow up the world with a single syllogism”.

But Kierkegaard’s positive view of Hamann’s humour and his criticism of systems and system builders from this position says nothing regarding Kierkegaard’s own experiments and instantiation of humour in his authorship. Again, while

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<sup>98</sup> JP 1702/II A 140/ DD:37; 1837.

<sup>99</sup> See George Pattison, *Kierkegaard, Religion and the Nineteenth-Century Crisis of Culture* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p.113.

Kierkegaard identifies Hamann with humour in the Journals and Papers, this is largely unstated in the published writings.<sup>100</sup> But what is it about humour, as articulated above, which is enacted in Kierkegaard's works? Does he have an appeal to humour which goes beyond a positive assessment of Hamann in such a way that one finds this in his own writings? Can one detect in Kierkegaard a form of humour or an instantiation of humour or a humorous practice which has its roots in his reading of Hamann?

While humour plays a significant, even central role, in Kierkegaard's writings,<sup>101</sup> I shall focus on the two issues raised in the above entry: (1) humour as the articulation of that which cannot be brought within the confines of the system; and (2) humour as a means to uncover the farcical attempts to discount the non-systematisable aspects of existence. It is on these two points where one detects Hamann's influence on Kierkegaard's authorship, an influence conceptualised in his early reception of Hamann's writings.

First, is the issue of the humourist who is alive to the incommensurable in contrast to the systematiser who deems such things which cannot be systematised as secondary or erroneous. For Kierkegaard, this goes to the centre of his theological, philosophical and anthropological views expressed particularly forcefully in his views of Christian faith:

The humorous, present throughout Christianity, is expressed in a fundamental principle which declares that the truth is hidden in the mystery (εν μυστηρίω. αποκρύφει),<sup>102</sup> which teaches not only that the truth is found in a mystery (an assertion which the world generally has been more inclined to hear, since mysteries have arisen often enough, although the ones initiated into these mysteries promptly apprehended the rest of the world in a

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<sup>100</sup> As Gregor Malantschuk has pointed out, Kierkegaard nowhere develops an account of humour in his writings with reference to Hamann; see Gregor Malantschuk, *Kierkegaard's Thought*, ed. and tr. Howard V. Hong and Edna Hong (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1971), p.90.

<sup>101</sup> For a treatment of humour in Kierkegaard's authorship, with particular focus on the Climacian writings, see John Lippitt, *Humour and Irony in Kierkegaard's Thought* (London: Macmillan, 2000). See also John Lippitt, "A Funny Thing Happened To Me On the Way To Salvation: Climacus as Humorist in Kierkegaard's Concluding Unscientific Postscript", *Religious Studies* 33 (1997): p.181-202. For a reading of humour in Kierkegaard which addresses Lippitt's interpretation see Kristy Vipperman, "Climacus the (multi-dimensional) humorist: interpreting 'An understanding with the reader'", *Religious Studies* 35 (1999): p.347-362.

<sup>102</sup> Col. 1:26.

humorous vein), but that it is in fact *hidden* in the mystery. This is a view of life which regards worldly wisdom humorously to the *n<sup>th</sup>* degree; otherwise the truth is usually *revealed* in the mystery...no matter how much Christian knowledge increases, it will still always remember its origin and therefore *know* everything εν μυστηρίω.<sup>103</sup>

Important in this passage is Kierkegaard's distinction between *truth which is hidden in the mystery* and *truth which is found in the mystery*. For Kierkegaard it is the former and not the latter which is the true mark of the humourist. To find the truth in mystery suggests that one is able to uncover the truth, to be initiated into it and thus can see those who are not in a humorous vein. But this, for Kierkegaard, seems to be a false view of humour and mystery, the type that leads to gnosticism and associations of hierarchical initiates. Instead, the truly humorous declares that truth is hidden in mystery and no matter how much is said or known it still remains tied to its origin in mystery and remains as mystery.<sup>104</sup> For Kierkegaard, the humourist is alive to the incongruity – or as Kierkegaard puts it in CUP, the “contradiction” – at the centre of human existence.<sup>105</sup> For Kierkegaard, humour seems to be in some sense illuminative of mystery. That is, the individual who has humour will not attempt to reconcile the mystery nor will she deem it to be of distracting or superfluous value. Instead, humour embraces mystery and provides the space, as it were, for existence to encounter mystery in its fundamental nature. Humour can consider mystery not as something to be overcome or disregarded but rather as that which is fundamental although in certain respects unspecifiable. As

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<sup>103</sup> JP 1682/II A 78/DD:6; June 3, 1837.

<sup>104</sup> See Pattison, *Religion*, p.113.

<sup>105</sup> See CUP, p.514. See Westphal, *Becoming a Self*, p.165-166. I leave aside a discussion of the function of humour as a border territory between the ethical sphere and the religious sphere which Kierkegaard articulates in CUP. It is related to our current discussion but actually serves an alternative purpose in that writing. That is, Kierkegaard draws a distinction between humour as the recognition of incongruity and humour practiced by the religious individual as a means of maintaining an incognito in order to protect the passionate inwardness of the God-relationship. In the first instance, which is related to the current discussion, the humourist as the individual between the ethical and the religious spheres recognises the disjunction between the claims which the ethical places upon the individual and the individual's inability to fulfill the ethical demand. In this respect, the humourist has not found an alternative to the ethical while at the same time recognising the inherent contradiction of the ethical and the need for an alternative; see CUP, p.501-520. For a treatment of this issue see C. Stephen Evans, “Kierkegaard's View of Humor: Must Christians Always be Solemn?,” *Faith and Philosophy* 4/2 (1987): p.176-186. Westphal argues differently from Evans regarding the nature of humour as a border territory and instead prefers to treat the topic solely in terms of humour employed by the religious individual as an incognito; see Westphal, *Becoming a Self*, p.165-169.

such, humour is deployed not as a clever literary tool, but is instead adopted because it is the appropriate means to communicate the incommensurability of existence. That is, humour maintains mystery because it enacts the contradictory nature of existence in its form.<sup>106</sup>

This leads to our second point. Kierkegaard also signals that it is such a view which locates the humorous individual in relation to worldly wisdom and which allows the individual to view it humorously. But what exactly is he attempting to explain? I think that this fits well with his contrastive view in the earlier passage quoted above between the humourist and the systematizer. In particular, the humourist is aware of the incommensurable whereas the philosopher either wants to abolish the mystery at the heart of human existence or simply is dismissive and thereby considers it as secondary or erroneous. This suggests that what is fundamental to knowledge of existence is overlooked by the system-maker. But in overlooking this, the system-maker is viewed humorously and humour is deployed as a means to unmask this folly. Thus, despite any type of formal philosophical problems that Kierkegaard has with speculative philosophy (these are many, and I shall turn to them in the remaining chapters) a central piece of his position in relation to speculative philosophy is that it is comical or it can be viewed as comical by the humourist who instead of abolishing the mystery of existence, embraces it, replicates in his writings, and is constantly aware that the truth of existence has its origin in mystery and remains hidden to systematic elucidation. This is clearly seen in his diagnosis of speculative, systematic philosophy in CUP:

Yet let us not do the wrong of calling the objective tendency impious, pantheistic self-worship but rather view it as a venture in the comic, because the idea that from now on to the end of the world nothing should be said except what would suggest a further improvement in a nearly finished system is simply a systematic consequence for systematizers.<sup>107</sup>

Kierkegaard raises, again, the diagnosis of systematic philosophy which was present in the journal entry quoted earlier. That is, the systematizer holds that

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<sup>106</sup> See George Pattison, *Kierkegaard, The Aesthetic and The Religious: from the Magic Theatre to the Crucifixion of the Image*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (London: SCM, 1999), p.53-55. For a discussion of the relation of humour to the paradox of the incarnation see Evans, *Kierkegaard's View of Humor*, p.183-184.

<sup>107</sup> CUP, p.124.

whatever cannot contribute to the system should not be said thereby dismissing or overlooking the incommensurable mystery at the heart of human existence. But here he suggests that the method for approaching such an endeavour is to view it as comical and it is the one who is “alive” to mystery, attuned to the humorous, who can make such a claim. But, as Kierkegaard will claim, there is a noble form of the humorous view and a debased form and it is here where we see the ethical nature of the humorous at work in his writings. Kierkegaard writes of the debased form:

People think it comical for someone to have a false conception, and they laugh when it is expressed...If having an untrue conception of something is comical, then we are all more or less comical, and some disclosure or other awaits us to render us ridiculous. But the comic of this kind...is of a subordinate order, and yet the sense for and the understanding of the comic is so undeveloped that this kind is almost always used and very seldom the purely comic.<sup>108</sup>

Kierkegaard expands on this distinction between a lesser form of the humorous view and what he calls here the ‘purely comic’ or perhaps the higher form of humour in another entry:

To present as comic, or in actual situation to laugh at that under which a man suffers – no, I could not bring myself to do that. When such is the case, I do not feel at all inclined to laugh; I would either try to help the man straighten out his affairs or I would try to avoid him... It is absolutely necessary that the person concerned be himself happy in his ridiculous delusion; as soon as he is unhappy in his ludicrous delusion, he is not to be laughed at.<sup>109</sup>

In contrasting these two types of humorous perspective Kierkegaard signals the enactment of humour as a means to uncover the pretension of the systematisers. The one who has a true form of humour will not laugh at someone in a genuinely difficult situation in which they are aware of their despair and are distraught. The

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<sup>108</sup> JP 147/VII<sup>1</sup> A 19/JJ:429; 1846.

<sup>109</sup> JP 1763/X<sup>2</sup> A 304/NB14:126; 1849. In this passage, Kierkegaard identifies Socrates as epitome of the practice of such humour. Given Kierkegaard’s continued identification of Hamann with Socrates, one can argue that what Kierkegaard says here is equally applicable to his understanding of Hamann’s enactment of humour.

humourist instead employs the comical for those who are caught in a delusion in which they are not merely unaware but happy and content. Kierkegaard seems to be advancing the notion that no amount of argument, pleading or help will allow the individual to see the error of their ways. How could it, if the individual is entirely happy, albeit delusionally so, in their illusion? For Kierkegaard, the only response available is humour.<sup>110</sup> Thus the humourist is alive to the incommensurable, is aware that there are things which are left over and cannot be systematised. It is awareness and full recognition of mystery without the need to reconcile it. The speculative view point, conversely, is not aware of mystery and is dismissive of it. It is content in its delusion and its ability to incorporate into the system all that which is important, dismissing that which evades it as unimportant. It seeks to finish the system and in so doing is truly happy in its delusion. Because humour reflects the awareness of the incongruity, it is possible to view attempts to circumvent this as comical. In this respect, both Hamann and Kierkegaard deploy humour in order to show the fallacy of attempting to overcome incongruity, the mystery of existence. This is why they both speak of their opponents in humorous terms, in truly comical fashion. It is to show that the attempt to explain the nature of existence without recourse to mystery is not only misdirected but farcical. The employment of humour is to undermine the pretension, the hubris operative in claims regarding the denuding of mystery. They use humour to show the farcical and comical attempts to accomplish that which is insurmountable.

While they both use humour in such a mode, there are differences in the form that humour takes in their writings. For example, Hamann's humour usually takes the form of single pithy statements which comprise large sections of his works. He jostles things together and comes up with some surprising comparisons, and juxtapositions. More obviously, Hamann deploys humour in much more pointed ways and is pervasive with his use of crass sexuality in order to make his point<sup>111</sup> – something which is entirely foreign to Kierkegaard. Kierkegaard on the other hand expands his humorous portrayal of his opponents in the forms of parables and brief narrative jokes – like his comparison of the systematians to a mentally disturbed individual who wishes to prove that he is sane and therefore walks around claiming

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<sup>110</sup> See Westphal, *Becoming a Self*, p.194.

<sup>111</sup> See David B. Hart, "The Laughter of the Philosophers", *First Things* (January 2005): p.34-37.

the earth is round.<sup>112</sup> Despite these differences, which perhaps could be described as stylistic, the fundamental use of humour is the same – to show the folly and absurdity of their enlightened and speculative ages.<sup>113</sup>

The positive appraisal of Hamann's humour by Kierkegaard thus marks an important development in his early conception of his authorship. Humour, which would become central to Kierkegaard's writings, is particularly focussed on the inability of systematic philosophy adequately to describe the nature of existence. Kierkegaard maintained that humour was an inextricable part of the means by which existence was to be articulated. Specifically, humour is fundamental to maintaining the primacy of the inarticulable aspects of existence, aspects which are passed over and disregarded by the practitioners of the philosophy-as-science model. In this way, humour is more than a literary ploy as it emerges as a mode for viewing the mystery at the heart of being, a mystery which is insurmountable but not entirely inarticulable if one grants the ability of humour to be in some way illuminative. Humour as illuminative does not, however, mean that it shines so brightly as to explain mystery and thereby rendering it unmysterious. Instead, the illuminative nature of humour heightens one's awareness of mystery and enlightens one to mystery as not a veil to be removed – for it cannot be – but as one from which existence cannot be extricated.

Kierkegaard articulates his view of humour as a corrective to systematic philosophy and he contrasts them directly, as seen above. Humour, therefore, is not only Kierkegaard's claim for the insurmountable mystery at the heart of existence

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<sup>112</sup> CUP, p.195. For a collection of Kierkegaard's humorous passages see Thomas C. Oden, *The Humour of Kierkegaard: An Anthology* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004).

<sup>113</sup> Some have wished to make rather far reaching claims regarding who is to be seen as the more humorous or who of the two employ the humorous to better effect. I make no such judgment here. It is clear that both have been recognised for their literary talents and that both have truly humorous moments, and that their writings are infused with deep humour. To make a judgment regarding who is the more humorous or the more faithful practitioner of humour I leave up to the individual reader to decide if they feel compelled to do so. It is interesting that the defenders or champions (however one wishes to view them) of Hamann take it upon themselves to elevate Hamann at the expense of Kierkegaard. That is, their positive assessment of Hamann is bought at the price of criticising Kierkegaard for failing to achieve the level of authorial or literary genius evident in Hamann. One gets the feeling that this is because they feel that Hamann has been unfairly marginalised whereas Kierkegaard has received his fair share of credit. Moreover, operative in this taking from Kierkegaard in order to pay Hamann is the belief that most of what Kierkegaard says - that is, some of Kierkegaard's fundamental concepts - originates with Hamann. They thus view themselves as correcting a grave injustice. For champions of Hamann at the expense of Kierkegaard see Betz, *Hamann Before Kierkegaard*, p.329-331; see also Hart, *Laughter*, p.35-37. Oden on the other hand champions Kierkegaard but without denigrating Hamann.

but is importantly also a specific corrective against philosophy-as-science with its systematic demands. For Kierkegaard, Hamann is held as the epitome of this view and stands at the beginning of Kierkegaard's early critique of Hegelian, i.e. systematic, philosophy. Kierkegaard repeats this contrast in a well-known passage from CUP (1846), restating views first articulated in his journals a decade earlier and again holding up Hamann as the prime exemplar:

I will not conceal the fact that I admire Hamann, although I readily admit that, if he is supposed to have worked coherently [*sammenhængende*], the elasticity of his thoughts lacks evenness and his preternatural resilience lacks self-control. But the originality of genius is there in his brief statements, and the pithiness of form corresponds to the desultory hurling forth of a thought. With heart and soul, down to his last drop of blood, he is concentrated in a single word, a highly gifted genius's passionate protest against a system of existence [*et Tilværelsens System*].<sup>114</sup>

The continuity in themes which was discussed in relation to the journals is easy to detect: the form of Hamann's writings; the obvious praise which Kierkegaard heaps upon Hamann; and the central contrast to systematic philosophy. Some recent commentators, though, have claimed that in this passage Kierkegaard is in fact criticising Hamann for his lack of systematicity and suggest that he is repeating the criticisms which Hegel had levelled. Because this has become a standard view within the extant literature and also because it challenges my claims it is important to spend some time addressing this issue.

The basic claim that is made is that while Kierkegaard was more appreciative of Hamann than Hegel, he considers Hamann as not being systematic enough. In this way, Kierkegaard can be read as echoing, broadly, the critique of Hegel. A claim which is held to be substantiated in the passage from CUP, particularly in Kierkegaard's mention of the form of Hamann's writings. For example, Bayer and Knudsen have claimed that while Hamann was appreciated by Kierkegaard (the

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<sup>114</sup> SKS 7, p.227/CUP, p.250. I provide the Danish here so as to facilitate comparison between translations: "Jeg vil ikke dølge, at jeg beundrer Hamann, medens jeg gerne indrømmer, at hans Tankers Elasticitet mangler Ligelighed, og hans overnaturlige Spændstighed Selvbeherskelse, hvis han skulde have arbejdet sammenhængende. Men Geniets Oprindelighed er der i hans korte Ord, og Formens Prægnants ganske svarende til den desultoriske Udslyngen af en Tanke. Han er med Liv og Sjæl indtil sin sidste Blodsdråbe samlet i et eneste Ord, et højtbegavet Genies lidenskabelige Protest mod et Tilværelsens System."

genius' protest against a system of existence) he was not taken as an unconditional ally against "Hegel the *Systemdenker*".<sup>115</sup> And this because, according to their reading, Kierkegaard held that "Hamann's protest against the system was not systematic enough" [daß Hamanns Protest gegen das System nicht systematisch genug sei].<sup>116</sup> A similar sentiment has been advanced by John Betz in the most recent English language scholarship on the Kierkegaard-Hamann relation. He has followed the tendency to view Kierkegaard's statement as a criticism, in the end hindering an unequivocal reception of Hamann. As he states, "it is highly ironic that Kierkegaard eventually came to criticize Hamann for the same reason as Hegel, namely, for being too unsystematic."<sup>117</sup> The view espoused by Betz, was made earlier by Stephen N. Dunning: "Ultimately, however, Hegel's criticism of Hamann is identical with that of Kierkegaard's: he failed to develop his insights."<sup>118</sup>

There is though a confusion of tongues here which partially exonerates Bayer and Knudsen in their identification of Kierkegaard with Hegel (although the same cannot be said of Betz who was working with the Hong translation and therefore appears to be merely parroting pre-existent claims). The German language translation of Kierkegaard's works which they are reading seems to be responsible, in the end, for one aspect of this misunderstanding. The CUP text from which they draw is

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<sup>115</sup> Bayer and Knudsen not unreasonably see Hegel as the main target of Kierkegaard's innumerable criticisms running the length and breadth of his corpus. They follow a well-worn tradition that has held sway until only recently. The work of Jon Stewart, familiar to Kierkegaard specialists, has shown that the target of Kierkegaard's criticisms is not Hegel per se but rather a version of Hegelian thought which was appropriated in Danish theology and philosophy in the nineteenth century.

<sup>116</sup> Bayer and Knudsen, *Kreuz*, p.2; emphasis mine. This argument is repeated in a later work by Bayer, *Zeitgenosse*, p.43. See also Gründer, *HH*, 51; he writes in relation to this passage in CUP that "Kierkegaard takes Hamann seriously as few others have, yet still criticises him."

<sup>117</sup> John Betz, *Hamann Before Postmodernity*, (Ph.D. diss.) University of Virginia, 1999, p.161. More recently Betz has reiterated the critique of non-systematicity in Kierkegaard: "Such dissatisfaction is typical: whereas Hamann expresses himself in fragments and aphorisms, Kierkegaard seeks greater, even systematic, clarification." See Betz, *Hamann Before Kierkegaard*, p.327. Betz's claims form part of a larger argument, which he advances in the above journal article on Hamann and Kierkegaard, where he clearly views Hamann as being the more original thinker of the two. This has led him to conclude that Hamann and not Kierkegaard should be a future model for theology, particularly in the Lutheran tradition; See Betz, *Hamann before Kierkegaard*, p.329-331. A similar sentiment was first advanced by R.G. Smith several years before Betz. R.G. Smith has argued that Hamann is to be the preferred model for Christian existence over Kierkegaard; see R.G. Smith, *J.G. Hamann: A Study in Christian Existentialism*, (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1960), p.20. See also Smith, *Hamann and Kierkegaard*, p.54-55.

<sup>118</sup> Stephen N. Dunning, "Kierkegaard's 'Hegelian' Response to Hamann", *Neue Zeitschrift für systematische Theologie und Religionsphilosophie* 30/3 (1988): p.325.

rendered in German as ‘daß der Elastizität seiner Gedanken Gleichmaß und seiner übernatürlichen Spannung Selbstbeherrschung fehlt, *wenn* er nämlich hätte zusammenhängend arbeiten sollen.’<sup>119</sup> Our interest at present is in the final clause of Kierkegaard’s statement. A translation of the last clause of the German text into English would render it: “*when* he, namely, should have worked coherently.” In the German translation, therefore, the emphasis is clearly on Kierkegaard’s claim that Hamann *should* have worked coherently, with the implication being that he did not. In this respect, Bayer and Knudsen are correct in attributing a strong claim to Kierkegaard.

The error is made apparent when one investigates the original Danish text and discovers that Kierkegaard does not make a *strong* claim but suggests it in the form of a condition; it reads: “Jeg vil ikke dølge, at jeg beundrer Hamann, medens jeg gerne indrømmer, at hans Tankers Elasticitet mangler Ligelighed, og hans overnaturlige Spændstighed Selvbeherskelse, *hvis* han skulde have arbejdet sammenhængende.”<sup>120</sup> In the Hong translation the conditionality of Kierkegaard’s statement has been preserved and this points to a nuance in the language used and therefore alters the type of claim attributable to Kierkegaard: “I will not conceal the fact that I admire Hamann, although I readily admit that, *if* he is supposed to have worked coherently, the elasticity of his thoughts lacks evenness and his preternatural resilience lacks self-control.”

In the above passages I have emphasised the Danish *hvis* as it occurs in the English and German translations. Examining the German text one notes that *hvis* has been rendered as *wenn* (which can be both translated into English as *if* or *when*). In the construction of the German passage it is clear that it is intended to be understood as *when* in a strong, non-conditional sense. The Danish *hvis*, however, points to a conditional which has been preserved in the Hong translation as *if*. Thus, rather than having Kierkegaard argue that Hamann had written with a lack of self-control [Selvbeherskelse/Selbstbeherrschung] *when* he should have worked coherently, the

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<sup>119</sup> See Bayer and Knudsen, *Kreuz*, p.2, fn9; emphasis mine. The German language edition from which they draw is known as the ‘Jena edition.’ For two detailed studies of the translation and reception of Kierkegaard in Germany see Heiko Schulz, *Germany and Austria, A Modest Head Start: The German Reception of Kierkegaard* in *Kierkegaard’s International Reception I, Northern and Western Europe*, ed Jon Stewart; see also Habib C. Malik, *Receiving Søren Kierkegaard: The Early Impact and Transmission of His Thought* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1997).

<sup>120</sup> SKS 7, p.227; emphasis mine.

original Danish text points to a more conditional sentiment: that his work displays a lack of self-control *if* he is to be seen as working coherently or, extrapolating from the context, *if* he is to be considered (or judged) as a coherent thinker. As Hamann, in a typically perspicacious statement, would point out: such a small change can give “the whole system a different language and direction.”<sup>121</sup>

This moment of difficulty in translation from Danish into either German or English does not explain the fact that Kierkegaard registers a level of interest and a form of concern with Hamann’s style. However, it does show that Kierkegaard’s statement is more nuanced than the German text would lead us to believe. Regardless of this fact, it must be taken into account that Bayer and Knudsen read Kierkegaard (perhaps unavoidably given the translation with which they were working) as criticising Hamann in a fashion similar to that of Hegel. Thus, the statement in CUP is taken to be normative of Kierkegaard’s views; a position which has gained broad acceptance as I have shown above.

Even granting the above difficulty in translation there is a further point which renders the identification with Hegel questionable and for which Bayer and Knudsen are fully responsible (and so too is Betz). This emerges when one attends to the equating of the German terms *zusammenhängend* with *systematisch* in their text.<sup>122</sup> In German, these two words can be taken as synonyms – as can the English equivalents: coherent(ly) and systematic(ally). However, in the CUP text this correlation is not present. It is not in the original Danish text, nor does it occur in German nor English.

Further, in Kierkegaard there is a world of difference in meaning between a work that is judged to be *systematic* and one that is judged to be *coherent*. The former, as we have previously discussed in relation to Hegel, deals specifically in a philosophical context and should be understood in relation to his claim that Hamann’s work does not develop any type of objectivity, remains focussed on the particular and accidental and thus never expands into systematic exposition and therefore lacks objective content, whereas the latter – coherency – is a literary

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<sup>121</sup> H V, 448; (to Jacobi, 2.6.1785). One gets the feeling that the confusion caused by such a small and ‘insignificant’ word would have amused Hamann in particular.

<sup>122</sup> Kierkegaard, in the words of Bayer and Knudsen, “bemängelt, daß Hamanns Protest gegen *das System* nicht *systematisch* genug sei” and the German CUP text which renders the passage as “wenn er nämlich hätte *zusammenhängend* arbeiten sollen.” Emphasis mine.

critique. Thus, Kierkegaard notices Hamann's protest against "a system of existence" but also points to the unique style he employs. Given that Bayer and Knudsen were working with a difficult translation one can understand a partial confusion. However, the misunderstanding of the relation between *System* and coherence is entirely their own doing and one which they themselves have imported into the discussion. This has occurred through the identification of *zusammenhängend* with *systematisch* and the relation to *System* in their text. To suggest, as Bayer and Knudsen have, that Kierkegaard recognised Hamann's protest against *the System* but critiqued him for a lack of systematicity is to confuse the terms employed. The fact that Kierkegaard suggests that a certain level of incoherency is present in Hamann's writings if he is judged against normal literary standards is different from assessing that Hamann hadn't worked systematically enough in a philosophic sense when he should have.

If Kierkegaard was arguing for the latter, as it would appear from the perspective of Bayer and Knudsen, then the claim made in the CUP would be nearly identical to Hegel's critique. On this reading, Kierkegaard would be committing a serious error in praising Hamann for his intense and personal protest against *the System* while at the same time arguing that his thought should have developed and expanded in a philosophic systematic so as to provide objective content, thus contributing to a *System*. Kierkegaard would be blatantly contradicting himself. It is possible for Kierkegaard to recognise, in agreement with Hegel, that Hamann's writings lack a type of coherency and systematicity without making the further claim that they should have evidenced both of these features. Perhaps more importantly, Kierkegaard appears to signal his commonality with Hamann in a passage from *Repetition* which recalls CUP: "Assuming that what I say is not a mere lie, I perhaps did right in submitting my aphorism to a systematic appraiser. Perhaps something may come of it, a footnote in the system – great idea! Then I would not have lived in vain!"<sup>123</sup> The similarities between this passage and that from CUP are unmistakable, and it is correct to note, as Ringleben has, that Kierkegaard "claims solidarity with Hamann" in demanding thus to be judged, and acknowledging what the likely outcome would be, in the same manner or to a standard which was applied to Hamann by Michelet (and Hegel).<sup>124</sup> As the CUP passage concludes, " But the

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<sup>123</sup> Quoted in Ringleben, *Kierkegaard as a Reader of Hamann*, p.218; see *Repetition*, p.149-150.

<sup>124</sup> Ringleben, *Kierkegaard as a Reader of Hamann*, p.218.

system is hospitable. Poor Hamann, you have been reduced to a subsection by Michelet. Whether your grave has ever been marked, I do not know; whether it is now trampled upon, I do not know; but I do know that by hook or by crook you have been stuck into the subsection uniform and thrust into the ranks.”<sup>125</sup>

In light of this, it cannot continue to be maintained that Kierkegaard holds that Hamann should have been more systematic and therefore somehow fails to meet a criterion necessary for reception and appropriation, which was Hegel’s argument. Moreover, as I have argued throughout this chapter, it was precisely these *unsystematic* aspects of Hamann’s writings which intrigued Kierkegaard and which he commented favourably upon, particularly in his early encounters with the Magus of the North. More importantly, though, Kierkegaard identifies his own authorship with these features of Hamann’s writings, adopting a Socratic position, instantiating indirect communication through pseudonymity, understanding his role as imbibing the office of a latter day Socratic *agent provocateur* and pursuing humour both in order to highlight the nature of existence and as a means to uncover the pretensions and illusion causing hubris which he diagnosed at the heart of the systematic project.

## Conclusion

The similarities in language, the proximity of the dates from when Hegel’s review was published in his collected works (1835) and the appearance of Hamann in Kierkegaard’s journals (1836) suggest the possibility that Kierkegaard had read Hegel’s review and in fact was introduced to Hamann through this review.<sup>126</sup> In concluding this chapter I would like to return directly to this topic which was first raised in the introduction. If one is to hypothesise regarding the introduction of

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<sup>125</sup> CUP, p.250. See also Gründer, *HH*, p.27-28, for a brief discussion of Hamann’s place in Karl Ludwig Michelet’s *Geschichte der letzten Systeme der Philosophie in Deutschland* (1837). Gründer notes that Michelet “ordnet Hamann ohne weiteres neben Jacobi in die ‘Glaubensphilosophie’ ein.” See also Alastair Hannay, “Having Lessing on One’s Side” in *International Kierkegaard Commentary: Concluding Unscientific Postscript to ‘Philosophical Fragments’* vol.12, ed. Robert L. Perkins (Georgia: Mercer University Press, 1997), p.215. Hannay considers this passage to be a criticism of Hamann owing to the fact that his writings could not “resist Hegelian compartmentalization.” He further comments: “Certainly, Hamann’s single-minded and passionate protest against a rational metaphysics of life was a blow in the right direction; and it was a shame, if true, that he had been rendered impotent by being acknowledged by the System.”

<sup>126</sup> See Steffensen, *Kierkegaard und Hamann*, p.400. Betz has also made a similar point recently; see Betz, *After Enlightenment*, p.14.

Hamann to Kierkegaard via Hegel, then one has to take into account the issue of Hamann's marriage of conscience [*Gewissensehe/Samvittigheds-Ægteskab*].

Kierkegaard first mentions this topic in 1844/45:

Hamann's so-called marriage of conscience [Samvittigheds-Ægteskab], which was not a civil marriage – how does this all hang together? Roth in the preface of Volume III merely mentions it and says that there are documents, but that he dare not publish them. In addition he quotes Reichardt's *Urania* for 1812. Must be investigated.<sup>127</sup>

Kierkegaard's entry does not provide the full account of Roth's preface regarding Hamann's marriage of conscience. In fact, Roth more than "merely mentions it" by gesturing towards some documents that exist. Rather, Roth writes that Hamann's marriage of conscience was a well-known fact during his lifetime, that it was not looked unfavourably upon by his fellow citizens and that it is something which Hamann frequently alludes to in his writings for which Roth provides a reference.<sup>128</sup>

But what does this tell us about Kierkegaard's possible reception of Hamann via Hegel? It is important, I think, to note that Hegel had discussed Hamann's domestic arrangement at some length in his review. Hegel restates Roth's position not to include "in the present collection Hamann's memorable communications about the origin of this relationship, but that provision would be made that they should not vanish."<sup>129</sup> Importantly, however, Hegel claims that, despite Roth's choice to omit certain documents, "there is certainly enough to be found in the present collection to satisfy any curiosity."<sup>130</sup> To demonstrate this, Hegel identifies two letters in which

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<sup>127</sup> JP 1556/VI A 5/JJ: 294; 1844/1845.

<sup>128</sup> Roth wrote the following: "What I have not shared in this collection relates to Hamann's marriage of conscience [*Gewissens-Ehe*] which he entered into in 1763 and to which he often alluded in his writings, for example II, p.417. Hamann's relationship was well-known in Königsberg during his lifetime and because it was purer and happier than many civic marriages, it was not objectionable. It was even known amongst the wider public. One finds the relationship mentioned, for example, in an opinion expressed by Reichhardt† in *Urania* from 1812 in which Hamann's reluctance to convert his relationship into a civil marriage is explained wholly inaccurately. Considerations, from which I could not escape, have prohibited me from presenting in the current collection Hamann's memorable communications regarding the origin of this relationship; efforts will be made to ensure that these should not be lost." R III, p.x-xi.

<sup>129</sup> Hegel, *Review*, p.21.

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*

Hamann discussed at length and in intimate detail his relationship with his *wife*. The first that Hegel provides is to Franz von Buchholtz<sup>131</sup> and the second is a reference to a letter to Herder.<sup>132</sup> Hegel quotes portions of these letters and wryly refers to Hamann's self-designated marriage of conscience in the following manner: "or whatever one wants call *living as one will*."<sup>133</sup> Despite the lack of the omitted texts and the single reference that Roth provides in the preface to volume three, Hegel was able to find two significant texts which speak directly of Hamann's domestic arrangement. In this way, Hegel was certainly correct to claim that there exists in the collected works enough direct discussion to provide a portrait of Hamann's living situation.

Regarding the possibility of Kierkegaard having read Hegel's review, it appears to me that this is the strongest evidence against such a claim. Kierkegaard himself had stated in the above quoted entry "Must be investigated." Had he wished to do so, he could have turned to Hegel's review which he was supposed to have read as early as 1836 and which he was supposed to have recalled as late as 1846 in CUP. Furthermore, the above entry appears as something with which Kierkegaard had been unfamiliar with regarding Hamann's private life prior to this point (1844/1845). This is confirmed by examining arguably the most well-known journal entry which Kierkegaard penned in relation to Hamann:

Amazing! Yesterday I spoke with Jørgen Jørgensen, who has now become an avid reader of Hamann. In Hamann's writings he has found evidence that Hamann was not married to his wife but lived with her out of wedlock, consequently as a concubine. And I, who have looked for this most eagerly, have not found it. At one time this would have been of the greatest importance to me. And yet it would not really have helped me, but it would have given the matter a little different twist if I had known that Hamann had dared to do such a thing. Of course I have thought of the possibility, but I did not know that Hamann had carried it through. But at the time I was sure that it could not be done that way.<sup>134</sup>

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<sup>131</sup> Hegel, *Review*, p.22; R VII, p.162/H V, p.206; (to von Buchholtz, 7.9.1784).

<sup>132</sup> R V, p.193-194/ZH III, p.263; (to Herder, 14.10.1776). Hegel, *Review*, p.22.

<sup>133</sup> Hegel, *Review*, p.22.

<sup>134</sup> JP 1558/VIII<sup>1</sup> A 251/NB2:137; 1847.

This entry was written in 1847, likely in mid-August.<sup>135</sup> Significantly, it also contains in the marginalia a reference to the earlier entry of 1844/45. One notes immediately his surprise at having finally discovered this after, it would seem, Kierkegaard had himself been unable to do so despite his claim to “have looked for this most eagerly”. It is this element of discovery and Kierkegaard’s own claims to have searched for evidence of what he had first encountered in 1844/45 which is important at this point.<sup>136</sup> Had Kierkegaard read Hegel’s review not only would he have been aware of Hamann’s marriage of conscience earlier than is first indicated in the *Journals*, but also he would have had at hand the passages to which Hegel refers and quotes in the review. This would have provided Kierkegaard with the requisite means to investigate the claims that he encountered in Roth’s preface to volume three.<sup>137</sup> I would argue that this is the most direct evidence available to suggest that Kierkegaard had not read Hegel’s review and thus Hegel did not function as the initial conduit in Kierkegaard’s reception of Hamann. Moreover, one should exercise caution in taking Kierkegaard’s personal interest in Hamann’s domestic arrangement

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<sup>135</sup> The date for this entry is not given by Kierkegaard. Only 10 of the 269 entries are dated. It was likely penned, however, in mid-August 1847.

<sup>136</sup> I intentionally leave aside a discussion of the obviously personal tenor of this entry. The following, however, is worth noting briefly. First, Kierkegaard had considered taking Regine Olsen into a relationship short of marriage. In fact, he seems to have entertained the idea of living in a domestic arrangement similar to that of Hamann, ostensibly apart from an awareness that Hamann had lived in such domesticity. Second, Kierkegaard appears to be genuine when he states in the above entry that although a familiarity with Hamann’s civil status may have changed things for him, it was not an option that he entertained for very long; see JP 5664/IV A 107/JJ:115; May 17, 1843. Thus, Kierkegaard expresses, I believe, genuine sentiments of admiration and perhaps envy towards Hamann who had chosen and fulfilled a course of home-life which Kierkegaard found himself unable to do. For an account of Kierkegaard’s complex relationship with Regine Olsen see Joakim Garff, *Søren Kierkegaard. A Biography*, tr. Bruce H. Kirmmse (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005), p.173- 191.

<sup>137</sup> The issue of how diligently Kierkegaard had in fact searched for this evidence is itself an interesting topic. It is possible that Kierkegaard was being disingenuous, as there is indication that he had at his disposal, apart from access to Hegel’s review, the necessary means by which to investigate the claims of Roth found in the preface to volume three. Specifically, Roth (as indicated above) provided a citation to volume two which Kierkegaard could have pursued. Furthermore, Kierkegaard had in his possession the two part eighth volume which was published in 1842/43 that contained an index and references. And we know from the JJ papers, particularly JJ:50 that Kierkegaard had the eighth volume in his possession no later than May, 1843. In the index there is an entry for Hamann’s marriage of conscience which provides several references to letters in which Hamann discusses at length his domestic relations (R8/II: 189; *H’s Gewissensehe*). Thus, it would have been a rather straightforward exercise to locate the relevant passages that Kierkegaard claims to have so diligently searched for in vain. If this is correct then it would not be the first time that Kierkegaard had been less than straightforward regarding his reading of Hamann as the incident from March 18, 1839 with H. Hertz attests to; see Garff, *Kierkegaard*, p.151.

as evidence of his substantial intellectual influence as some have tended to do.<sup>138</sup> Regardless of Kierkegaard's level of interest in this aspect of Hamann's personal life, whether it be great or small, it in no way effects the obvious indebtedness that Kierkegaard owes to Hamann, an indebtedness which I have examined during the course of this chapter.

This indebtedness, traceable to Kierkegaard's early reception of Hamann, marks, in my view a fundamental period in the conceptualisation of his own authorship. In this formative period, when Kierkegaard was beginning to formulate his first critiques against Hegelianism and to articulate a possible role that he himself might inhabit within his social and cultural milieu, Hamann provided him with a conception of a Socratic authorship and task and trained his eye on the particularities of existence, safeguarded by humour from the encroachment of the *System*. As I have argued, Kierkegaard's positive appraisal of Hamann - both in his writings and as instantiated *through the writings* - is clearly seen when contrasted with Hegel's review. This comes as no surprise because Kierkegaard's main intellectual targets were, in their own estimations, Hegel's direct descendants. While Kierkegaard retains these foundational elements in his authorship, particularly to the end of the pseudonymous authorship, his thought also matures and his later, more developed criticisms of post-Kantian variations shall be the focus for the remaining chapters. It is here, I will argue where one witnesses a substantial Hamannian genealogy in both his criticisms and constructive proposals.

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<sup>138</sup> See for example Betz, *Hamann before Kierkegaard*, p.301-302; see also Hay, *Sharing Style*, p.101; see also Steffensen, *Kierkegaard und Hamann*, p.415-416.

## Chapter Two

### The Presuppositionless Beginning: Agency, Language and the Problem of the Immediate

#### Introduction

Speculative philosophy (and the numerous related terms) is the main target of Kierkegaard's critique in CUP. Predominantly Kierkegaard casts his issue with speculative philosophy in existential terms. However, he does offer a series of formal critiques. Kierkegaard is particularly interested in the presuppositionless beginning of the system. In this chapter, I propose to focus on this aspect of his work independently of a consideration of his existential critique. In part I, I will discuss the differentiation between the formal and the existential as well as providing a brief contextual summary of the formal issue that Kierkegaard takes up.

In part II, I will examine and assess Kierkegaard's formal argument. I will argue that his formal argument against the speculative process occurs in two parts. First, that the presuppositionless, immediate beginning is not an *a priori* given but rather an *a posteriori* achievement. This, I will demonstrate, implies the second level critique. This critique holds that the presuppositionless beginning is not achievable. I identify this as the critique from agency. I will pursue this by reviewing his critique of reflection. The focus on reflection will serve two purposes: (a) I will show that Kierkegaard introduces his critique in two parts; and (b) I will indicate that Kierkegaard identifies the concept of pure being as the presuppositionless beginning which reflection is meant to achieve and present Kierkegaard's argument that is cannot be achieved.

In part III, I will continue my examination and assessment of Kierkegaard's formal argument but shall turn to consider infinite abstraction and argue that this is a distinct term from that of reflection, although they are normally treated as synonymous. I will argue that Kierkegaard follows a similar argumentative strategy in detailing a two part critique but will also indicate that Kierkegaard attaches a different notion of the presuppositionless beginning, namely pure thinking, to infinite abstraction. The alternative notion of the presuppositionless beginning, I shall argue,

provides an alternative variation of the second level critique. I will argue that Kierkegaard identifies the problem of language as the reason for maintaining that the presuppositionless beginning is not available. However, it becomes clear that this argument appears only *in nuce* in his writings and therefore requires elaboration.

I propose to elaborate Kierkegaard's argument in part IV by examining Hamann's critique of Kant in his *Metakritik über den Purismus der reinen Vernunft*. I will focus on Hamann's claim that reason is language, to which I believe Kierkegaard appeals. I will consider three topics in Hamann's writing. First, I will show that Hamann takes up his critique of Kant in light of the question that Kant deems unnecessary. Second, I will present Hamann's argument for the relationality between language and reason, while discussing his appeal to christological mystery and a sacramental relationality to describe his position. Third, I will then turn to consider Hamann's claim that language provides a further way to understand the relation between receptivity and spontaneity which he sees as inter-related and claims that Kant has separated unnecessarily. In this discussion, I will also take up Hamann's claim that it is in this relation between receptivity and spontaneity that error arises. Throughout my discussion I will use Hamann's critique of Kant as my main text, but I will also draw on his substantial correspondence and other writings to clarify his claims. At the same time, I will note the points at which Kierkegaard draws on Hamann's argument. In the conclusion, I will evaluate Kierkegaard's appeal to Hamann in his argument against the speculative claim to have gained the presuppositionless beginning.

## **I. Existential Forgetfulness and The Formal Critique**

I believe that Kierkegaard pursues an existential critique and formal critique of speculative philosophy in CUP and these require an appropriate differentiation. Kierkegaard's main goal is to diagnose and offer a cure for the existential dilemma facing the individual's relation to speculative philosophy, particularly as this pertains to the life of Christian faith which he articulates. For example, Kierkegaard argues that "for the speculating thinker the question of his personal eternal happiness cannot come up at all, precisely because his task consists going in away from himself more

and more and becoming objective and in that way disappearing from himself”.<sup>1</sup> In Kierkegaard’s terms, the endeavour of speculative philosophy in its tendency to a consideration of selfhood in objective or conceptual terms bears the marks of a pernicious form of forgetfulness or absentmindedness.

Kierkegaard’s existential critique in CUP is central to this work, and germane to the entire corpus. However, a focus solely on this aspect of his argument can lead to overlooking his formal critique of speculative philosophy which I believe he advances.<sup>2</sup> Not only is this an important element of CUP, and indeed his other major pseudonymous works, but Kierkegaard points to this difference. For example, near the conclusion of the section which I will examine below, Kierkegaard indicates that his intention is to offer a distinction between an existential and a formal treatment: “Even if a good-natured thinker is so absentminded as to forget that he himself is existing, speculative thought and absentmindedness are still not quite the same thing.”<sup>3</sup> A little later, Kierkegaard argues that one must offer an account of the “objective tendency” in order to raise a formal challenge: in “beginning straightaway with ethical categories against the objective tendency, one does wrong and fails to hit the mark, because one has nothing in common with the attacked.”<sup>4</sup> This suggests that Kierkegaard aims not merely to engage with speculative philosophy on an existential level but to mount a formal critique which, while related to his existential diagnosis, is separable. It is my view that the existential critique is dependent upon the formal critique whereas the reverse does not hold.

Kierkegaard introduces the formal critique in the context of the fourth thesis of Lessing. The formal critique of the presuppositionless beginning must be understood in light of the problem to which Kierkegaard is responding. Kierkegaard

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<sup>1</sup> CUP, p.56.

<sup>2</sup> I will return to this issue in the next chapter and address certain problems of identifying speculative thought as merely *leading* to forgetfulness. In anticipation of my further argument, I will argue that the forgetfulness or absentmindedness that Kierkegaard identifies with speculative thinking is the result of a complex process instituted by the agent and not simply a derivative product. That is, the subject does not just happen to forget that she is existing because she gets tangled up with speculative thought (as some readings claim), but rather that it is a position that is taken up through the specific activity of the agent.

<sup>3</sup> CUP, p.119.

<sup>4</sup> CUP, p.124. The mention of the ‘ethical categories’ here signals Kierkegaard’s repeated criticism of Hegelian thought and his claim that it has no ethics. I will treat this briefly in the following chapter when I examine Kierkegaard’s conception of the ethical task of selfhood in CUP.

introduces the topic in a divisional heading: “Consequently, (a) a logical system can be given; (b) but a system of existence [*Tilværelsens System*] cannot be given.”<sup>5</sup> Kierkegaard’s support for this claim shall be the focus of the next sections. Before turning to his argument, I would like to explore, briefly, the issue which Kierkegaard engages but which he never directly identifies. Instead the problem that he is addressing appears in brief allusions which would have been familiar to his readers.<sup>6</sup>

The issue of the absolute or presuppositionless beginning is a central topic from Descartes onward.<sup>7</sup> It particularly gained force in the post-Kantian tradition that we recognise as Idealism (although it does form a major part of the Early German Romantic criticism of that tradition). The formal need of obtaining the first, absolute starting point for philosophical science arose in light of the pantheism controversy which reintroduced a radical form of scepticism in the wake of Kant’s dualism.<sup>8</sup> Seeking to attempt to overcome the sceptical challenge, post-Kantians such as Reinhold, Fichte, and Hegel (and the early Schelling) took up the challenge.<sup>9</sup> The only way to overcome scepticism, they argued, was to ground philosophical claims in the one, indubitable principle. If the first principle could be established which met

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<sup>5</sup> CUP, p.109.

<sup>6</sup> In CUP the allusions to certainty, skepticism and system occur with relative frequency but never in a sustained fashion. That is, Kierkegaard does not argue that the problem he is addressing is the relationship between the grounding principle of the system, the foundation of secure knowledge (i.e. certainty) and the presence of scepticism which motivates this programme. Kierkegaard had taken up the issue in the earlier, although posthumously published, *Johannes Climacus or De Omnibus Dubitandum Est: a Narrative*. In that work Kierkegaard articulates a more coherent outline of the issue but it remains far from comprehensive. Kierkegaard approaches the issue of scepticism, in response to Martensen’s principle of doubt (found in the title), from a largely existential perspective (again signalled in the subtitle ‘a Narrative’).

<sup>7</sup> See Gregor Malantschuk, *Kierkegaard’s Thought*, p.63 & 81. Malantschuk approaches Kierkegaard’s critique as responding to Descartes and Hegel. See below for a revision of this view.

<sup>8</sup> See Paul Franks, *All or Nothing: Systematicity, Transcendental Arguments, and Skepticism in German Idealism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005); see in particular chapter one which provides an excellent outline of this debate. Kierkegaard points to this well-known debate, raised by Jacobi, of Lessing’s Spinozism; see CUP p.99-100.

<sup>9</sup> For a discussion of the development of post-Kantian thought with particular emphasis on Reinhold see Karl Ameriks, *Kant and The Fate of Autonomy: Problems in the Appropriation of the Critical Philosophy* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000). Ameriks argues that it was Reinhold who is responsible for establishing Kantian philosophy in terms of a response to the problem of scepticism raised by Jacobi in what is popularly known as the Pantheism controversy. The contribution of Fichte to the debate is outlined by Terry Pinkard, *German Philosophy 1760-1860: The Legacy of Idealism* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002); see in particular chapter five. A philosophical-historical reconstruction of this period is provided by Frederick C. Beiser, *The Fate of Reason: German Philosophy from Kant to Fichte* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1987), particularly chapter two.

the sceptical demand for justification, then all further principles which were dependent upon or mediated by this first principle would be given the secure foundation they required.

This issue was taken up in the Danish context, most notably by Martensen and Heiberg. In order to achieve the security of philosophical claims and thus complete a self-contained and -justifying system they needed to provide the absolute starting point which itself was not subjected to the sceptical challenge. In taking up this debate, Kierkegaard's Danish contemporaries were not innovative but merely reformulating and in many ways restating a series of philosophical positions that had gained currency since the Kantian revolution, particularly from the work of Hegel and to a lesser extent Schelling.<sup>10</sup>

Kierkegaard decides to take up this argument and claims that such a system is impossible. As I read it, Kierkegaard's claim can be reduced to the following principle for which he argues throughout CUP: a system of existence cannot be given because the necessary first, presuppositionless, absolute principle is unachievable. Because it is unachievable then the system cannot get started and certainly cannot be finished. In order to achieve a system of existence one requires the immediate, first and absolute principle upon which to ground all subsequent claims or from which all subsequent principles are derivative:

...for it is indeed ludicrous to treat everything as completed and then to say at the end [*Slutning*] that the conclusion [*Slutning*] is lacking. In other words, if the conclusion is lacking at the end, it is also lacking at the beginning... But if the conclusion is lacking at the beginning, this means

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<sup>10</sup> See Jon Stewart, *Relations to Hegel*, p. 488-496. It is significant to note that Stewart argues that Kierkegaard's exclusive target in this debate is Heiberg and in fact that the position advocated in CUP shares some similarities with that of Hegel. Pattison has challenged this claim and argues that while the Danish context is essential to understanding Kierkegaard's critique, one cannot dismiss Hegel as a target. Thus, where Stewart sees a similarity with Hegel in CUP, Pattison argues that the criticisms could be equally applied to Hegel. My concern is not to mediate these debates as the intended recipient of Kierkegaard's critique is not an issue that I am required to solve. My intention is to show why Kierkegaard holds that a system cannot begin with the absolute beginning while acknowledging that this was a central concern of formal philosophy at home in his native Denmark which had been inherited from the post-Kantians. In short, Martensen and Heiberg did not invent the issue but rather contributed to a discussion with a long and substantial pedigree. This suggests that many of Kierkegaard's criticisms could be equally applied to both those in closer proximity and those further afield (both historically and geographically). See Pattison, *Philosophy*, p.28-33.

that there is no system...the lack of a conclusion has retroactive power to make the beginning doubtful and hypothetical, that is, unsystematic.<sup>11</sup>

Kierkegaard's argument is that this first, immediate principle cannot be achieved, the consequence of which is the denial of the system. A system, in its formal sense, necessarily requires this principle without which it cannot be a system. All claims of the system are dependent upon this one principle. If this one principle cannot be achieved then the entire systematic edifice is undermined and the possibility of scepticism present.

Kierkegaard's argument against the availability of the immediate, presuppositionless beginning of the system will be the specific focus of the current chapter. I will examine his discussion of reflection and infinite abstraction which he argues are the formal processes by which the absolute beginning is made. I will argue that Kierkegaard raises two related critiques: (1) the immediate, if possible, is not an *a priori* given but is an *a posteriori* achievement gained through reflection and infinite abstraction; (2) the *a posteriori* possibility of achieving the absolute beginning is itself shown to be insufficient to secure the principle. I take Kierkegaard to be arguing that even granting an *a posteriori* possibility, one still encounters the problem of agency or complex subjectivity which he argues can never be reduced to a single, absolute principle. In short, the system cannot be completed because it cannot get started. It cannot get started because the absolute, immediate principle is unachievable. I will now explore his argument in more detail.

## **II. Reflection and the Immediacy of Pure being**

Kierkegaard's formal critique of speculative thought in relation to the immediate begins with the following passage:

The system begins with the immediate and therefore without presuppositions and therefore absolutely, that is, the beginning of the system is the absolute beginning. This is entirely correct and has indeed also been adequately admired. But why, then, before the system has begun, has that other equally

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<sup>11</sup> CUP, p.13; see also CUP, p.107-108.

important, definitely important, question not been clarified and its clear implications honored: *How does the system begin with the immediate, that is, does it begin with it immediately?* The answer to this must be an unconditional no. If the system is assumed to be after existence (whereby a confusion with a system of existence is created), the system does indeed come afterward and consequently does not begin immediately with the immediate with which existence began, even though in another sense existence did not begin with it, because the immediate never is but is annulled when it is. The beginning of the system that begins with the immediate *is then itself achieved through reflection.*<sup>12</sup>

This passage contains two important elements that I wish to examine in detail. First, the question that Kierkegaard raises in the above passage introduces what I would like to establish as his *first level critique* of speculative thought. The question asks “*How does the system begin with the immediate, that is, does it begin with it immediately?*” He answers unequivocally in the negative and identifies his means for clarifying his remarks by introducing the topic of reflection. Secondly, at a deeper level, Kierkegaard poses a different question: is the immediate achievable at all? I shall take these in turn.

At the first level, the issue at stake is whether the immediate with which speculative philosophy begins is something given in an *a priori* manner (although Kierkegaard does not explain the intricacies of this claim) or whether it is something achieved through a specified task, and therefore *a posteriori*. For Kierkegaard the immediate is not an *a priori* given but is only the result of and comes after reflection has carried out its task. Only once reflection has reached the immediate can logic begin. Thus, the logic of the system begins *after* reflection has given its results. Kierkegaard notes that “Hegelian logicians have correctly discerned this”, “but it is objectionable that they do not respect what they themselves are saying, inasmuch as this...indirectly states that there is no absolute beginning.”<sup>13</sup> What speculative philosophy claims to be the immediate, with which logic begins, is in fact an *a posteriori* achievement.

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<sup>12</sup> CUP, p.111-112.

<sup>13</sup> CUP, p.114.

Kierkegaard perceives the achievement of the immediate in an *a posteriori* fashion as having wider implications, as he notes “this thought in all its simplicity is capable of deciding that there can be no system of existence and that a logical system must not boast of an absolute beginning, because such a beginning is just like pure being, a pure chimera.”<sup>14</sup>

This leads us to the second level, namely, is the immediate achievable at all? Regardless of whether the immediate is understood as given or something to be gained through the speculative process of reflection is a different issue from whether the immediate is achievable. That is, can we gain immediacy through reflection? The view that the immediate is something which is achieved through reflection in an *a posteriori* manner and is not an *a priori* given is different from the issue of whether the immediate is achievable or not, although, the latter implies the former as Kierkegaard wants to claim. Kierkegaard, in the above passage, intimates that the immediate is not available (“the immediate never is but is annulled when it is”; the immediate “is a pure chimera”). His argument for the non-availability of the immediate proceeds from a specific discussion of the speculative task of reflection and occurs from the perspective of agency.

A key to understanding Kierkegaard’s argument is his identification of the immediate, which reflection claims to achieve, as *pure being*. Pure being is the most basic category, “without any further qualification or determination...just Being as Being, and nothing more”.<sup>15</sup> It is what grounds all other determinations systematically. Kierkegaard mentions pure being only in passing but it is fundamental to understanding his second level critique from agency.

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<sup>14</sup> CUP, p.112.

<sup>15</sup> Pattison, *Philosophy*, p.20. Pattison discusses the category of pure being as the immediacy which abstraction delivers and with which Hegel’s logic begins. There are two things which must be noted in this respect. First, I fundamentally agree with Pattison that the logical category of pure being is the topic that Kierkegaard takes up in this section but disagree that it is a result of “abstraction.” Rather, Kierkegaard identifies the category of pure being with the process of reflection so that the immediate of reflection is pure being. I believe that this makes sense owing to the fact that Kierkegaard directs his critique towards agency and not merely abstracting from existing subjectivity. I will turn to discuss the process of abstraction shortly where I will argue that Kierkegaard identifies a different immediate category, pure thinking, with this process. The second point to note, which I raised briefly in my introduction, is that Pattison is establishing Hegel and not merely the Danish Hegelians (Martensen, Heiberg) as the recipient of Kierkegaard’s critique. This is part of his larger project for tempering Stewart’s claims regarding the target of Kierkegaard’s criticisms. For a thorough discussion of Pattison’s disagreements with Stewart see Pattison, *Philosophy*, p.28-32.

Kierkegaard frames his critique in the form of a question: “if a beginning cannot be made immediately with the immediate...but this beginning must be achieved through reflection, then the question arises very simply...How do I bring to a halt the reflection set in motion in order to reach the beginning?” Kierkegaard proceeds to answer this question in terms of the agent who carries out the task. Reflection presupposes a subject performing the task of achieving the immediate, something Kierkegaard claims that the Hegelians have comically forgotten. Their comic forgetfulness, though, has a serious point because reflection is meant to uncover or access the ground of agency, being; how is it, then, that the very foundation of agency sought and achieved is that which halts the process of reflection? The idea of halting is a complex act of agency. It requires decision, will. Reflection is an act that is carried out or an act instituted by an agent. Thus the self must maintain its complexity in order to act – that is bring reflection to a halt – while at the same time supposing to find the ground of this agency in its most immediate form. The agent cannot accomplish both – it cannot be both a subject acting and an object in the very same moment. But this is what speculation appears to demand and which Kierkegaard exploits.

Kierkegaard argues that through “reflection, the individual really becomes objective; more and more he loses the decision of subjectivity and the return into himself. Yet it is assumed that reflection can stop itself objectively, whereas it is just the other way around; reflection cannot be stopped objectively, and when it is stopped subjectively, it does not stop of its own accord, but it is the subject who stops it.”<sup>16</sup> When Kierkegaard claims that speculation runs aground on achieving the presuppositionless beginning, he is articulating that tacitly the act of speculative reflection *presupposes* an acting subject carrying out this task while at the same time attempting to articulate the very ground of the self as object. In reflection the self becomes an object, stripped of its agency or complexity and considered as pure being. However it is questionable whether this can be achieved if such a method requires or presupposes the acting subject to carry out its task.<sup>17</sup> The basic ground of

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<sup>16</sup> CUP, p.116.

<sup>17</sup> This argument first appears in Kierkegaard’s writings in his dissertation and is discussed with specific reference to Fichte; see CI, p.272-275. Kierkegaard argues: “[Fichte] infinitized the *I* in *I-I*. the producing *I* is the same as the produced *I*. *I-I* is the abstract identity. By doing so he infinitely liberated thought. But this infinity of thought in Fichte is, like all Fichte’s infinity...negative infinity, and infinity without any content.” I return to this point in chapter four.

agency, pure being, is claimed to be achieved by the acting agent. Kierkegaard points towards this when he says that reflection must be stopped through a resolution and claims that “if a resolution is required, presuppositionless is abandoned.”<sup>18</sup>

The two problems that Kierkegaard identifies with speculative thought and the beginning of the system are: (1) the immediate is not an *a priori* given but is gained *a posteriori* through a process which Kierkegaard here identifies with reflection. This is what I have designated as Kierkegaard’s first level critique. (2) The first level critique has further formal implications which Kierkegaard addresses. His strategy is to examine whether the immediate is available through the speculative process of reflection. Kierkegaard identifies pure being as the immediate which reflection claims to gain but this, in his view, runs into the problem of agency for which there is no solution. Accordingly, Kierkegaard concludes that the immediacy of pure being is unachievable.<sup>19</sup>

### III. Infinite abstraction, the Immediacy of Pure thinking, and Language

Kierkegaard introduces another term which he suggests is related to reflection but which implies a difference: infinite abstraction. The term infinite abstraction is introduced at an odd place in the CUP text. Until the point where it first appears, Kierkegaard is discussing reflection. He then seems to go on a brief excursus before again turning to reflection. It is not until much later in the CUP that Kierkegaard revisits the notion of infinite abstraction. Following his discussion of infinite

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<sup>18</sup> CUP, p.113.

<sup>19</sup> A key source for Kierkegaard’s argument is F.A. Trendelenburg, as Pattison has discussed; see Pattison, *Philosophy*, p.15, 17-20. It is worth pointing out that Kierkegaard’s arguments from agency and the need to secure the foundation of pure being share deep similarities with the position also articulated by Novalis. Kierkegaard had in his possession the writings of Novalis (ASKB 1176) and he appears in three places in the journals (AA:12/I A 80/JP 5105, 1835; BB:6/ I C 95/ JP 5138, 1836; FF:1/I A 241/JP 2798, Sept.13, 1836). In this respect, Kierkegaard should not be seen as innovative in this line of argumentation but instead rehearsing an existing and well-known response to the post-Kantian attempts to achieve the status of *Wissenschaft*. A full discussion of Kierkegaard’s positive reception of Early German Romanticism, as opposed to a merely critical stance, is much needed but extends well beyond the bounds of the current study. For a discussion of the Early German Romantic response to post-Kantianism, particularly Hölderlin and Novalis, see Pinkard, p.131-171. For an alternative reading of the Romantic response to post-Kantianism systematisation see Frederick C. Beiser, *The Romantic Imperative: The Concept of Early German Romanticism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003).

reflection and prior to returning to it in his discussion of the leap, Kierkegaard has the following excursus where he introduces the term infinite abstraction:

When a beginning with the immediate is achieved by reflection, the immediate must mean something different from what it usually does. Hegelian logicians have correctly discerned this, and therefore they define the immediate, with which logic begins, as follows: the most abstract remainder after an exhaustive reflection. There is no objection to this definition, but it is certainly objectionable that they do not respect what they themselves are saying, inasmuch as this definition indirectly states that there is no absolute beginning. ‘How is that?’ I hear someone say. ‘When one has abstracted from everything, is there not then, etc.?’ Indeed, *when* one has abstracted from everything. Let us be human beings. Like the act of reflection, this act of abstraction is infinite; so how do I bring it to a halt –<sup>20</sup>

This passage indicates five issues which are important for differentiating infinite abstraction from that of reflection. First, is the introduction of the term infinite abstraction and its correlates: the act of infinite abstraction [*Abstraktionens unendelige Act; uendelige Abstraktions Akt*] and exhaustive abstraction [*udtømmende Abstraktion*]. The significance of these synonyms will become apparent in due course because there are times later in CUP where Kierkegaard does not always employ the term infinite abstraction but instead adopts the term exhaustive abstraction. I consider these to be synonyms.

Second, Kierkegaard draws a comparison with reflection and appears to gesture towards a difference between the terms in noting their similarities: “Like the act of reflection, this act of abstraction is infinite”. Third, and related, infinite abstraction is identified with the immediate and implies the absolute beginning (“the immediate with which logic begins”).

The fourth point to note is Kierkegaard’s return to the topic that he discussed in relation to reflection, namely that the immediate is achieved through a process and not simply given. Now, though, the attention is solely on the process of infinite abstraction. The earlier question that Kierkegaard raised and answered with regard to reflection, “*How does the system begin with the immediate, that is, does it begin with*

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<sup>20</sup> CUP, p.113-114; see also CA, p.10.

*it immediately?*” is implied in the section that follows the one quoted directly above. The response that Kierkegaard offers is nearly identical: the immediate beginning is the *a posteriori* result of the process of infinite abstraction. Just as Kierkegaard has answered an “unconditional no” to the question in relation to reflection, so too does he suggest that one does not begin immediately with the immediate but must first be achieved. The first level critique offered in his discussion of reflection is restated here: “the beginning is not an act of abstraction but comes afterwards.”<sup>21</sup>

The fifth point is the shift to the second level critique. This is concerned not with the *a priori* or *a posteriori* status of the immediate, to recall above, but rather asks whether the immediate is available at all. Reflection is unable to achieve the immediate because it is unavailable, as above, and Kierkegaard had argued from the perspective of agency. He continues with this line of argumentation with regard to infinite abstraction and asks, “How do I begin with this nothing?” which infinite abstraction purports to provide. Thus, similar to his second level critique of reflection, he is willing to grant the possibility that abstraction to nothing is possible (“Let us even venture an imaginary construction in thought.”) but then suggests that the act of infinite abstraction must be carried out by an agent and unless the agent somehow vanishes upon completion of the achievement of the immediate, then he does not see how it is possible to claim to begin with nothing. Similar to his critique of reflection, the acting subject is ineliminable. In a deeply humorous tone, Kierkegaard describes the ineliminable existing subject as the barrier to the absolute, immediate, presuppositionless beginning in these terms:

If, namely, the act of infinite abstraction is not the kind of trick of which two can very well be done at the same time, if, on the contrary, it is the most strenuous work that can be done – what then? Then all my strength will go into maintaining it. If I do not use all my strength, I do not abstract from everything. If, then, on this presupposition I make a beginning, I do not begin with nothing, simply because at the moment of beginning I did not abstract from everything. This means that if it is possible for a human being, thinking, to abstract from everything, it is impossible for him to do more,

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<sup>21</sup> CUP, p.113-114.

since this act, provided that it does not surpass human strength altogether, in any case completely exhausts it.<sup>22</sup>

Like reflection, infinite abstraction can only be stopped (brought “to a halt”) by an acting subject. Moreover, even if infinite abstraction could gain the immediate then it still presupposes an acting subject in order to begin with the immediate. For Kierkegaard, either the subject is there all along or else he must be produced by some “kind of trick” in order to reappear after infinite abstraction in order to begin.<sup>23</sup> Granting the immediate in an *a posteriori* fashion still does not resolve the issue of the availability of the immediate as a result. As with reflection, the immediate can only be achieved after the process of infinite reflection but it still fails to secure the immediate because of the ineliminable nature of agency upon which the speculative process depends in order to secure the immediate and once secured, to begin.

The focus on agency with regard to reflection is key because it occurs in the discussion of obtaining pure being. Kierkegaard does not mention pure being as a specified form of the immediate achieved by infinite abstraction but he does rehearse the second level critique from agency. That a different form of the immediate is not identified in relation to infinite abstraction could lead one to conclude that given the strong similarities between the two notions and the lack of specification in terms of immediacy achieved by infinite abstraction that Kierkegaard’s excursus was not necessary. However, Kierkegaard offers a clue when he mentions “thinking” in relation to abstraction. He reintroduces this topic near the conclusion of the section – “Objectively understood, thinking is pure thinking”<sup>24</sup> – but does not elaborate on this point until later in CUP.

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<sup>22</sup> CUP, p.114.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid. The passage continues: “To become tired of the act of abstraction and thus to manage to begin is only an explanation befitting grocers, who are not particular about a little irregularity.”

<sup>24</sup> CUP, p.123; the passage continues: “This objective thinking has no relation to the existing subjectivity, and while the difficult question always remains – namely, how the existing subject gains entrance into this objectivity in which subjectivity is pure abstract subjectivity (which again is an objective qualification and does not signify any existing human being) – it is certain that the existing subjectivity evaporates more and more.”

The particular form of the immediate achieved through infinite abstraction is discussed in two concentrated passages in this separate and later section of CUP.<sup>25</sup> I shall provide them and then turn to an analysis:

...pure thinking...begins, it is said, after the most exhaustive abstraction. Pure thinking is – what shall I say – piously or thoughtlessly unaware of the relation that abstraction still continually has to that from which it abstracts...This means that pure thinking is a phantom. And if Hegelian philosophy is free from all postulates, it has attained this with one insane postulate: the beginning of pure thinking.<sup>26</sup>

The second passage, which occurs earlier, is as follows:

But pure thinking is totally in suspension and is not like abstraction, which does indeed disregard existence but still maintains a relation to it, whereas pure thinking, in mystical suspension and with no relation to an existing person, explains everything within itself but not itself...When, for example, an existing person asks how pure thinking relates itself to an existing person, how he goes about being admitted into it, pure thinking gives no answer but explains existence within its pure thinking and thereby confuses everything, because that upon which pure thinking must become stranded, existence, is in a volatilized sense assigned a place within pure thinking, whereby whatever might be said within it about existence is essentially revoked.<sup>27</sup>

Four specific topics are raised in the above which require elaboration. First, the term *exhaustive abstraction* is used [*udtømmende Abstraktion*]. I take this to be synonymous with infinite abstraction which was discussed previously. The second point to note is the identification of pure thinking as the beginning, that which allows the system to begin free of all postulates, or, in terms of earlier discussion, it is the immediate, presuppositionless, beginning. Thus, pure thinking is the result of infinite abstraction. This is the point at which the important differentiation is noted between the speculative process of reflection and that of infinite abstraction. Reflection, recalling our earlier discussion, achieved the immediate as pure being whereas now

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<sup>25</sup> CUP, *Section II, Chapter III: Actual Subjectivity, Ethical Subjectivity; the Subjective thinker*, p.301-360.

<sup>26</sup> CUP, p.314/SKS 7, p.286.

<sup>27</sup> CUP, p.313-314/SKS 7, p.285-286.

Kierkegaard identifies pure thinking as the particular accomplishment of infinite abstraction.

Thirdly, pure thinking is achieved “after the most exhaustive abstraction” and “is piously or thoughtlessly unaware” of the relation from that which it abstracts. This recalls our previous treatment of the first level critique where Kierkegaard pointed out that the immediate is not *a priori* given but instead is an *a posteriori* achievement. In answer to his earlier question, “*How does the system begin with the immediate, that is, does it begin with it immediately?*”, he responds by stating that, following the previous strategy, the system begins with the immediacy of pure thinking as the result of infinite abstraction which, of course, repeats the emphatic *no* to the second part of the question.

The fourth point leads us to consider the second level critique, namely, the unavailability of the immediate. In these passages Kierkegaard indicates that pure thinking is not available (‘pure thinking is a phantom’) and approaches this from two perspectives. From the one side, the unavailability of pure thinking is gestured towards in terms of agency, which merely restates the earlier discussion.<sup>28</sup> On the other hand, infinite abstraction is approached from the vantage point of existence. Setting aside the obvious relation between existence and agency, I shall focus on Kierkegaard’s critique of the unavailability of the immediate by considering existence which, as Kierkegaard states, is that upon which pure thinking becomes “stranded”. I argue that this is the area where one can develop a complementary argument to the second level critique. Approaching the issue of the immediate in this way raises the following questions: What does it specifically mean to exhaustively abstract from existence in order to achieve pure thinking? Why does Kierkegaard hold this to be impossible? That is, why does pure thinking become stranded on existence in such a way that this form of immediacy is not merely problematic but unobtainable?

Kierkegaard indicates that existence is a problematic notion, not directly amenable to full articulation and unable to be *thought* in its immediate ground: “Existence, like motion, is a very difficult matter to handle. If I think it, I cancel it,

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<sup>28</sup> See CUP, p.315: “Is abstraction a something that does it, or is it not the act of the abstracter? But the abstracter is, after all, an existing person, and as an existing person is consequently in the dialectical element, which he cannot mediate or merge, least of all absolutely, as long as he is existing.”

and then I do not think it. It would seem correct to say that there is something that cannot be thought – namely, existing. But again there is the difficulty that existence puts it together in this way: the one who is thinking is existing.”<sup>29</sup>

In order to achieve the presuppositionless beginning of pure thinking, the process of infinite abstraction requires a removal of the particular, complex agent in order to achieve its goals of the pure beginning, free from all determinations. But this is exactly the point at which pure thinking becomes unavailable. Again, it is clear that the *a posteriori* argument of the first level is implied in the second level critique. Because pure thinking is achieved through the speculative act of infinite abstraction, this presupposes a complex nexus of relations from which the subject cannot be extricated. One cannot remove the particularity of the subject in this way although the criteria of the immediate requires that such concrete determinations be revoked. This revocation is precisely what Kierkegaard holds to be impossible. The agent cannot gain the perspective from eternity or transcend its finitude in order to acquire the objective view of subjectivity: “Modern speculative thought has mustered everything to enable the individual to transcend himself objectively, but this just cannot be done. Existence exercises its constraint.”<sup>30</sup> To revoke existence “would mean abstracting from all possible deliverances of experience, memory and prejudice”, as Pattison notes.<sup>31</sup> Or, in other terms, the requirement of achieving pure thinking is the removal of all particularity and determinations which condition thinking in its finitude. This is one possible way to construe that which Kierkegaard holds to be impossible and upon which the speculative process of infinite abstraction becomes “stranded”.

The problem, though, that one encounters is describing the act of thought within these particular constraints, of articulating that from which thinking can never be extricated. The question is, therefore, what type of dependence is integral to

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<sup>29</sup> CUP, p.308-309.

<sup>30</sup> CUP, p.197. Addressing the personality of the speculative practitioner, Kierkegaard offers this analysis: “To that extent, his existence certainly does become clear as a presupposition from which he wants to extricate himself, but nevertheless the abstraction itself does indeed become a strange demonstration of his existence, since his existence would simply cease if he were completely successful.” CUP, p.316-317.

<sup>31</sup> Pattison, *Philosophy*, p.18. It is important to add that Pattison discusses both reflection and abstraction but does not differentiate between the terms as I have sought to do here. I believe it is important to maintain this distinction in order to appreciate the extent and subtleties of Kierkegaard’s second level critique.

thought which can never be removed? The issue facing Kierkegaard's reader is that he never fully articulates this. However, he does gesture towards language, which, in light of his appropriation of Hamann may prove to be a fruitful avenue by which to interpret his critique directed toward the claim to have achieved pure thought. In a journal entry, Kierkegaard raises this point:

If it were the case that philosophers are presuppositionless, an account would still have to be made of language and its entire importance and relation to speculation, for here speculation does indeed have a medium which it has not provided itself, and what the eternal secret of consciousness is for speculation as a union of a qualification of nature and a qualification of freedom, so also language is [for speculation] partly an original and partly something freely developing. And just as the individual, no matter how freely he develops, can never reach the point of becoming absolutely independent, since true freedom consists, on the contrary, in appropriating the given and consequently in becoming absolutely dependent through freedom, so it is also with language, although we do find at times the ill-conceived tendency of not wanting to accept language as the freely appropriated given but rather to produce it for oneself, whether it appears in the highest regions where it usually ends in silence or in the personal isolation of jargonish nonsense. Perhaps the story of the Babylonian confusion of tongues may be explained in this way, that it was an attempt to construct an arbitrarily formed common language, which, since it lacked fully integrative commonality, necessarily broke up into the most disparate differences, for here it is a matter of the *totum est parte sua prius*, which was not understood.<sup>32</sup>

The issue articulated is that the speculative process can never achieve the presuppositionless beginning because language can never be removed. This is to say that speculation requires language and is in some sense dependent upon language. Taking this further and adopting the specified terms of our previous discussion, then the argument is that infinite abstraction (as the speculative act) cannot achieve pure thinking because thinking cannot be separated from language. Or, in other terms, any

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<sup>32</sup> JP 3281/ III A 11; July 18, 1840.

attempt to gain pure thinking runs aground on thinking's dependency on language. If this construal of Kierkegaard's argument is plausible, then one witnesses a melding of the critique from agency with a critique from the remainder. Thus, Kierkegaard appears to be arguing in the following way: (a) speculation occurs within the medium of language and this not something which it itself produces from its own autonomous agency but is rather the given, that in which the self already finds itself, but which the self freely appropriates; (b) the given-ness of language thus challenges the speculative claim to have achieved the absolute beginning because language is that from which one cannot abstract; (c) if speculation occurs within language then the only available avenue for the achievement of the presuppositionless beginning would be to suggest that language is something which the self constructs independently; (d) however, such a language would only hold for each individual speculating self and have no commonality – it would end in solipsism. Which is to say, that in order to be truly presuppositionless, one would have to claim a language which was not dependent upon the given-ness in which the self already finds itself in existence.

The argument that Kierkegaard advances in this entry fits well, I believe, with his argumentative strategy in his critique of the presuppositionless beginning discussed earlier. And while Kierkegaard addresses this explicitly in the above entry, it also the case that he points to these topics throughout his other writings as well, as I will show. I hold that Kierkegaard's arguments evince a high level of indebtedness to Hamann but to date this not been explored in any detail.<sup>33</sup> Therefore, I will present those aspects of Hamann's work that are taken up by Kierkegaard, rehearsing Hamann's arguments in detail, while demonstrating Kierkegaard's appropriation of Hamann.

## **IV. Hamann: Vernunft ist Sprache**

### **A. Introduction**

I believe that the journal entry from Kierkegaard just quoted is an abbreviation of Hamann's central argument found in *Metakritik über den Purismus*

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<sup>33</sup> See Steven Shakespeare, *Kierkegaard, Language and the Reality of God* (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2001), p.57. Shakespeare notes that this entry summarises Hamann's critique of Kant.

*der reinen Vernunft* (*Metacritique of the Purism of pure Reason*;<sup>34</sup> hereafter *MPR*). While Kierkegaard does not name Hamann specifically, and adopts his own terms – speculation, presuppositionless – I believe the argument that Kierkegaard sketched in the journal entry shows a high level of indebtedness to Hamann’s writing which Hamann developed in response to Kant’s *Kritik der reinen Vernunft* (*Critique of Pure Reason*, 1781; hereafter *KrV*).<sup>35</sup>

*MPR* was written in 1784, after the publication of Kant’s *Prolegomena*. Although Hamann indicated to Herder that he was awaiting the publication of the announced *Prolegomena* in order to complete his *MPR*,<sup>36</sup> Hamann had attained from Kant’s publisher, Hartknoch, an advanced copy of *KrV*.<sup>37</sup> In the subsequent period, Hamann indicated in a letter to Herder from 1781 that he had read *KrV* three times already and was considering taking it up for a fourth.<sup>38</sup> This was no mean feat, given the sheer length of Kant’s *Kritik*, not to mention its complexity.

Prior to writing *MPR*, Hamann first wrote a review of *KrV* in July 1781.<sup>39</sup> Between the writing of the review and *MPR*, Hamann had also penned two small drafts of *MPR* which have only recently come to light and made available.<sup>40</sup> All of these documents remained unpublished in Hamann’s lifetime, a conscious decision on his part as he was concerned that the content of his review and of *MPR* would damage – perhaps irrevocably – his friendship with Kant.<sup>41</sup> The current version of *MPR* was Hamann’s final draft, although he had indicated throughout the remaining

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<sup>34</sup> In English, the title of Hamann’s work is usually rendered as *Metacritique of the Purism of Reason* (Dickson and Betz) or as *Metacritique on the Purism of Reason* (Haynes). While either of these might be stylistically preferred, they do miss Hamann’s juxtaposition of ‘Purism’ and ‘pure’ [*rein*] which I believe is important to retain.

<sup>35</sup> All citations of *KrV* will be from the first edition (A) as this was the edition that Hamann knew. The second edition (B) was not published until 1787, a year prior to Hamann’s death and well after Hamann had finished entertaining the notion of returning to the *Metakritik*.

<sup>36</sup> H V, p.400; (to Herder, 7-8.7.1782). See Dickson, *Relational Metacriticism*, p.273.

<sup>37</sup> H IV, p.268; (to J.F. Hartknoch, 25.2.1781).

<sup>38</sup> H IV, p.355-356; (to Herder, 9-12.9.1781).

<sup>39</sup> N III, p.275-280/R IV, p.45-54. The review was first Published by Karl Leonhard Reinhold in 1801: *Beyträge zur leichtern Uebersicht des Zustandes der Philosophie bey den Anfänge des 19. Jahrhunderts*, Hamburg, 1801, 206-212. See Bayer, *HMK*, p.64-65; see also Karl Ameriks, *Fate of Autonomy*, p.81-82 and p.117-118. See Betz, *After Enlightenment*, p.220.

<sup>40</sup> For a detailed treatment of the two early drafts, including a reproduction of the texts see Bayer, *HMK*, p.151-198.

<sup>41</sup> H IV, p.317; (to Herder, 5.8.1781).

years of his life that he might return to it. This was a view he expressed in his correspondence. However, Hamann did not return to it, being occupied with other projects – most notably his critique of Mendelssohn’s *Jerusalem in Golgotha and Schelebimini*. The draft of *MPR* that we have was sent in a letter to Herder and was first published in 1801 before being included in the Roth edition and subsequently in the Nadler edition.<sup>42</sup>

The central and abiding point that Hamann makes in *MPR* is that reason is dependent upon language and that Kant fails to account for this. As such, Hamann is able to mount a critique against Kant’s project of securing *a priori* cognition. At the midway point of *MPR*, Hamann framed the issue in the following manner:

If indeed there yet remains a chief question: *how is the faculty of thought possible?* – The faculty to think *right* and *left*, *before* and *without*, *with* and *above* experience? then no Deduction is needed to establish 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 based on language, according to the unrecognised prophecies and slandered miracles of the richly-deserved *Samuel Heinke*: but language is also the *centre-point of the misunderstanding of reason with itself*, partly because of the frequent *Coincidence* of the greatest and smallest concept, its emptiness and richness in ideal propositions, partly because of the infinite figures of speech over syllogisms, and much more of the same.<sup>43</sup>

The centrality of this passage in understanding Hamann’s essay in its entirety cannot be overstated. In the first place, Hamann makes two central claims: (a) reason is dependent on language and (b) that language is “the centre-point of the misunderstanding of reason with itself”. However, these two claims can only be understood in light of the opening question: “how is the faculty of thought possible?” The importance of this question to the entire shape of Hamann’s argument and critique of Kant is seen when one recognises that Hamann has taken up the question

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<sup>42</sup> See Bayer, *HMK*, p.199-200, fn2.

<sup>43</sup> N III, p.286/R VII, p.9.

which Kant explicitly avoided. In the *Preface* of *KrV* (A xvii), Kant wrote the following:

...because the chief question always remains: ‘What and how much can understanding and reason cognize free of all experience?’ and not: ‘How is the **faculty of thinking** itself possible?’ Since the latter question is something like a hypothesis...it appears as if I am taking the liberty in this case of expressing an **opinion**, and that the reader might therefore be free to hold another **opinion**.

A comparison with Hamann’s passage, which obviously and explicitly draws on Kant’s *Preface*, demonstrates that he is interested in the very question which Kant had dismissed as leading to conjecture. With Hamann’s claim that the chief question is about how the faculty of thinking is possible, he is indicating that his concern is with the question that Kant avoids.<sup>44</sup> In so doing, he changes the nature of the enterprise in its entirety. Hamann is not concerned with *a priori* knowledge, but rather with explicating how the faculty of thinking is possible.<sup>45</sup> For Hamann, by answering this question he intends to show that Kant’s concern with the question “What and how much can understanding and reason cognize free of all experience?” is the wrong one. For Hamann, if the faculty of thinking is dependent on language, then Kant’s project of securing *a priori* cognition is itself called into serious doubt. Put another way, Hamann’s concern with the question that Kant leaves aside challenges Kant’s entire project. By changing the nature of the question, Hamann indicates that if only Kant had focussed on the question which he disregards at the outset, then he would have realised that the question he chose to take up could not be answered (without attention to the first) and in fact becomes superfluous.<sup>46</sup>

This is sharpened by the fact that Hamann references Kant’s *Preface* and that many of the remaining passages from *KrV* to which Hamann alludes throughout the

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<sup>44</sup> See Ulrich Moustakas, *Urkunde und Experiment: Neuzeitliche Naturwissenschaft im Horizont einer hermeneutischen Theologie der Schöpfung bei Johann Georg Hamann* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2003), p.216-217.

<sup>45</sup> See Friedemann Fritsch, *Communicatio Idiomatum: Zur Bedeutung einer christologischen Bestimmung für das Denken Johann Georg Hamanns* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1999), p.228. See Oswald Bayer, “A priori willkürlich, a posteriori notwendig: Die sprachphilosophische Verschränkung von Ästhetik und Logik in Hamanns Metakritik Kants”, *Neue Zeitschrift für Systematische Theologie und Religionsphilosophie* 42 (2000): p.118.

<sup>46</sup> See Dickson, *Relational Metacriticism*, p.292; see also Betz, *After Enlightenment*, p.251.

course of *MPR* are drawn largely (although not exclusively) from the *Preface* and *Introduction* to *KrV*. That is, Kant has asked the wrong set of questions from the outset and it explains why Hamann refers later in the essay to Kant's building materials and claims that his failure to ask the right question is the ultimately the chief error and the faulty foundation which causes the critical project to totter and ultimately collapse.<sup>47</sup>

Therefore, if Hamann's attempt to answer a question that is not taken up in *KrV*, how much does Hamann's answer to the question regarding the faculty of thought relate to Kant's project? That is, how of much of a criticism of Kant exists in this writing? Very little, if anything that Hamann says challenges Kant's critical system from the perspective of *Idealism*. However, the brilliance of Hamann's essay is, arguably, not that he attempts to correct the details of the system, as the post-Kantian Idealists would (for example, Reinhold and Fichte<sup>48</sup>), but rather renders the project questionable by taking up the inquiry that Kant avoids. It is from this context that one should consider Hamann not as a *critic* of Kant but as a *Metacritic*.<sup>49</sup> Which is to say that Hamann welcomed Kant's critique of pure reason and its attack against dogmatism and scepticism but holds that what Kant had established as an alternative is an even more purified version of reason. As Piske has argued, Hamann's concern is not with Kant's transcendental arguments, but rather he is concerned with the "question regarding what reason is and in which relations it finds itself; Hamann's intention is not a dispute regarding details, rather an inquiry into the overall conceptualisation of Kant's philosophy."<sup>50</sup> In this respect, readers of Hamann should not concern themselves with whether or not Hamann *got Kant right* because this was not Hamann's primary concern.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> N III, p.289/R VII, p.15-16.

<sup>48</sup> For an excellent account of early post-Kantian thought, I again direct my reader to Karl Ameriks, *Kant and the Fate of Autonomy*.

<sup>49</sup> Moustakas, *Urkunde*, p.216. The term *Metakritik* is a neologism introduced by Hamann; see Bayer, *HMK*, p.210.

<sup>50</sup> See Irmgard Piske, *Offenbarung, Sprache, Vernunft: Zur Auseinandersetzung Hamanns mit Kant* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1989), p.4. See also W.M. Alexander, "Johann Georg Hamann: Metacritic of Kant", *Journal of the History of Ideas* 27/1 (Jan.-Mar., 1966): p.139.

<sup>51</sup> See J. Simon, "Kant als Autor und Hamann als Leser der *Kritik der Reinen Vernunft*", in *Königsber-Studien: Beiträge zu einem besonderen Kapitel der deutschen Geistesgeschichte des 18. und angehenden 19. Jahrhunderts*, ed. Joseph Kohlen (Peter Lang, Berlin: 1998), p.201-220. On a similar note, I am not concerned with the topic of whether or not one can detect in Kant's writings an influence of Hamann, particularly from the early period of their friendship. For a discussion of this,

Hamann's shift away from the question of *a priori* cognition to one concerned with the relation between thinking and language is made clearer from Hamann's correspondence during this period. In the period between Hamann's Review of *KrV*, the draft texts of *MPR* until the time he sent Herder a copy of this work, one discovers in his correspondence not only a sharpening of focus on language but also an admission of the difficulties he encountered and the final aim and intentions of *MPR*. This is particularly seen in a series of letters from late 1783 to late summer 1784. For example, at the beginning of November 1783, Hamann wrote the following to Jacobi: "It is the same for me with Reason as it was for that ancient with God (the Ideal of pure Reason according to our Kant) the longer I study over it, the less I get to the point with this Ideal of the Godhead or Ideal."<sup>52</sup> And as Hamann would write in *MPR*, specifically with reference to Reason: "But it is well-nigh the same with this idol [Reason] as it was for that ancient with the Ideal of Reason [that is, God]. The longer one contemplates, the more deeply and inwardly one is struck dumb and loses all breath to speak."<sup>53</sup>

This silence which Hamann's deliberations over pure Reason produced, lead him to focus on language exclusively. As he wrote, in the same letter to Jacobi, "I have completely given up these investigations [into 'pure reason'] on account of their difficulty and now hold myself to the visible element, to the organon or criterion – I mean language."<sup>54</sup> And this focus on language is what Hamann would write about to Herder regarding his work on Kant's *KrV*, a month after the letter to Jacobi: "To

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see J. Simon, "Spüren Hamanns bei Kant?", in *Hamann – Kant – Herder, Acta des vierten Internationalen Hamann-Kolloquiums im Herder-Institut zu Marburg Lahn 1985*, ed. by Barnhard Gajek (Berlin: Peter Lang, 1987), p.89-110.

<sup>52</sup> H V, p.94-95; (to Jacobi, 11.2.1783).

<sup>53</sup> N III, p.284/R VII, p.6. The ancient to whom Hamann here refers in his letter to Jacobi and in *MPR* is the poet Simonides. Cicero recorded the anecdote in *De natura deorum*, I. 60 : "Inquire of me as the being and nature of god, and I shall follow the example of Simonides, who having the same question put to him by the great Hiero, requested a day's grace for consideration; next day, when Hiero repeated the question, he asked for two days, and so went on several times multiplying the number of days by two; and when Hiero in surprise asked why he did so, he replied, 'Because the longer I deliberate the more obscure the matter seems to me.'" *Cicero*, XIX, *De Natura Deorum, Academica*, tr. H. Rackham (Loeb, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1979), p.58-59; quoted in *CUP II*, p.250, n.565, translator note. Kierkegaard too makes reference to this anecdote: "When a Greek philosopher was asked what religion is, he requested postponement. When the deadline came, he again requested that it be extended, etc.; he wanted to suggest thereby that the question could not be answered."; see *CUP*, p.337.

<sup>54</sup> H V, p.94-95; (to Jacobi, 11.2.1783).

discover and to expose the *πρωτον ψευδος* [ *proton pseudos* – chief falsehood; original error] was enough for me. But precisely here lies the knot.”<sup>55</sup> Thus, the central problem or chief falsehood that Hamann was content to find and expose was the *aporia* of at the centre of Kant’s work – namely, the dependence of reason on language. As Hamann wrote just prior to sending Herder the draft of *MPR*: “Reason is language, *Λογος* [*Logos*]; I gnaw on this marrow bone and will gnaw over it until my death.”<sup>56</sup>

From the above, it is clear that Hamann intended to provide an account of the relation between reason and language, and he did so by taking up the question that Kant had discarded. This strategy was intended to show that Kant’s building was constructed on a faulty foundation because in the final analysis the dependency of thought on language requires to be accounted for before one is able to consider the possibility of *a priori* cognition. In this way, Kierkegaard signalled his agreement with Hamann in the entry provided earlier: “If it were the case that philosophers are presuppositionless, an account would still have to be made of language and its entire importance and relation to speculation, for here speculation does indeed have a medium which it has not provided itself”.<sup>57</sup> In order, therefore, to understand Kierkegaard’s appeal to Hamann in his critique of the speculative claim to have gained the presuppositionless beginning, I shall now turn to present Hamann’s account of the relation between reason and language. This will be done in two steps: (1) I shall reconstruct Hamann’s critical and constructive arguments which he advances in favour of his claim that reason is dependent on language; (2) I will then

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<sup>55</sup> H V, p.107; (to Herder, 8.12.1783).

<sup>56</sup> H V, p.177; (to Herder, 6-10.8.1784). Of course, the central concern with language in Hamann’s thought and the views he promulgates have been recognised as significant in the contemporary debates regarding the recent linguistic-turn. In this respect, Hamann is considered as a key forerunner of much twentieth century thought with his influence (mediated through a complex route via Herder and Schleiermacher) claimed on Wittgenstein and Derrida, to name just two. Virtually all treatments of Hamann gesture in this direction, but very few detailed studies exist. For an account of Wittgenstein’s similarity to Hamann, see Helmut Hein, “Hamann und Wittgenstein: Aufklärungskritik als Reflexion über Sprache”, in *Johann Georg Hamann Acta des zweiten Internationalen Hamann-Colloquiums 1980*, ed. Bernhard Gajek (Margburg: N.G Elwert Verlag, 1983), p.21-56. In the same volume see also Josef Simon, “Hamann und die gegenwärtige Sprachphilosophie”, p.9-20. This essay discusses Hamann and contemporary philosophy of language. For a recent account of Hamann’s relation to postmodernity, which includes a discussion of Derrida, see Betz, *Relational Metacriticism*, p.312-340. See also John Milbank, “Pleonasm, Speech and Writing” in *The Word Made Strange. Theology, Language, Culture* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 1997), p.55-83.

<sup>57</sup> JP 3281/ III A 11; July 18, 1840; see above p.73.

provide a further account of Hamann's diagnosis of error which he considers to be inextricably tied to language.

## **B. Reason, Language and Christological Mystery**

If Hamann's central claim is that reason is language, and that there is no possibility of *a priori* cognition given the relation between reason and language, then in order to understand this one has to explore the ground for his claim and his complaint against Kant. Which is to ask, where has Hamann located the point where Kant goes wrong? Or, in other terms, what does Hamann find problematic with Kant's account? Hamann articulates his disagreement with Kant as the separation between the sensibility and the understanding, the divorce between the constitutive and relational natures of existence:

But if *sensibility* and *understanding* spring as two stems of human knowledge from *One* common root, so that through the one objects are *given* and through the other objects are *thought*; to what end is such a violent, unwarranted wilful divorce, of what nature has joined together! Will not both stems through such a dichotomy and division of their common root dry out and wither? Would not a single stem with two roots better serve as an image of our knowledge, one *above* in the air and one *below* in the earth? The first is exposed to our sensibility; the latter on the other hand is invisible and must be thought by the *understanding*, which agrees more with the priority of *thought* and the posteriority of the *given* or taken, as well as agreeing with the favourite inversion of pure reason in its theories.<sup>58</sup>

Hamann's claim is that Kant has caused an unnecessary division between sensibility and the faculties. But what exactly is Hamann's complaint against Kant? I think that Hamann's critique is quite basic here, namely that Kant has falsely divided knowledge into two separate realms, with priority given to reason or the understanding in the function of cognition over sensibility. In the first place, Kant does articulate the division to which Hamann refers: "All that seems necessary for an introduction or preliminary is that there are two stems of human cognition, which may perhaps arise from a common but to us unknown root, namely sensibility and

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<sup>58</sup> N III, p.286-287/R VII, p.10-11.

understanding, through the first of which objects are given to us, but through the second of which they are thought.”<sup>59</sup> And later, Kant describes the priority of reason over the sensible (*KrV* A 835): “the general root of our cognitive power divides and branches out into two stems, one of which is **reason**. By ‘reason’ I here understand, however, the entire higher faculty of cognition, and I therefore contrast the rational and to the empirical.” It is this division which Hamann diagnoses as the point where Kant is lead astray in his claims for *a priori* cognition. At the same time he gestures towards his own corrective by introducing a somewhat confusing image of the two roots and one stem against Kant’s two stems and one root. As Dickson notes, “It is possible...to argue that the violent divorce of the senses and reason arises not so much from the conceptual distinction between them...but from the claims made about the knowledge that each is supposed to yield.”<sup>60</sup> Thus Hamann signals that he sees it as his central task to correct this, to articulate the natural relation into which Kant has introduced a split.<sup>61</sup> In so doing, of course he wishes to show that *a priori* cognition is not possible because there is no such thing as reason independent of language: language which is mediated, rooted in the senses and in our primordial experiences of the world.

In this respect Hamann articulates the indivisible relationship between the senses and faculties, the rational and empirical, by considering the nature of language, and it is here where he sets the programmatic foundation for his claim regarding the relation between reason and language:

... common, popular language gives us the finest parable for the hypostatic union of the sensible and intelligible natures, the *communicatio idiomatum* [*Idiomenwechsel*] of their powers, the synthetic mysteries of the two corresponding and self-contradictory forms *a priori* and *a posteriori*, together with the transubstantiation of subjective conditions and subsumptions into objective predicates and attributes through the *copula* of a decree or an expletive for the abbreviating of boredom and the filling out of the empty space in periodic galimatias *per Thesin et Arsin*. –<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> *KrV* A 15.

<sup>60</sup> Dickson, *Relational Metacriticism*, p.295.

<sup>61</sup> Piske, *Offenbarung*, p.144.

<sup>62</sup> N III, p.287/R VII, p.12.

Where Kant had separated the sensible and intelligible natures, Hamann sees them as inter-related, interpenetrating in a non-prioritised manner and offers language as the way to articulate this relationship. As Piske notes, “Hamann poses the question regarding the original unity which reflection has separated as a problem of language. Language provides the opportunity to illuminate the murkiness of this unity, because language itself is the original unity of the sensual and the intellectual.”<sup>63</sup> And if language provides the means to explicate this relation in these terms, it is also the case that Hamann invokes, as seen above, christological (*hypostatic union; communicatio idiomatum*) and sacramental (*transubstantiation*) analogies or “parables” to illuminate language. Thus, while the above is merely programmatic, it does highlight two central themes that Hamann explores in his attempt to articulate the relation between reason and language. I shall take these in turn, discussing first language as the relation between the “sensual and the intellectual” and second, turning to discuss the christological and sacramental analogies that Hamann adopts.

Hamann articulates the above relation through a discussion of language in the following way:

Words, therefore, have an aesthetic and logical capacity. As visible and audible objects they belong with their elements to *sensibility* and *intuition*, however by the spirit of their institution and meaning they belong to the understanding and concepts. Consequently, words are as much pure and empirical intuitions, as they are pure and empirical concepts; empirical, because the sensation of seeing or hearing is effected through them; pure, inasmuch as their meaning is determined by nothing that belongs to those sensations.<sup>64</sup>

This passage, which articulates Hamann’s understanding of the relation between that which Kant has divided, should be seen as a preliminary step in his conception but one that serves to ground many of his claims. There is a central point to be derived from this passage. Namely, that language cannot be understood as separated from its sensuousness, and that any account of the language we employ – whether in everyday use or in transcendental explorations – must be described in the

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<sup>63</sup> Piske, *Offenbarung*, p.173.

<sup>64</sup> N III, p.288/R VII, p.13.

complex interaction between the sensible and non-sensible. In this respect, Hamann claims that Words are both sensuous – that is, they can be heard or seen – and non-sensuous because the meaning of a word cannot be determined merely from the sensation. Hamann’s argument thus exploits this ambiguity to show that any type of separation between the sensuous and non-sensuous renders language unintelligible. “Words unite”, as Dickson has pointed out, “the physicality of utterance” – which Hamann labels ‘pure and empirical intuitions’ – with “the intellectuality of meaning”, which Hamann labels “pure and empirical concepts”.<sup>65</sup> In short, language encompasses both elements in a relation which might not be available to full explication but which must be maintained if a meaningful account of language is to be given.

If language is both sensuous and non-sensuous as Hamann claims, in fact the point at which these two are united, then how would it be possible to provide an account of *a priori* concepts, that is, concepts generated by the understanding independent of all experience? For Hamann this becomes an impossibility, as he writes: “Words as undetermined objects of empirical intuitions are called according to the original text of pure reason, aesthetic appearances; consequently according to the eternal lyre of antithetical parallelism, words as undetermined objects of empirical concepts, critical appearances, spectres, non- or unwords”.<sup>66</sup> Which is to say that, for Hamann, according to Kant’s separation, words as belonging to the realm of sensation – in that they are audible or physical (word-sign) – do not gain meaning until provided with the appropriate concept from the understanding. That is, as objects they remain undetermined until the understanding fashions them with meaning by supplying the appropriate determining concept.

What Hamann is pointing out here is that according to Kant’s understanding of the relation between empirical sensation and the concepts of the understanding, an account of language cannot be given. That is, words taken according to Kant’s division are not words at all, but are mere sensible intuitions and gain meaning only when the understanding provides the concepts for them. Hamann’s question, then, for Kant is how do we gain concepts for words if words are merely sensible intuitions which are undetermined prior to the work of the understanding? This would require,

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<sup>65</sup> Dickson, *Relational Metacriticism*, p.300.

<sup>66</sup> N III, p.288/R VII, p.13-14.

according to Hamann, a language prior to language in order to describe the sensible nature of language. And this is the point that he sets out to demonstrate in two test cases which he employs to demonstrate that according to Kant's scheme neither words nor meaning can be determined when a separation between the senses and the facultive realms is in place. Hamann presents the first case in the following way:

Now is it possible, *Idealism* asks from one side to discover from the mere intuition [*Anschauung*] of a word the concept for it? Is it possible from the *material* of the word reason, its six letters or two syllables – is it possible, from the *form*, which determines the order which these letters and syllables occupy, to come up with the concept for the word *reason*? Here the *Kritik* answers with both its scales balanced.<sup>67</sup>

In putting the question back to Kant, in the first test case, Hamann is asking the following: is it possible to gain the meaning of a word simply by considering its empirical qualities? What does the word *Reason*, as Hamann's excellent example asks, tell us about the meaning of the word, separated from its reference to a particular description of our facultive constitution, separated from its use? That is, taken on its own as a mere sensible intuition, how could one arrive at the meaning or the concept of reason? As Hamann suggests, Kant is equivocal.<sup>68</sup> Hamann then considers the issue from the other side, "Is it further possible, *Idealism* asks from the other side, to discover the empirical intuition of a word through the understanding? Is it possible to discover from the *concept* of Vernunft [Reason] the material of its name, that is its 7 letters or 2 syllables in German or in any other language? Here the scales of the *Kritik* indicate a conclusive No!"<sup>69</sup> For Hamann, this is the correct answer which Kant would presumably give, which is to say that it is not possible, as common sense shows, to determine "the sensible attributes of a word from its meaning".<sup>70</sup>

Following the above, Hamann then presents the second test case: "Should it not however be possible, from the concept [of *Vernunft*] to deduce the *form* of its empirical intuition, to intuit which form that one of the 2 syllables stands *a priori* and

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<sup>67</sup> N III, p.288/R VII, p.14.

<sup>68</sup> See Dickson, *Relational Metacriticism*, p.302.

<sup>69</sup> N III, p.288-289/R VII, p.14-15.

<sup>70</sup> Dickson, *Relational Metacriticism*, p.302.

the other *a posteriori* or that the seven letters are ordered in a specific relation? Here the *Homer* of pure reason snores a very loud Yes!...because he has dreamt that the universal character of a philosophical language, which until now has been sought, has already been invented.”<sup>71</sup> Why does Hamann switch from agreeing with Kant to disagreeing with him? That is, why does Hamann suggest that Kant's system should answer yes, even if it answers no? Dickson describes it in the following way: “because forms such as space and time and quantity exist within the structures of the mind, it *should* be possible from the *concept* of the word ‘reason’ to derive something of its *form*...because [as Hamann perceives it] Kant has unwittingly laid the foundation stone for the Leibnizean project: to create a ‘universal’ ‘philosophical language’ – that is, language detached from a time, place, people or culture; that is, an *a priori* language before and without all experience, derived solely from the structures of the mind: a language of and for ‘pure reason’.”<sup>72</sup>

In sum, Hamann’s claim is that language as both sensible and non-sensible is rendered meaningless if one of these moments is abstracted from the other. Words, as in Hamann’s example, have no meaning when considered as mere sensuous intuitions. Conversely, how could one conceive of language apart from the particular sign or mark, that is its sensuousness? As Hamann indicates, and Dickson is right to point out above, the only possibility available would be to claim that *reason* (or the understanding) is able to fashion a mark or sign in its own representations and to impart a particular meaning to it. This would require a language separate from all external influences which, despite its many difficulties ultimately raises the issue of communicability.<sup>73</sup> That is, even if it were possible for reason to create a language for itself one would still be required to explain how this might be communicated to other such reasoning beings such as myself in a meaningful and intelligible way. Such a position would require something like the claim that individual reasoning selves create the same type of language independently of each other. And this would require a further need to guarantee intelligibility and communicability via some type of metaphysical grounding or else remain open to the serious threat of solipsistic scepticism. For Hamann, such an account of reason and language – which he

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<sup>71</sup> N III, p.289/R VII, p.15.

<sup>72</sup> Dickson, *Relational Metacriticism*, p.302.

<sup>73</sup> See Bayer, *HMK*, p.385.

attributes to Kant – causes more problems than it alleviates. This outcome is particularly devastating for Kant in light of his own well-known attempt to overcome dogmatism and scepticism in his critical project.

At the same time, Hamann is not unaware of the difficulties he faces in articulating such a relationality as a corrective to Kant's division. As he laments in a brilliant but esoteric passage:

O for the action of a *Demosthenes* and his triune energy of eloquence or the mimic that shall yet come, without the panegyric sounding bell of an angel's tongue! then I would open the reader's eyes, that he perhaps might see – hosts [*Heere*; that is armies] of intuitions ascending to the fortress of pure understanding, and hosts of concepts descending into the depths of the most palpable sensibility, on a ladder upon which no sleeper dreams – and the dance of these Mahanaim or two hosts of reason – the cryptic and vexatious chronicle of their love-affair and rape – and the entire theogony of all the giant and hero forms of the Shulamite and Muse, in the mythology of light and darkness – unto to the form-play of an old *Baubo with herself* – **inaudita specie solaminis**, as Saint *Arnobius* says – and a new *immaculate virgin*, but who may not be a mother of God, for which Saint *Anselm* held her to be – <sup>74</sup>

The multiple allusions and the nearly impenetrable nature of this passage raises several crucial points that I wish to highlight.<sup>75</sup> First, the lamentation that Hamann acknowledges in this passage – “O for the action of a *Demosthenes* and his triune energy of eloquence” – I take to mean that in communicating the nature of language as both infinite and finite in relation to reason one runs up against the difficulty of being able to do this. As Hamann had written in a letter to Herder, “If only I was as eloquent as Demosthenes, then I would only have to repeat a single word three times [i.e. language] ... For me darkness still remains over this depth: I continue to wait for an apocalyptic angel to provide the key to this abyss.”<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> N III, p.287/R VII, p.12-13.

<sup>75</sup> For a discussion of Hamann's use of juxtaposing images drawn from the biblical narrative, and classical literature see Max L. Baeumer, “Hamanns Verwendungstechnik von Centonen und Conzetti aus der antiken, jüdischen und christlichen Literatur”, in *Johann Georg Hamann: Acta des Internationalen Hamann-Colloquiums in Lüneburg* ed. Bernhard Gajek (Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 1979), p.117-131.

<sup>76</sup> H V, p.177; (to Herder, 6.8.1784).

Demosthenes, recognised as one of the great orators of ancient Greece, was asked three times what was the most important element in oratory to which he replied each time with “action”.<sup>77</sup> Thus, for Hamann, the difficulty of explanation is something which he acutely felt. And while in *MPR* Hamann could be read as contrasting his style with that of Kant, it is clear that in his personal letter to Herder that Hamann was communicating his own difficulty of describing this relation.<sup>78</sup> The question, then, to which Hamann is answering is “how is the faculty of thought possible?” to which he replies “language”. And this is the word which he would wish to proclaim three times that his reader might see the relation between thinking and language. But it is just this proclamation and the difficulty of explaining not only the relation but language itself which Hamann keenly felt as he described in *MPR* and in the letter to Herder.

As Hamann says, if he had the eloquence of Demosthenes then he would be able to show the reader the relation between thought and the senses, that is language: “then I would open the reader’s eyes, that he perhaps might see – hosts [*Heere*; that is armies] of intuitions ascending to the fortress of pure understanding, and hosts of concepts descending into the depths of the most palpable sensibility, on a ladder upon which no sleeper dreams –”. Of course, Hamann is here alluding to Jacob’s ladder (Genesis 28:12), which also foreshadows Christ’s “descent into the lower parts of the earth” and “ascent above all heavens” (Eph. 4:9-10), as Betz has astutely observed.<sup>79</sup> But the main point that Hamann is making in the image of Jacob’s ladder is that Kant through his “violent separation”, unlike Jacob, could not conceive (that is, dream) of language as the “entanglement and reciprocal intercommunion” of reason and the senses.<sup>80</sup>

It is this reciprocity and violent separation which Hamann further contrasts in the passage through sexual imagery. For Hamann, where reason dominates and Hamann describes in terms of “rape”, Hamann sees a “love-affair” between two equal parties further reflected in his contrast of “Shulamite”, the beloved of *The Song*

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<sup>77</sup> See Haynes, *Hamann Writings*, p.214, note 79.

<sup>78</sup> See Dickson, *Relational Metacriticism*, p.298.

<sup>79</sup> Betz, *After Enlightenment*, p.256.

<sup>80</sup> Bayer, *HMK*, p.365. See also Fritsch, *communicatio*, p.231-232. Bayer provides an excellent discussion of Hamann’s many allusions in this passage which I have not discussed, particularly regarding the *Mahanaim*; see Bayer, *HMK*, p.362-373.

of *Songs* and the “Muse”.<sup>81</sup> Continuing with the sexual imagery, Hamann likens Kant’s conception of reason as “turned in upon itself in a form of auto-affection”,<sup>82</sup> i.e. masturbation. This is what is meant when Hamann invokes the image of Baubo: “– unto the form-play of an old *Baubo with herself* –”. As Haynes has pointed out, Arnobius – to whom Hamann refers – recounted the Greek myth of Ceres who upon reaching Eleusis disconsolate is cheered up by Baubo through coarse jokes and the exposing of her genitals which causes “Ceres to laugh and [thus] providing an ‘unheard-of kind of solace’”.<sup>83</sup> In Hamann’s hands, Baubo is alone playing with herself. That is, there is no mention of Ceres of the original Greek myth. Kant’s project is the sexual self-gratification, that is reason alone with itself divorced from outside influence. This idea of self-gratification is Baubo exposing her genitals to herself and is used by Hamann against Kant’s claims regarding pure reason (*KrV* A 680): “Pure reason is in fact occupied with nothing but itself”. As Fritsch comments, Kant’s “attempt, to have reason as the originator of concepts, is, as Hamann wishes to say with his reference to Baubo, analogous to sexual self-gratification.”<sup>84</sup>

But Hamann goes further, suggesting in the last line, that Kant’s notion of reason is an immaculate virgin, however one which cannot be the mother of God: “and a new *immaculate virgin*, but who may not be a mother of God...”. In drawing the analogy between Kant’s conception of reason with the mother of God, Hamann is suggesting that as pure (i.e. virginal) Kant’s reason is not able to inseminate with the Word. In this respect, Kant’s conception of reason cannot bear *logos*, that is language, and this is because he has separated what language joins together.<sup>85</sup> As Kant wrote (*KrV* A 765): “...the parthenogenesis [of concepts], so to speak, of our understanding (together with reason), without impregnation by experience”.<sup>86</sup> Thus, Hamann is merely drawing on Kant’s own description and in a reversal changes Kant’s description of his own project into a criticism. Kierkegaard too signals his

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<sup>81</sup> Dickson, *Relational Metacriticism*, p.299-300; I agree with Dickson on this point as she regards these two figures as contrastive and in this respect follow her assessment of Bayer who argues alternatively that the Shulamite and the Muse both refer to Kant’s project. See Bayer, *HMK*, p.366-367.

<sup>82</sup> Betz, *After Enlightenment*, p.256.

<sup>83</sup> See Haynes, *Hamann Writings*, p.215, note 85.

<sup>84</sup> Fritsch, *communicatio*, p.232.

<sup>85</sup> See Fritsch, *communicatio*, p.233.

<sup>86</sup> See Bayer, *HMK*, p.272-273.

agreement with Hamann in this aspect when he wrote: “It is a superb saying that Hamann has for abstract definitions: ‘*the virgin born children of Speculation*’ [‘*die Jungfraukinder der Speculation*’].”<sup>87</sup> The problem is, of course, that Hamann did not say this, at least not in these terms. And while the reference has remained unidentified, it is of course, possible – as I believe – that Kierkegaard was recalling, thus paraphrasing, this section of *MPR*.<sup>88</sup>

But if Kant’s conception of reason as a virgin which cannot bear language because of the separation that he introduced between reason and the empirical world, then it is also the case that Hamann is signalling towards his own christological (and sacramental) understanding of language, which I noted earlier. Thus, in *Two Mites* (*Zwey Scherflein*),<sup>89</sup> Hamann speaks of “the womb of language, which is the DEIPARA of our reason”.<sup>90</sup> In a reversal of Kant, then, language is viewed as the womb of reason, and Hamann’s choice of Deipara [*Mother of God; God bearing*] is striking in illustrating this point. Hamann had claimed, returning to a topic earlier highlighted, that language provided the appropriate analogy by which to describe the relation between reason and the senses, but also that he described language as “the hypostatic union”, “the *communicatio idiomatum*”, and as “transubstantiation”.

But what exactly is Hamann describing by invoking deeply christological and sacramental imagery to illuminate language? I believe that there are two points at work here: (1) the images provide a means to describe the relation between the empirical and non-empirical, or the infinite and finite, which Hamann holds to be the nature of language; (2) that ultimately, as Hamann had signalled with his invocation of Demosthenes, that the explication of this relation is not available to full disclosure and thus even as it highlights the inter-relationship it is still shrouded in christological vagueness and mystery. I shall take these two points in turn.

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<sup>87</sup> JJ:222/V A 29/JP 1552; 1844.

<sup>88</sup> The Hong edition and the more recent *SKS* do not identify a source. However, Wilhelm Rodemann provides a reference to R II, p.174/N II, p.150. But this passage only refers in passing to ‘*ein Jungfernkind*’; see Wilhelm Rodemann, *Hamann und Kierkegaard*, p.29-30. The one significant problem in being unable to identify the exact passage to which Kierkegaard is referring comes down to the fact that he presents it as a direct quote in German.

<sup>89</sup> Mark 12:42. Hamann was invoking Luther’s translation: “Und es kam eine arme Witwe und legte zwei Scherflein ein; das macht zusammen einen Pfenning.”

<sup>90</sup> N III, p.239/R VI, p.39. See Bayer, *HMK*, p.372-373.

The first point to make in discussing Hamann's christological imagery is that we must take his claim seriously that these are to be understood as "parables". This means that language is analogous to the hypostatic union and the *communicatio idiomatum* but is not directly equatable with Christ. As Bayer has argued, because Hamann also sees language as the medium in which error occurs – an issue pointed to earlier and to which I will turn shortly – his use of christological and sacramental language should be understood "as a partial or broken analogy /parable[*ein gebrochenes Gleichnis*]." <sup>91</sup> But what type of analogy does the christological notion of the hypostatic union and the *communicatio idiomatum* provide?

The hypostatic union is the theological view that the dual nature of Christ is maintained in one person, but without co-mingling. For Hamann this means that language as the unity of the empirical and non-empirical is to be maintained without the subsumption or reduction of one to the other. In other words, language contains within itself both of these moments but one cannot separate them totally nor can one be forsaken for the other without rendering language meaningless. As Hamann had claimed, language is the unity of the sensuous (word-sign; finite) and the non-sensuous (meaning; infinite). This aspect is further deepened when one examines his use of the *communicatio idiomatum*. The principle of the *communicatio idiomatum* maintains the unique and distinct natures of Christ's humanity and divinity while also acknowledging intercommunion between them (*Perichoresis*). <sup>92</sup> Thus, for Hamann, language is not only a union of opposites but also the inter-relationship

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<sup>91</sup> See Bayer, *a priori willkürlich, a posteriori notwendig*, p.120-121. It is possible to articulate a complex metaphysics/ontology based on Hamann's use of the *communicatio idiomatum* in his work. In fact, he lends himself to this interpretation when he writes, for example: "This divine *communicatio* and human *idiomatum* is the basic law and master-key of all our knowledge and the entire perceptible household." N III, p.27/R IV, p.23. For a detailed study of the function of the *communicatio idiomatum* in Hamann's thought see Fritsch, *communicatio*.

<sup>92</sup> Hamann was drawing on his Lutheran tradition by invoking this principle. However, the principle of the *communicatio idiomatum* was first articulated at the fourth ecumenical council of Chalcedon in 451 A.D. See Johann Anselm Steiger, *Fünf Zentralthemen der Theologie Luthers und seiner Erben: Communicatio – Imago – Figura – Maria – Exempla* (Leiden: Brill, 2002), p.4-5. As Steiger explains, one can attribute to the human nature of Christ thirst, hunger, suffering and death; while to the divine nature one attributes creator, omniscience, eternal and righteousness. However, the intercommunion between the two natures one can also say, that the man Jesus created the world and that God was born and was laid in a manger. See also Bayer, *HMK*, p.353-354. For a discussion of Hamann's views of language in relation to Luther (and via Luther, Augustine), see Peter Meinhold, "Hamanns Theologie der Sprache", in *Johann Georg Hamann: Acta des Internationalen Hamann-Colloquiums in Lüneburg* ed. Bernhard Gajek (Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 1979), p.53-65.

between them.<sup>93</sup> As Bayer explains, “Language as the sensible and audible element of thought is analogous to the sensible and audible incarnation of God in the human nature of Christ. Language, therefore, is viewed as the mediation of two extremes – sensuousness and reason – ”.<sup>94</sup>

Similarly, Hamann’s use of “transubstantiation” further highlights the inter-relationality between the sensuous and non-sensuous: “As visible and audible objects they belong with their elements to *sensibility* and *intuition*, however by the spirit of their institution and meaning they belong to the understanding and concepts.” This means that the finite (sign) is joined with the infinite (signified) in a mutually interpenetrating, inseparable relation. As Betz has commented, “the union of the formal and material, concept and intuition, is accomplished not by any special words of institution much less by anything so needlessly sophisticated as synthetic concepts a priori, but by something as trivial as a copula or a command or even an expletive.”<sup>95</sup> Thus at the close of *MPR*, Hamann wrote: “What the Transcendental philosophy metagrabolises, I have for the benefit of the weaker reader pointed towards the sacrament of language, the letters of its elements, the spirit of its institution, and I leave it to each one to unfold the clenched fist into an open hand. – – ”<sup>96</sup> With a good dose of typically Hamannian irony, he claims that where Kant had confounded and mystified (*metagrabolise*)<sup>97</sup> he has made clear through a consideration of language understood as sacrament. But of course, any clarity that might have been achieved in Hamann’s presentation is also referred back to the christological and sacramental mystery.<sup>98</sup> In other words, while the sacramental and christological analogy to language helps to explicate the relation between the sensible and non-sensible, it also highlights the mystery, i.e. the ultimately inexplicable, nature of this relation. At the same time, it is a relation that must be maintained if one is avoid falling into serious error, i.e. heresy.

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<sup>93</sup> For a discussion of Hamann’s use of Giordano Bruno’s principle of *coincidentia oppositorum*, see Bayer, *HMK*, p. 355.

<sup>94</sup> Bayer, *HMK*, p.356.

<sup>95</sup> Betz, *After Enlightenment*, p.255.

<sup>96</sup> N III, p.289/R VII, p.16; see chapter one for a discussion of the clenched fist.

<sup>97</sup> Dickson, in her note, suggests that this means “to write about nothing (to waffle).” This was a word favoured by Rabelais; see N III, p.32-33/R IV, p.34.

<sup>98</sup> See Bayer, *HMK*, p.381-382. He refers to Hamann’s views regarding the relation between the sensuous and the understanding in language as “the mystery of synthesis”.

### C. Receptivity, Spontaneity, and Error

In the above I have shown that for Hamann there is no separation between the senses and reason which he describes in terms of language. Importantly, language is the medium in which thought occurs and there can be no meaning, in Hamann's conception without this view. He criticises Kant's view by noting that through a separation of the senses and the faculties, that reason cannot give an account of itself, that words become meaningless unless considered in terms of use. As seen already, for Hamann there is no separation.

I would argue that the above provides a crucial view of Hamann's regarding the relation between thinking and language which he describes in terms of the relation of the empirical to the non-empirical. This is a fundamental conception which informs his entire thought. However, in terms of the relation between faculty of thought and language, Hamann articulates this with regard to the relation between “receptivity” and “spontaneity”. It is this relation which he only mentions briefly but in my opinion helps to highlight and deepen our understanding of Hamann's views and thereby to further illuminate the relation between thinking and language. In so doing, it is of the utmost importance that one keep the preceding discussion at the forefront of one's mind because it is against this backdrop of the relation between the empirical and non-empirical which forms the ground of his views of receptivity and spontaneity. Towards the beginning of *MPR*, Hamann wrote the following:

*Receptivity of language and spontaneity of concepts!* – From this double source of ambiguity pure reason creates all the elements of its dogmatism, scepticism, and critique [*Kunstrichterschaft*], generates new phenomena and meteors on the variable horizon through an analysis just as arbitrary as a synthesis of the thrice old leaven, creates signs and wonders with the All-creator and destroying mercurial conjurer's wand of its mouth or with the forked goose-quill between the three syllogistic writing-fingers of its herculean fist –<sup>99</sup>

There are two points that Hamann is making in this passage which warrant attention. The first is programmatic, in that it presents his further understanding of language as is seen in the opening of the passage: “*Receptivity of language* and

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<sup>99</sup> N III, p.284-285/R VII, p.6-7.

*spontaneity of concepts!*” As I will show, this relation between receptivity and spontaneity reflects Hamann's view of the inter-relationality between the sensible and the non-sensible previously discussed. The second point that Hamann makes is that within the way language functions or the way we use language there arises the error at the heart of Kant's view of reason. This is indicated when Hamann suggests that it is in this relation between receptivity and spontaneity that “pure reason creates all the elements of its dogmatism, scepticism and critique, generates new phenomena”. I will address the first issue, namely the description of language as both receptivity and spontaneity, taking these in turn, before turning to the Hamann's diagnosis of error from this perspective.

In order to understand Hamann's conception of language as both receptivity and spontaneity, it is important to discuss them separately in order to appreciate his view of them as related. For Hamann, the notion of receptivity is straightforward. As I understand him, “receptivity of language” makes the claim that the self already finds itself in language. As seen in our previous discussion, this means that reason or thought, cannot be removed from its historical and social nexus, which Hamann understands in terms of language. In this respect, Hamann wrote in *Des Ritters von Rosencreuz letzte Willensmeynung* (The Last Will and Testament of the Knight of the Rose-cross, 1772; hereafter *RRW*):

-- Every phenomenon of nature was a word, – the sign, symbol and pledge of a new, mysterious, inexpressible but all the more intimate union, communication and fellowship of divine energies and ideas. All that which man heard from the beginning, saw with his eyes, looked upon and felt with his hands, was a living word; for God was the word. With this word in his mouth and heart, the origin of language was as natural, as close and easy as a child's game;<sup>100</sup>

Hamann's understanding of the given-ness of language is rooted, as the above passage makes clear, in his theological vision of creation.<sup>101</sup> Without dwelling on this

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<sup>100</sup> N III, p.32/R IV, p.33-34. See also *Aesthetica in nuce*, N II, p.198-199/R II, p.261-262.

<sup>101</sup> See ZH I, p.393-394; (to G.I. Lindner, 9.8.1759). See also Piske, *Offenbarung*, p.11; p.258-263; see also James C. O'Flaherty, “Hamann's Concept of the Whole Man”, *The German Quarterly* 45/2 (Mar. 1972): p.262; see also Joachim Ringleben, “ ‘Rede, dass ich dich sehe’. Betrachtungen zu Hamanns theologischem Sprachdenken”, *Neue Zeitschrift für systematische Theologie und Religionsphilosophie* 30/3 (1988): p.209-224; see also Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetics*, vol.3, ed. John Riches; tr. Andrew Louth, John Saward, Martin Simon, and

specific point, one can see that for Hamann language always precedes the language user. It is a natural medium for humanity, one which we did not invent but in which we already find ourselves. To claim otherwise, as indicated earlier, is to claim that reason creates a language for itself prior to reasoning. In this respect, the argument that Hamann developed in *MPR* was a view already present in his thought and even precedes *RRW*. While Kierkegaard does not offer any expansion on this point, he does explicitly agree with Hamann, as a note from *The Concept of Anxiety* shows:

If one were to say further that it then becomes a question of how the first man learned to speak, I would answer that this is very true, but also that the question lies beyond the scope of the present investigation. However, this must not be understood in the manner of modern philosophy as though my reply were evasive, suggesting that I *could* answer the question in another place. But this much is certain, that it will not do to represent man himself as the inventor of language.<sup>102</sup>

For Hamann, and Kierkegaard, language as receptivity simply means that the given-ness of language is the place where the self already finds itself. As Kierkegaard gestures above, again echoing Hamann, our ability to answer this question would require the possibility of describing the self in a pre-linguistic environment. In a poignant passage from *RRW*, Hamann wrote:

If therefore man, according to the universal witness and example of all peoples, times and places, is not in a position to learn to walk on two legs without the sociable influence of his warders and guardians, that is, as it were *iussus*, nor to break daily bread without the sweat of his face, and least of all to hit upon the masterpiece of the creative brush: then how could it occur to anyone to view language...as an independent invention of human art and wisdom? – Our philosophers speak like alchemists about the treasures of fruitfulness; although to judge by their fields and vineyards, one could swear that they cannot distinguish tares from wheat, grapes from thorns, nor figs from thistles – ...The confusion of language, whereby they

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Rowan Williams (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1986), p.247-272; Dickson, *Relational Metacriticism*, p.90-91.

<sup>102</sup> CA, p.47; see also JP 2321/ V B 53:12; 1844.

seduce and are seduced, is of course a very natural magic of automatic reason...<sup>103</sup>

In articulating the issue in the above manner, Hamann is both furthering his argument for the given-ness, i.e. receptivity, of language while also critiquing those who would deny such a view and at the same time pointing towards his notion of spontaneity. In this respect, Hamann gestures that we learn, that it is not just a matter of automatism. In fact, as Hamann points out, to have language without its relation to receptivity - (“sociable influence”) is to suggest that reason creates language, hence the reference to “automatic reason” and which Hamann describes in *MPR* as “human reason itself, then, must be inferior to the unerring and infallible instinct of the insects.”<sup>104</sup> However, this does not mean as Hamann shows – and to which I will now turn – that we are merely instinctual creatures, bound to a metaphysics of necessity which would reduce the self to less than the instinctual nature of insects. This suggests, as a result, that Hamann views the relation to language as both receptivity and spontaneity, as the earlier passage indicated. But what exactly does he mean by spontaneity?

When Hamann claims “spontaneity of concepts” he is suggesting, as I read him, that while language is the medium of thought this does not undermine freedom. Which is to say that our embedded-ness in language does not undermine creativity, for example to describe the world in a particular way, to poetise, for example, or to generate concepts. In my view, this crucial aspect of his understanding of language comes to the fore in *MPR* when he takes up the discussion of space and time:

*Sounds* and *Letters* are therefore pure forms *a priori*, in which nothing is found belonging to sensation of the concept of an object, they are the true aesthetic elements of all human knowledge and reason. The oldest language was music and with the palpable rhythm of the pulse and the breath in the nose, it was the primordial bodily image of all *measures of time* and its intervals. The oldest writing was *painting* and *drawing*, through figures it was concerned from the beginning with the *economy of space*, its limitation and determination. Hence, through the exuberant, persistent influence of the two noblest senses, sight and hearing, the concepts of space and time have

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<sup>103</sup> N III, p.30-31/R IV, p.30-31.

<sup>104</sup> N III, p.285/R VII, p.9.

become in the entire sphere of the understanding so universal and necessary as light and air are for the eye, ear, and voice, so that space and time, if not *ideae innatae*, seem to me to be *matrices* of all intuitive knowledge.<sup>105</sup>

In keeping with his parodistical adoption of Kantian terminology, Hamann claims that sounds and letters are pure forms *a priori*, which of course is meant to indicate and replace Kant's notion of space and time. Of course, he does not mean this in Kant's sense but instead he is suggesting that the empirical nature of language – sounds and letters – is that which is given to us in order to use language. This notion here relates to the earlier discussion above, namely that language is empirical but that one cannot determine meaning from merely the empirical quality of language. As seen earlier, the word *Reason* as an empirical object is a non- or un-word in Hamann's terms without meaning attached to it. Thus, sounds and letters are indispensable to language but are only half of the requisite relation in order for meaning to occur. Moreover, by claiming that “sound and letters” are *a priori*, he is also making the claim that the medium of thought precedes us, i.e. receptivity. But in this section Hamann, I believe, takes up a different issue which is signalled by Hamann's replacing Kant's space and time with “sound and letters”.

Kant had claimed that space and time are not qualities that belong to objects which we perceive and thus are *a priori* necessary for cognition of sensual impressions to be possible. Space and time, not belonging to empirical objects, must arise – as Kant concluded – from the activity of the understanding and thus are pure, *a priori* intuitions. That is, they are intuitions which are not derived from empirical objects but arise, independent of experience, through the function of the understanding.<sup>106</sup> Hamann's problem, then, is best stated in a question: if there is no separation between the empirical and non-empirical given that language is both, then how is it that we come to have designations such as space and time? Can an account be provided which describes the manner in which we develop conceptual thinking which does not separate thinking from the senses but still allows the possibility for the emergence of new concepts?

Hamann's answer to this question, while perhaps unsatisfactory for a Kantian, is keeping in line with his fundamental views regarding the interrelated

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<sup>105</sup> N III, p.286/R VII, p.9-10.

<sup>106</sup> See *KrV* A19-A49.

nature of thought and the senses in language, while also highlighting the relation between receptivity and spontaneity. That is, for Hamann our notions of space and time emerge out of our primordial linguistic experiences of the world and it is through these basic linguistic features of our experience that new concepts are able to emerge. For Hamann, as one sees in the above passage, music is the primordial bodily image [*das leibhafte Urbild*] of our concepts for time, just as painting and drawing – as the earliest form of representation – are the origins for our concepts of space, a view which Hamann had articulated much earlier in *Aesthetica in nuce*.<sup>107</sup> Thus, Hamann concludes that it is through the senses – and not the structures of the (Kantian) mind (*ideae innatae*) – that we come to form the basic concepts in which to describe the empirical world.<sup>108</sup> In this respect, he holds that space and time as concepts are not necessary *a priori* but instead are related to the basic fabric of language which constitutes the basic way we encounter and perceive the world. It is from this interaction – receptivity and spontaneity in which we develop in language our conceptual thinking. Hamann describes this interaction in the following way:

Meaning and its determination arises, as everyone knows, from the combination of a word-sign, which is *a priori* arbitrary and indifferent, but a *posteriori* necessary and indispensable, with the intuition of the object itself; through this repeated bond the concept itself is communicated to, imprinted and embodied into the understanding by means of the word-sign as by the intuition itself.<sup>109</sup>

As he clarifies in the last part of this section, word-signs are *a priori*, arbitrary and impartial, and *a posteriori* necessary and indispensable and through the connection with an object to which they refer, through repeated use does meaning become standardised “through this repeated bond the concept itself is communicated to, imprinted and embodied into the understanding by means of the word-sign as by the intuition itself.” When Hamann states that the word-sign is arbitrary he is making the straightforward point that any particular word could refer to any particular object but that the meaningfulness of the word-sign in designating a particular object comes

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<sup>107</sup> See N II, p.197/R II, p.258. See Bayer, *HMK*, p.330-331.

<sup>108</sup> See Dickson, *Relational Metacriticism*, p.294. As she remarks, "Hamann counteracts...Kant's account not by asserting the external independent reality of space and time, but rather by grounding them in human *bodily* experience instead of in our tendencies in *thought*."

<sup>109</sup> N III, p.288/R VII, p.13-14.

through continued use. As Hamann had stated earlier in *MPR*, language has no other criteria other than tradition and use. Thus, for Hamann there, is no absolute beginning where we could discover the way in which particular meaning comes to be attached to particular word-signs.<sup>110</sup> This is why Hamann calls the word-signs we employ to designate particular things as “a priori arbitrary and indifferent”. As arbitrary, there is no explanation available to determine why a certain word comes to mean or refer to a particular object something which is attested to in the differences in languages. However, the word-sign is also “necessary and indispensable” because there is no such thing as language without the word-sign. Finally, the meaningfulness of language occurs through repeated use and repetition.

In this way, Hamann holds that there is no language which arises independently of experience, while also articulating an account as to how language comes to have meaning, meaning which is independent in certain respects from the sensation of language. For Hamann, this occurs in a relationality in which there is no priority given to one over the other. As Piske remarks: “In Hamann’s thought, therefore, there is no ‘pure’ form which is not always first drawn from the sensible... The determination of a representation or a concept is for Hamann always an act of language; this is always realised, however, in a relation between thought ... and the sensible-concrete respectively.”<sup>111</sup> As Hamann argued in *Zweifel und Einfälle*: “...Reason simply fashions its concepts from the external conditions of visible and sensual things”.<sup>112</sup> Bayer has summarised this appropriately: “Absolute Time and absolute Space are not, according to Hamann, possible; Time and Space are structured and thereby constituted through elementary sensual experiences and deliverances, by which the force of language divides and determines human life and time.”<sup>113</sup>

In this respect, Hamann is articulating a complex relation between receptivity and spontaneity in this discussion. As noted, we already find ourselves within language (receptivity) which Hamann signals in the above passage when names “Sound and letters” as pure *a priori* forms. At the same time, it is possible to

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<sup>110</sup> Bayer, *HMK*, p.386.

<sup>111</sup> Piske, *Offenbarung*, p.159.

<sup>112</sup> N III, p.191/R IV, p.328.

<sup>113</sup> Bayer, *HMK*, p.334; p.105-106. See also Bayer, *Zeitgenosse*, p.214.

understand Hamann, as I have, as articulating the way in which we come to describe our experience of the world in terms of the concepts space and time. For Hamann our ability to designate with specific ideas that in which already find ourselves indicates that language is a fluid medium which does not, by virtue of finding ourselves already in language, remove our descriptive possibilities. In this respect, one could attribute to Hamann what Bayer has called a relative Spontaneity.<sup>114</sup> A look at a position Hamann advocated in *Philological Ideas and Doubts* [*Philologische Einfälle und Zweifel*] can aid in furthering our understanding of the relation between receptivity and spontaneity:

Presumably the senses relate to the understanding as the stomach does to the vessels, which secrete the finer and higher fluids of the blood, without which the circulation and influx of the stomach could not administer its office. Nothing, therefore, is in our understanding which was not previously in our senses: just as nothing is in our entire bodies which has not once passed through our own stomachs or our parents. The *stamina* and *menstrua* of our *reason* are thus in the truest sense *revelations* and *traditions*, which we take up as our own property, transform with our fluids and powers and thereby become equal to our calling...<sup>115</sup>

Immediately one notes the significant themes under discussion. In particular, the claim that the understanding and the senses are bound in an intimate way, which Hamann describes in biological terms. Significantly, as the image of the stomach and its vessels indicates there exists a mutual dependency – both are required in order for the proper operation to occur. Furthermore, the senses and the understanding are treated as embodied, as bound to one another. Moreover, Hamann’s reference to our “parents” suggests that we are bound to our history in an inextricable manner. But one also notes the sexual imagery (*stamina* and *menstrua*) that Hamann evokes in describing the relation between reason and language (*revelations* and *traditions*),

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<sup>114</sup> Bayer, *HMK*, p.334, fn20. In this respect, I find agreement with Bayer and disagree with Betz's interpretation of spontaneity. For Betz the reference to spontaneity is meant as a criticism of Kant and not, as I have presented it, a constitutive part of Hamann’s own positive view of language. I believe that the importance of attributing a view of the relation between spontaneity and language is crucial to understanding Hamann’s claims regarding our creative capabilities and the possibility of error. See Betz, p.248-249. For a discussion of language and creativity in Hamann’s authorship see, Terence J. German, *Hamann on Language and Religion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981); see particularly chapters II and III.

<sup>115</sup> N III, p.39/R IV, p.33-44.

recalling above. Importantly, the revelations and traditions in which we already find ourselves (receptivity) does not undermine our creative possibilities (spontaneity). In fact, it is only in receiving the pre-given and taking it up as our own that Hamann claims that we fulfil the dignity of our existence. In this way, receptivity and spontaneity are not in competition with one another, one is not to be preferred over the other, instead we are called to receive (stamina, be inseminated) and discharge (menstrua). Thus language, as receptivity and spontaneity, does not undermine freedom – it does not bind us to a predetermined world. Instead, it is within the already given that we are meant to discharge our office. As Bowie has written with regard to Hamann: “Languages are necessarily bound to the contingencies of their particular historical development, in which abstract and sensuous moments cannot be definitively separated. This fact should not however, he maintains, be regarded as a problem. Instead, the historical specificity of languages should be seen as an opportunity, because it augments the possibilities for world disclosure.”<sup>116</sup>

For Hamann, there is no getting behind our linguistic representations of the world in order to discover concepts which form the way we take the world. Instead, the only possibility that we have is to examine language and through this to describe the ways in which our perception of the world occurs at its most fundamental level. Again, as noted earlier, to be able to consider the concepts of space and time apart from language would be to access and describe – in language – a pre-linguistic world. However, receptivity as language which precedes us does not tie us to a predetermined moral universe, nor does it reduce the self to a piece within a pantheistic whole (a point that is perhaps confirmed in that Hamann came to reconsider his *MPR* in the midst of the pantheism controversy which erupted in 1785).<sup>117</sup> Rather, our ability to use language – for example in poetic composition, in new hypotheses, or any number of other functions in which we describe ourselves and our world in *new* ways – demonstrates that we are able to exercise our freedom

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<sup>116</sup> Bowie, *Aesthetics and Subjectivity: From Kant to Nietzsche*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), p.186-187.

<sup>117</sup> In a letter to J. G. Scheffner, Hamann wrote: “...- and through all of these events, I have been brought back to my idea for a Metakritik of the Purism of Reason and Language which I have, already since 1781, carried around in my head.” H VI, p.65; (to J.G. Scheffner, 16.9.1785). The ‘events’ to which Hamann here is referring is the *Pantheism Controversy* which fully erupted in July, 1785. For an historical account of this controversy, see Frederick C. Beiser, *The Fate of Reason*, chapter two.

within a given-ness. As Kierkegaard aptly summarised Hamann's view in the journal entry:

language is partly an original and partly something freely developing. And just as the individual, now matter how freely he develops, can never reach the point of becoming absolutely independent, since true freedom consists, on the contrary, in appropriating the given and consequently in becoming absolutely dependent through freedom, so it is also with language, although we do find at times the ill-conceived tendency of not wanting to accept language as the freely appropriated given but rather to produce it for oneself, whether it appears in the highest regions where it usually ends in silence or in the personal isolation of jargonish nonsense.<sup>118</sup>

In summarising Hamann's view, Kierkegaard has indicated his agreement and appropriation of Hamann in relation to his own concerns regarding pure thinking and the absolute beginning. However, this passage also raises a further point which requires comment: namely, that a misconception of language (the ill-conceived tendency) – that is a denial of the relation between receptivity and spontaneity – “ends in silence or...jargonish nonsense.” Moreover, apart from this passage, Kierkegaard claims in his journals, similarly to Hamann, that while language is a gift it is also the point of humanity's undoing: “Language, the gift of speech, engulfs the human race in such a cloud of drivel and twaddle that it becomes its ruination. God alone knows how many there are in every generation who have not been ruined by talking, who have not been transformed to prattlers or hypocrites. Only the most outstanding personalities of the human race are able to bear this advantage, the power of speech.”<sup>119</sup> This passage, which is representative of Kierkegaard's later views, shows that while language is the natural, inseparable medium for thinking, it is also the point at which the self is deceived. Kierkegaard does not elaborate on this in any substantive manner, however it does highlight his basic closeness to Hamann.<sup>120</sup>

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<sup>118</sup>JP 3281/ III A 11; July 18, 1840; see above p.73.

<sup>119</sup> JP 2337/ XI<sup>2</sup> A 222/NB35:33; 1854.

<sup>120</sup> I call this similarity a *closeness* because Kierkegaard in his later Journals and Papers, eventually called for silence in the face of the difficulty encountered in language, particularly as this related to his existential critique of speculative philosophy. This dissimilarity between them does not detract from Kierkegaard's formal critique of the speculative attempt or claim to gain the absolute beginning. That

In order to understand the appeal that Kierkegaard makes to Hamann in the above entries, it is important to consider, as a final point, Hamann's conception of the relation between language and error in his critique of Kant. Hamann claims, as seen earlier, that from language, as the relation between receptivity and spontaneity (which he calls "this twofold source of ambiguity" and a little later refers to it as the "hereditary defect and leprosy of ambiguity"), reason "generates new phenomena and meteors...creates signs and wonders". I view this as related to his claim, seen earlier, that "language is also the *centre-point of the misunderstanding of reason with itself*, partly because of the frequent *Coincidence* of the greatest and smallest concept, its emptiness and richness in ideal propositions, partly because of the infinite figures of speech over syllogisms, and much more of the same."<sup>121</sup> But what exactly does he have in mind? In the opening lines of *MPR* Hamann makes reference to Berkeley and Hume and it is in these two opening paragraphs, I believe, where Hamann articulates the way in which inattention to the way we use language leads to the type of error which he diagnoses at the centre of Kant's project:

A great philosopher has claimed, "that all general and abstract ideas are nothing but particular ones, annexed to a certain term, which gives them a more extensive signification, and makes them recall upon occasion other individuals." This assertion of the Eleatic, mystic and enthusiast [*schwärmenden*] Bishop of Cloyne, *George Berkeley, Hume\** declares to be one of the *greatest* and *most valuable discoveries* to be made in the republic of letters in our time...But regarding this *important discovery* itself: it lies open and uncovered without any special profundity in the mere use of language of the most common perception and through the observation of the *sensus communis*.<sup>122</sup>

The relation between Hamann's account of language and the errors into which Kant falls is not immediately apparent from the above. Recalling our earlier discussion and close attention to the above passage brings his view into focus. In invoking Berkeley and Hume, Hamann is claiming that Kant's failure to account for

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is, calling for silence in a generation of "prattlers" and "hypocrites" is a different concern than the relation between thought and reason. See JP 2334/XI<sup>2</sup> A 128/NB33:52; 1854.

<sup>121</sup> N III, p.286/R VII, p.9.

<sup>122</sup> N III, p.283/R VII, p.3-4; \*Hamann's reference to Hume.

language is the result of a seduction of language whereby the status of universal concepts is held to be independent of their relation to particulars in an *a priori* manner so that the former condition the latter rather than, according to Hamann (and Berkeley<sup>123</sup> and Hume)<sup>124</sup>, the latter being the condition for the former. For Hamann, one can generate concepts which can have universal applicability (as seen above in the discussion of space and time). In this respect, Hamann is not arguing against this linguistic capacity (as his views regarding receptivity and spontaneity indicate), that is, he is not arguing for a retention of the particular at the expense of the universal, in the sense that words cannot have general or universal signification. Rather, this always arises for Hamann from the particular. Hamann characterises Kant's error in the following manner:

...metaphysics abuses all the word-signs and figures of speech of our empirical knowledge as nothing but hieroglyphs and types of ideal relations, and through this learned mischief works the *straightforwardness* of language into a meaningless, ruttish, unsteady, indeterminate something = x, that nothing is left but a windy sighing, a magical shadow play, at most as the

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<sup>123</sup> For a detailed account of Berkeley's views as appropriated by Hamann, see Dickson, *Relational Metacriticism*, p.275-281. For an alternative view of Berkeley's account of language, see Piske, *Offenbarung*, p.136-143. Piske has argued that Hamann takes Berkeley to be a subsidiary target of Hamann's critique in *MPR*. She argues that Berkeley is a proponent of purifying language and is thus a forerunner of Kant's project. I agree with Dickson's assessment of Berkeley and therefore view Hamann's invocation at the outset of *MPR* as a positive appraisal and therefore meant as a critique of Kant through an appeal to Berkeley. Dickson provides an excellent account of Berkeley's views on language in order to explicitly challenge the conclusions of Piske. See Dickson, *Relational Metacriticism*, p.276-280.

<sup>124</sup> The presence of Hume in Hamann's writings is substantial. From his earliest period to the time of the writing of *MPR*, Hume had figured large in Hamann's thought. In fact, it was during the period of *MPR* that Hamann was working on his translation of Hume. For a detailed study of the Hamann – Hume relation see Thomas Borse, *Johann Georg Hamann und David Hume: Metaphysikkritik und Glaube im Spannungsfeld der Aufklärung*, 2 volumes. (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2006). See also M. Redmond, "The Hamann-Hume Connection", *Religious Studies*, vol.23 no.1 (Mar. 1987): p.95-107; and Charles W. Swain, "Hamann and the Philosophy of David Hume", *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, 5/4 (Oct. 1967): p.343-351; see also Hans Graubner, "Theological Empiricism: aspects of Johann Georg Hamann's reception Hume", *Hume Studies* 15 (1989): p.377-385. Of course, it is also the case that Kierkegaard's appeal to Hume has been traced to Hamann's influence and particular interpretation of Humean belief as support for their respective views of faith. For an account of this topic within the Hamann-Kierkegaard relation, see Thomas Miles, "Kierkegaard and Hume on Reason, Faith and the Ethics of Philosophy" in *Kierkegaard and the Renaissance and Modern Traditions*, vol. 1: Philosophy, ed. by Jon Stewart (Ashgate Publishing: Surrey, England, 2009), p.23-32. For an account of faith and Humean doubt, without reference to Hamann, in *CUP* and *PF*, see Westphal, *Becoming a Self*, p.70-81; see also Richard H. Popkin, "Hume and Kierkegaard", *Journal of Religion* 31 (1951): p.274-281.

wise *Helvetius* says, the talisman und rosary of a transcendental superstition in *entia rationis*, and its empty hoses and slogans.<sup>125</sup>

Given this, Kant's error is to assume wrongly that his concepts arise *a priori* and not as a result of an extrapolation to the universal which occurs in language (as the mediation between the empirical and non-empirical within the relational receptivity-spontaneity, as argued above). Kant's failure then, in Hamann's view, is to take universal, *a priori* concepts as independent from their origin in the reciprocity of language. As Hamann succinctly wrote to Jacobi: "For me the question the question is not so much what is Reason? But much more: what is Language? and this I suppose to be the ground of all paralogisms and antinomies of the which the former is accused. In this way it happens, that one has words for concepts and concepts for the things themselves."<sup>126</sup> There is thus, a type of forgetfulness which Hamann diagnoses at the centre of Kant's critical system because it takes what originates in our "empirical knowledge", the interaction of language, and treats it as if it originated in the understanding or reason alone, thus forgetting its source. Kierkegaard gestures towards this when he writes in his *Journals*: "Approaching something scientifically, esthetically, etc., how easily one is led into the conceit that he really knows something for which he has the word. It is the concrete intuition which is so easily lost here."<sup>127</sup>

Hamann does not provide any detailed discussion of how we move from the particular to the universal, nor does Kierkegaard for that matter (despite his obvious awareness of the issue). Instead, Hamann's argument functions as a type of common sense (*sensus communis*) approach to linguistic use. If language is the medium of thought and our interactions with the world of experience are what give rise to specific conceptual language (as, for example with the concepts of space and time discussed earlier) then it holds that our conceptual designations have their origins in this original interaction.<sup>128</sup> Of course, describing this is notoriously difficult which is

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<sup>125</sup> N III, p.285/R VII, p.8.

<sup>126</sup> H V, p.264; (to Jacobi, 14.11.1784). The date is important because, as will be recalled from our earlier discussion, Hamann had 'completed' his *MPR* and sent it to Herder in September of the same year. Dickson provides the latter part of this passage in a different context within her exposition of *MPR*. However, she notes that "This also sums up neatly my understanding of Berkeley's critique and Hamann's approving relation to it." See Dickson, *Relational Metacriticism*, p.301.

<sup>127</sup> JP 2324/X<sup>2</sup> A 235/NB14:61; 1849.

<sup>128</sup> See Betz, *After Enlightenment*, p.249.

perhaps why Hamann does not do so and again why he generally invokes christological mystery to describe his views. In order to give a proper account one would have to go back to the origin and development of language from its outset. Hamann gestures in this direction, as already seen above, when he notes that music and pictorial representation were the original languages borne out of experience. Beyond this he, rightly, does not venture. To do so would be, curiously, to go behind language and describe, paradoxically, a pre-linguistic world.<sup>129</sup> Or as Hamann describes it, in a favourite analogy found ubiquitously present in Kierkegaard's own authorship, to claim the ability to account for thought without language, to grasp and provide a pre-linguistic account of concepts is the Archimedean standpoint, a view which for human knowers is impossible: "Now, this last possibility of creating the form of an empirical intuition with neither an object nor a sign of the same from the pure and empty properties of our outer and inner mind, is precisely the *Δος μοι που στω* and *πρωτον ψευδος*, the entire cornerstone of critical idealism and its towers and lodges of pure reason."<sup>130</sup>

If the relation between receptivity and spontaneity of language brings one to the point where explicability ends, where christological mystery is invoked to describe the relation between the sensible and non-sensible, it is also true of Hamann that he does offer a further diagnosis of how Kant fails to account for the relation between reason and language. Hamann suggests, recalling an earlier discussion, that Kant's failure to recognise the genesis of our concepts as arising out of language which is prior to us, and therefore shows the dependence of thought on language, is traceable to the threefold purification which Hamann had outlined in the opening sections of *MPR*.<sup>131</sup> As argued previously, Hamann's invocation of Berkeley and Hume here as precursors to Kant – as Kant himself admits – is meant by Hamann to show that Kant's conception of reason stands within a historical, linguistic tradition. Not only, therefore, does the presence of Berkeley and Hume serve to illuminate Hamann's own views over and against Kant but they are invoked to challenge Kant's

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<sup>129</sup> See Dickson, *Relational Metacriticism*, p.306-307.

<sup>130</sup> N III, p.289/R VII, p.15-16. See Bayer, *HMK*, p.327-328. For a complex discussion of Hamann's conception of language and error in relation hereditary sin, creation and eschatology, see Tom Kleffmann, *Die Erbsündenlehre in Sprachtheologischen Horizont: Eine Interpretation Augustins, Luthers und Hamanns* (Tübingen: J.C.B Mohr, 1994). For an account of Hamann's similarities to Locke in relation to language and error, see Bayer, *HMK*, p.325-327.

<sup>131</sup> See Betz, *After Enlightenment*, p.244.

claims regarding the independence of reason from its linguistic milieu. As Hamann suggests in the second paragraph of *MPR*: “that without Berkeley, Hume would have hardly become the great philosopher that the *Kritik* with a similar gratitude declares him to be.”<sup>132</sup> This point is made explicit in a letter that Hamann wrote in 1782 (thus after his review, but before *MPR*) to Herder and his wife: “This much is certain, that without Berkeley there would have been no Hume, just as without these two there would have been no Kant. In the end, it all boils down to tradition [*Überlieferung*], just as all abstraction comes down to sensuous impressions.”<sup>133</sup>

As this suggests, Hamann sees a connection between Kant’s historical indebtedness and the origin of our abstract concepts, which for Hamann comes down to the question of language. Thus, Hamann can claim that language is “the single, first and last organon and criterion of reason, without any other credentials but tradition and usage.”<sup>134</sup> Kant’s failure to recognise the relation between reason and language, in fact the priority of the latter over the former, is rooted in Kant’s *description* of reason as independent of tradition.<sup>135</sup>

But as Hamann makes clear, this “hereditary defect”, this “confusion of language, by which however they seduce and are seduced”<sup>136</sup> is not something that can ever be definitely overcome, nor is it an error of which Kant is solely guilty. For Hamann the removal of error, the avoidance of seduction, is only possible in the eschatological fulfilment: “The auditorium of language is the seducer of our understanding, and will remain so until we return to the Beginning and Origin and the olim [that is, the Jewish diaspora] return home.”<sup>137</sup>

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<sup>132</sup> N III, p.283/R VII, p.4.

<sup>133</sup> H V, p.376; (to Herder and his wife, 20-22.4.1782). See Dickson, *Relational Metacriticism*, p.283.

<sup>134</sup> N III, p.284/R VII, p.6.

<sup>135</sup> For a detailed study of Kant’s view of reason separated from tradition and history in light of Hamann’s critique see Oswald Bayer, “Die Gesichten der Vernunft sind die Kritik ihrer Reinheit. Hamanns Weg zur Metakritik Kants”, in *Hamann – Kant – Herder, Acta des vierten Internationalen Hamann-Kolloquiums im Herder-Institut zu Marburg Lahn 1985*, ed. Barnhard Gajek (Berlin: Peter Lang, 1987), p.9-88.

<sup>136</sup> N III, p.31/R IV, p.31.

<sup>137</sup> H V, p.173; (to Jacobi, 29.4.1787).

## Conclusion

In this chapter I have argued that Kierkegaard differentiates between an existential and formal critique of speculative philosophy. In particular, I focussed on the issue of the presuppositionless, absolute beginning, which he takes up in *CUP*. I argued that Kierkegaard distinguishes between a critique of infinite abstraction and infinite reflection. The former, as I understand his argument, claims to have gained pure thinking whereas the latter holds to have achieved pure being. I argued that Kierkegaard mounts a series of critiques against these claims of speculative philosophy, first considering infinite reflection and then infinite abstraction. I argued that these critiques share similarities – namely agency and the argument against the possibility of achieving the presuppositionless beginning *a posteriori*.

At the same time, I argued that Kierkegaard raises the issue of pure thinking as the result of infinite abstraction in light of an argument which shows Hamann's influence. In particular, I claimed that Kierkegaard's argument against pure thinking as the presuppositionless beginning achieved via infinite abstraction is grounded in his claims that we cannot abstract from existence, which, following Pattison, I view as indicating our historical, contingent finitude of which a central element is our embedded-ness in language. In turning to Hamann, to whom Kierkegaard I believe appeals, I have shown that his argument against Kant is that there can be no such thing as *pure reason*, that is *a priori cognition*, because reason is always related and dependent upon language. In taking up Hamann's critique, I pointed out that his appeal to language as the ground of reason is articulated in a number of ways. In the first place, Hamann describes the relation between the infinite and the finite, the sensible and intelligible natures as joined in language. For Hamann, this is described in terms of christological and sacramental theology which also highlights the fundamental mystery of this relation. Admittedly, this aspect of Hamann's argument is not replicated – to my knowledge – in Kierkegaard's writings. It was, however, necessary to provide this discussion because it forms a central aspect of his thought. Following from this, I then discussed Hamann's understanding of language as inter-relationality between receptivity and spontaneity. It is this argument in particular, as I indicated, to which Kierkegaard appeals. For Hamann, and Kierkegaard, there is no removing the self from its socio-historical milieu, i.e. language. Further, this place in which the self already finds itself in language, Hamann describes in terms of

receptivity; again a point where Kierkegaard registers his agreement. But I also argued that Hamann articulates a notion of spontaneity which means that we are not bound to a metaphysics of necessity but are able to provide an account of how it is that we come to use language in a productive and creative way without giving up on freedom.

However, within this relationality between receptivity and spontaneity Hamann claims that error arises and this is an error of language, to which Kierkegaard also appeals. In particular, it is a failure to account properly for language which leads to the error of claiming that thought is independent from its relation to the given. For Kierkegaard, following Hamann, there is no gaining of the absolute presuppositionless beginning because we cannot abstract the self from language. As Hamann had argued, to claim the ability of *a priori* concepts would be to claim to be able to give an account of language prior to language or else claim that reason itself can create its own language – an issue which raises serious problems as I have shown. Thus, where Hamann had taken up the issue of language in direct consideration of Kant's first *Kritik*, Kierkegaard had appropriated Hamann's key insights and applied them to his own particular Danish milieu. While Hamann provided Kierkegaard with these central insights, it is Kierkegaard's own unique contribution to have taken them up and applied them in a new way to a set of concerns that emerged in his native Denmark in the post-Kantian period.

## Chapter Three

### The Existential Self: Hamann and Kierkegaard on Diagnosis and Cure

#### Introduction

Kierkegaard praises Hamann in CUP, to recall chapter one, for his “protest against a system of existence”. In admiring Hamann in this respect, Kierkegaard offers his readers the opportunity to explore what he found to be so praiseworthy in Hamann’s protestation. In other words, what exactly does this praise entail? Is it merely based on a passing recognition, an acknowledgement of camaraderie, an aligning of his own critique with that of the Socratic Hamann? Or does Kierkegaard’s appreciation extend further? Did Hamann’s writings help shape Kierkegaard’s own mature existential views and might this become evident by paying attention to their arguments?

In this chapter I examine the existential critiques advanced by Hamann (against his Enlightenment contemporaries) and Kierkegaard (against speculative philosophy). I consider how Hamann and Kierkegaard both diagnose the ways in which the maladies of their respective ages become manifest. In other words, how do the Enlightenment and speculative philosophy come to have faulty conceptions of selfhood? Further, what are the consequences of such a faulty conception, and what type of cure might be available with which to treat these illnesses? To answer these questions I will consider the following themes in Hamann and Kierkegaard: conceptions of the self, diagnoses of faulty notions of selfhood, the resultant existential ailments, and offered cures.

In section one I will present Hamann’s notion of the self found in *Philological Ideas and Doubts*. I will highlight three central points: (a) the self is a unity comprised of opposing pairs – body/soul; infinite/finite; (b) that the self is not reducible to these pairs but is itself the unifying element which Hamann describes as a third relation; (c) the self is created in God’s image, which means the self has its

ontological ground in that which is other than the self. Following this, I will then rehearse Hamann's diagnosis of the fractured self which he detects at the centre of the Enlightenment. Drawing on his arguments from *Philological Ideas and Doubts*, *Konxompax*, *Aesthetica in nuce*, and the *Review*, I will highlight the following four points: (1) a fractured conception of the self occurs when the self is determined solely through its rational capacity; (2) the elevation of reason causes a "divorce" within the self and separates the self from its relation to its ontological ground, i.e., God; (3) the rational self takes a disinterested, indifferent approach towards selfhood; (4) the self, in separating itself from its ontological ground, attributes to itself divine predicates in an attempt to fill the void created in the separation from the divine.

Following from this, I will then present Hamann's cure which he articulates as a means to overcome the disastrous existential consequences of the purely rational self. At the centre of his conception, as I will show, is the call for the disciplining of reason. The disciplining of reason entails the appropriate relation reason should inhabit in relation to the other faculties of which the self is constituted, namely believing, willing and feeling. Thus, rather than a hierarchical view of the faculties, Hamann argues for *companionability* which enables the return to unified selfhood. This argument will be drawn primarily from Hamann's correspondence. As a final point, I will turn to consider Hamann's diagnosis of the fractured self as not resulting from an actual elevation of reason or separation of the self's natures but from self-deception.

In section two, I turn my attention to Kierkegaard and present his conception of the self and his existential diagnosis as it appears in SUD and CUP. As a first step, I will outline Kierkegaard's conception of the self as found in SUD. I will present three points: (i) each self is composed of a dialectical synthesis (infinite/finite; eternal/temporal; possibility/necessity); (ii) for Kierkegaard, like Hamann, this is not full selfhood because the self is the third relation which enables the active dialectical synthesis and is thereby not reducible to its constituent parts; (iii) only in maintaining an appropriate relationship to its self, does the self remain in relation to its ontological ground which for Kierkegaard, as with Hamann, is God. In a second step, I will treat Kierkegaard's discussion of despair, and particularly infinitude's despair. I will present Kierkegaard's claim that the self finds itself in this particular type of despair owing to a misconceived elevation of the imagination. For Kierkegaard, as with Hamann, the separation and fracture of the self causes not only a problem in the

self's own self relation but ultimately separates the self from its divine, ontological ground. In attempting to become its own self, the self of infinitude's despair confers upon itself divine attributes as it attempts to replace the activity of the divine which has been made void in the self's drive towards autonomy – in its will to be a self, but the wrong kind of self. As a cure to the existential crisis of infinitude's despair, Kierkegaard argues, in *Practice in Christianity*, the imagination must be coordinated with the will in order to avoid the negative consequences of the self as mere infinitude. This reorientation is what enables the institution of a healthy self-relation and relation to the divine.

I then turn to consider Kierkegaard's diagnosis of fractured selfhood presented in CUP. I understand this as his existential critique of forgetfulness which he levels against speculative philosophy. I will highlight the continuity between the conceptions of selfhood that exist between SUD and CUP. Different from the treatment of despair, I will argue that it is through a false elevation of reason (and not the imagination as in SUD) that the self becomes forgetful of existence and this forgetfulness, again, is rooted in a deep existential motivation, specifically the desire to avoid the task of selfhood. My attention then turns to Kierkegaard's remedy for the existential malady of forgetfulness which, I argue, he presents as *concurrency*. *Concurrency*, for Kierkegaard, means the healthy non-hierarchical relation between the faculties. It is through such a relation that the ability to engage with the task of selfhood becomes a possibility. In a final step, I return to a question that I raise first in relation to Hamann, namely a false conception of selfhood grounded in self-deception. I argue that Kierkegaard advances an account which entails that the self does not actually separate itself from existence, nor does reason actually become falsely elevated but rather that forgetfulness is rooted in a form of self-deception. In concluding this chapter, I highlight the similarities between Hamann's existential critique and cure and those offered by Kierkegaard. I suggest while there are other important sources which contributed to Kierkegaard's thought, Hamann should be considered an important figure in the development of Kierkegaard's mature existential views.

## I. Hamann

At the centre of Hamann's thought is a view of selfhood as a united whole. He articulates his conception of the unified self in *Philological Ideas and Doubts* in the following manner:

Because the *mystery* of the *marriage* between so opposed natures as the outer and inner man, or body and soul is great: so to attain a comprehensible concept of the fullness in the unity of our human essence, an acknowledgement of several distinctive, earthly marks must be recognised.<sup>1</sup>

There are two points to glean from this passage. Firstly, the unity which Hamann describes as a marriage is between the "outer and the inner man, or body and soul". Moreover, this unity is a mystery – which means that it is not available to full self-conceptualisation; this recalls Hamann's similar understanding of language discussed in the previous chapter. However, Hamann does suggest that there may be some "marks" by which one can explore this mysterious unity. As such, following the above, he provides the following complex image:

Man is therefore not only a living field but also the son of the field, and not only the field and seed (according to the system of the Materialists and Idealists) but also the King of the field, who can grow good seeds and hostile tares in his field; then what is a field without seeds and a prince without land and revenue? These three in us are therefore One, namely θεοῦ γεώργιον [theou georgion; 'God's field']<sup>2</sup>...<sup>3</sup>

This passage, employing complex imagery is key to understanding Hamann's views. There are five points to highlight. First, the self is composed of two natures – the field and seed – which Hamann identifies with the materialists and the idealists respectively. I take this to mean that the field represents the temporal, bodily self ("Materialists"), while the seed is descriptive of the soul or inner self ("Idealists").

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<sup>1</sup> N III, p.40/R IV, p.46.

<sup>2</sup> I Corinthians 3:9

<sup>3</sup> N III, p.40/R IV, p.46.

As Lüpke has correctly identified, *the seed* is a “metaphor for Logos, for reason”.<sup>4</sup> Second, the self is the “King of the field”. I take this to mean that the self is not merely reducible to its material elements because the self has a level of jurisdiction over them. Third, the self as “King of the field” is also the self as “son of the field”. This indicates that the self is tied to its bodily, temporal, linguistic realm from which it cannot be extricated. In this sense, we are a product of our temporality in which we already find ourselves, i.e. the “son of the field”. Fourth, the self is not merely these two elements but is a third which is comprised of the unity between the body and the soul. This idea of the third relation is further clarified if one considers briefly Hamann’s adoption of the marriage analogy. Marriage is a union of two individuals who, in the biblical account of marriage – to which Hamann is clearly alluding – become one flesh in the marital union but still maintain their distinctive individualities (Gen 2:24; Mk 10:8). In this respect, marriage is a third relation that occurs when two individuals relate to one another, just as the self is the third relation in the relation between the infinite (soul) and finite (body) natures: “These three in us are therefore One”. In other terms, the self is not reducible to its temporality or to its sheer infinitude but is a relation between these two, and this relation is the third to which Hamann refers. As Dickson has commented, “against both the empiricists and the idealists, we are more than this, and not merely by virtue of the juxtaposition of the two opposed theses.”<sup>5</sup> This suggests that the self is not reducible to its finitude – we have freedom within the contingency, i.e. we are kings; but this does not entail the alternative, Idealist version, that we are radically autonomous since we are inextricably related to our temporal finitude, i.e. we are sons. As Hamann claimed above, we have the ability to grow good seed or hostile tares, which means that the self is free within the given-ness and that this freedom can be used for good or for ill. This, of course, recalls the discussion from the previous chapter regarding receptivity, spontaneity and error. Fifth, and finally, Hamann’s triune characterization is also a reference to the divine Trinity and indicates that the self is created in God’s image. As Betz has commented, “the three aspects, which form a mysterious unity, constitute the particular dignity of the human being as the *imago*

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<sup>4</sup> Johannes von Lüpke, “Anthropologische Einfälle. Zum Verständnis der ‘ganzen Existenz’ bei Johann Georg Hamann”, *Neue Zeitschrift für systematische Theologie und Religionsphilosophie* 30 (1988): p.238.

<sup>5</sup> Dickson, *Relational Metacriticism*, p.202.

*Dei.*”<sup>6</sup> But there is more, since Hamann claims that the self is “God’s field”, a reference to Paul’s first letter to the Corinthians, 3:9. Which is to say, this relation must always be related to the ultimate ground of the self’s existence, God.<sup>7</sup>

In sum, Hamann presents a conception of the self as a relation between the body and the soul or the finite and infinite. This relation is not merely a joining of two together, but it is a relational union and it is this union which for Hamann is the self. Further, the self not only relates to itself in this union but has its ultimate ontological ground in God, in whose image we are created. But this unity, the ground to which we are related, is at bottom rooted in mystery (I will return to this point in the following chapter) of which we can catch a glimpse in the distinguishing “markers”.

In the midst of his definition of the self, Hamann offers a critique. Continuing with his analogy of marriage, he writes:

Philosophers have always given truth a letter of divorce [*Scheidebrief*] by dividing what Nature has joined together and vice versa, whereby there have arisen among other heretics of *Psychology* also *Arians*, *Mohammedans* and *Socinians*, who have tried to explain the soul from a *single positive power* or *Entelechy*.<sup>8</sup>

There are three important claims in this passage which deserve attention. First, Hamann indicates that where he advocates marriage as the appropriate analogy for the nature of the self, his contemporaries (the vague use of the term “Philosophy”) have separated the natures of the self through a “letter of divorce”. In this context, I take Hamann to be suggesting that the separation is between body and soul, the sensible and non-sensible, or the finite and infinite (which recalls his critique of Kant, discussed in the previous chapter). Second, Hamann describes how this separation occurs – by basing a conception of the self on “a unique positive power”. Thirdly, he reiterates his critique by identifying such a false conception of the self with three traditional heresies, all of which are related by virtue of their Unitarian, as

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<sup>6</sup> Betz, *After Enlightenment*, p.153.

<sup>7</sup> See Lüpke, *Anthropologische Einfälle*, p.239-240; see also Dickson, *Relational Metacriticism*, p.203.

<sup>8</sup> N III, p.40/R IV, p.45.

opposed to Trinitarian, view of the Godhead. Moreover, he calls these “heretics of psychology” which indicates the problem of the false conception of the self stems from an unwarranted conception of the faculties. In this passage, therefore, Hamann is claiming that a false view of the self emerges, in which the natures of the self are separated from each other, through a false Unitarian conception of the self. And this Unitarian conception arises when a particular power is seen as determinative of the self.<sup>9</sup> I would propose, in light of this, that Hamann’s critique is that an elevation of reason as the central feature of selfhood is to blame for a false image of the self.

Returning briefly to Hamann’s *Review*, encountered in the previous chapter, a clearer view of this diagnosis is gained. Hamann opens his review of Kant’s work with the following quote from Kant (*KrV* A xi): “Our age is the genuine age of **criticism**, to which everything must submit. **Religion** through its **holiness** and **legislation** through its **majesty** commonly seek to exempt themselves from it. But in this way they excite a just suspicion against themselves, and cannot lay claim to that unfeigned respect that reason grants only to that which has been able to withstand its free and public examination.”<sup>10</sup>

This passage occurs as a note in Kant’s *Preface* to the first edition. The fact Hamann quotes from this note is important because for Hamann this is the issue which he finds problematic in Kant’s conception and which he wishes to challenge (this follows his argumentative strategy adopted in *MPR* as discussed in the previous chapter). Specifically, Hamann is concerned with the elevation of reason and the hierarchical place that reason occupies in determining the rights and values according to which we live. For Hamann, Kant has elevated reason to a place which occupies the highest authority, which determines and judges in all matters of human existence – both the spiritual and civil realms. As Hamann humorously notes in the *Review*, this is a form of “dogmatic despotism”.<sup>11</sup> However, Hamann’s diagnosis of the elevation of reason by Kant, and the *Aufklärer* in general, is, as Bayer has noted, rooted in Hamann’s alternative conception of the interrelationality between God, the self, and the World. For Hamann, Kant’s elevation of reason has caused a “strict divorce” between that which Hamann views as rooted in relationality, recalling the

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<sup>9</sup> See Dickson, *Relational Metacriticism*, p.497, note a.

<sup>10</sup> N III, p.277/R IV, p.47.

<sup>11</sup> N III, p.280/R IV, p.53.

themes of the last chapter. Moreover, the relationality has been rent asunder and these central aspects of our existence have now been brought under the domain of reason.<sup>12</sup>

Joining Hamann's claims in the *Review* with the earlier discussion means it is the self as the rational self, reason as the "unique positive power" from which such a conception of selfhood is derived, that results in the false conception of the self. By suggesting reason is the highest faculty which determines humanity, Hamann argues that this fails to account for the union of the finite with the infinite self, with the infinite self seen as occupying a dictatorial or despotic role. In promoting this one power as the sole power from which selfhood is derived, which gives selfhood its identity and dignity, one denies the triune relation of the self. And if the self is, being created in God's image, analogous to the Trinity in its tripartite constitution, then a denial of this inter-relationality is, for Hamann, a form of heresy which denies not only the relation of the self to itself but ultimately severs the self from the ground of its being.

For Hamann, moreover, such an elevation of reason has disastrous "existential consequences" which he views not as the triumph of reason but rather as a "sickness".<sup>13</sup> In particular, Hamann argues that reason with its "old, cold prejudice for mathematics"<sup>14</sup> leads to *Indifferentism* towards existence – a point Hamann highlights in both *MPR* and the *Review*.<sup>15</sup> And this he ties in the *Review* to the systematisation of existence: "The *scientific* cannot but proceed *systematically*."<sup>16</sup> Hamann counters this indifferentism and systematisation of existence by calling for passion: "passion alone gives abstractions as well as hypotheses hands, feet, wings"<sup>17</sup> and further claims that "The conception and birth of new ideas and new expression; – the labour and rest of the wise man, his solace and aversion in them, lie in the fruitful womb of the passions".<sup>18</sup> As Kleffmann has noted, passion for Hamann is the

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<sup>12</sup> Bayer, *HMK*, p.77-78.

<sup>13</sup> Bayer, *HMK*, p.139.

<sup>14</sup> N III, p.285/R VII, p.8.

<sup>15</sup> See N III, p.287/R VII, p.; see also N III, p.279/R IV, p.53.

<sup>16</sup> N III, p.279/R IV, p.52.

<sup>17</sup> N II, p.208/R II, p.287.

<sup>18</sup> N II, p.209/R II, p.288.

“primordial dynamic of life”.<sup>19</sup> Thus, where Kant had promoted indifferentism as a virtue of reason,<sup>20</sup> Hamann claims that this leads to a systematisation of existence, that it robs the self of passion and divorces the self from its own selfhood.

Hamann extends his existential diagnosis by arguing that the elevation of reason, and the divorce it causes in the self, also separates the self from the ground of its being. This becomes evident when Hamann describes the raising of reason in these terms as a form of self-deification. As Hamann wrote in *Konxompax*: “Then what is the highly praised reason with its universality, infallibility, exuberance, certitude and self-evidence? An *ens rationis*,<sup>21</sup> a dummy, that is imputed godly attributes by a blatant superstition.”<sup>22</sup> Such a self-attribution of reason with divine qualities is, according to Hamann, “the cheapest, most unauthorised and most brazen self-glory (or self-imputed glory)”.<sup>23</sup> The rational self, therefore, has appropriated the language of the divine for itself and now describes the self in these terms.<sup>24</sup> In this respect, in divorcing the self from its ontological ground, the self seeks to fill this void by attributing to itself the characteristics of the divine agency which it has displaced. As a result of this displacement, the self views itself as its own creator, fashioning its selfhood in its own (desired) image. As Hamann wrote in *Aesthetica in Nuce*:

Virtuosos of the present Aeon, upon whom the *Lord God* has caused a deep sleep to fall! You noble few! benefit from this sleep, and build from a rib of this Endymion the newest edition of the human soul, which the bard of midnight songs saw in his morning dream,\* – – but not from close up. The next aeon will awaken like a giant from a stupor to embrace your Muse, and

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<sup>19</sup> Tom Kleffmann, “Hamanns Begriff der Leidenschaft” in *Die Gegenwartigkeit Johann Georg Hamanns. Acta des achten Internationalen Hamann-Kolloquiums an der Martin-Luther-Universität Halle-Wittenberg 2002*, ed. Bernhard Gajek (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2005), p.167.

<sup>20</sup> *KrV* A xi-xii.

<sup>21</sup> A being of reason; that which is dependent on thought for its existence and is an invention of the mind which does not necessarily have a reference to an actual existing being.

<sup>22</sup> N III, p.225/R VI, p.16.

<sup>23</sup> N III, p.189/R IV, p.324; See Bayer, *HMK*, p.258; see also Fritsch, *communicatio*, p.237. See also N II, 154; Hamann describes such a self-ascription as the “a triumph of profane blasphemies” which mockingly he states is “the summit of our geniuses.”

<sup>24</sup> See Moustakas, *Urkunde*, p.200.

to exult her with the testimony: This is bone of my bone, and flesh of my flesh!<sup>25</sup>

As this passage suggests, in elevating reason the self displaces the authority of God and self-creates. Drawing biblical and classical imagery together, in typical fashion, Hamann not only detects the drive towards autonomy but sounds a warning to his contemporaries: the next age will come and create its own image of humanity and consume theirs, which results in an endless repetition of creation and destruction which leads to perpetual crisis and nihilism. This separation of our natures, through the elevation of reason, displaces our relation to the ground of our existence and in so doing the self views itself as its own master. In this respect, it is the notion of spontaneity without relation to receptivity or it is a king without field and thus its seed is literally thrown away, dispersed into nothingness. Further, it is selfhood ruled by indifferentism, lacking passion and ultimately divorced from itself and its relation to the divine.

If our reasoning capacity causes a divorce when it is elevated, does this mean that Hamann devalues reason and our capacity for abstract thought? By no means. Rather, reason must be disciplined and brought into its proper relation with the other faculties. Thus, Hamann calls for the disciplining of reason, to which he ironically gestures in his *Review* by drawing a parallel to Kant's *Discipline* of reason with "the Pauline theory of the *Discipline* of the *Law*."<sup>26</sup> But what exactly does Hamann mean here? A letter to Lindner from 1759 helps to clarify this:

Our reason is precisely what Paul calls the Law – and the precept of reason is holy, righteous and good. But is it given to us – to make us wise? just as little as the law was given to make the Jews righteous, rather to convict us of the opposite, how unreasonable our reason is, and that our errors should increase through it, just as sin increases through the law.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> N II, p.200/ R II, p.265-266. \*Hamann's note: "See Dr. Youngs Letter to the author of *Grandison, Conjectures on Original Composition*." In this work, Young had promoted the continual progress of the human race; see Haynes, *Hamann Writings*, p.68, note o.

<sup>26</sup> N III, p.279/R IV, p.52.

<sup>27</sup> ZH I, p.355-356; (to Lindner, 3.7.1759). See also H V, p.95; (to Jacobi, 2.11.1783). For a discussion of Hamann's use of Pauline ideas and language in his writings see Elfriede Büchsel, "Paulinische Denkfiguren in Hamanns Aufklärungskritik. Hermeneutische Beobachtungen zu exemplarischen Texten und Problemstellungen" in *Johann Georg Hamann und die Krise der Aufklärung. Acta des*

When Hamann gestures in this way in the *Review*, he is arguing that where Kant had hoped to clear up the errors which reason had fallen into, he has merely increased them. That is, he has not solved the problem. Thus his critique of pure reason has fallen short and merely increased error. When Hamann calls for the disciplining of reason he has something else in mind, namely that reason needs to be brought to its rightful place in order that it might regain its health and vitality. Reason, therefore, needs to be brought to submission in order that the false hierarchies might be corrected and that it might occupy its rightful place. As Hamann wrote in *Zweifel und Einfälle*: "...the obedience of healthy reason, which man is attempting to erect...whereby the bounds of all *subordination* would be resolved, is impossible without the *abnegation* and *submission* of reason".<sup>28</sup> But what is reason's correct place if not as the despotic ruler? Hamann articulates this at several points in a letter to Jacobi:

It is pure Idealism to isolate *believing* and *feeling* from *thinking*.  
*Companionability* is the true principle of reason and language...This and that philosophy always separate things which can by no means be divided.  
Things without relationships, relationships without things.<sup>29</sup>

As Hamann suggests, it is only by being brought into a non-hierarchical relation that our existence can be imbued with feeling, believing and passion. Moreover, Hamann further suggests, in the same letter to Jacobi, that healthy reason does not divide the self but maintains its unity:

Philosophy is of Idealism and Realism: just as our *nature* is composed of body and soul...Only *scholastic reason* [*Schulvernunft*] divides itself into Idealism and Realism. Proper and genuine reason knows nothing of this invented difference, which is not grounded in the *nature of things*, and contradicts the unity which lies at the ground of all of our concepts, or should at least do so.<sup>30</sup>

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*fünften Internationalen Hamann-Kolloquiums in Münster i. W. 1988*, ed. Bernhard Gajek and Albert Meier (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1990), p.405-422.

<sup>28</sup> *Zweifel und Einfälle über eine vermischte Nachricht*; N III, p.193-194/R IV, p.333-334.

<sup>29</sup> H VII, p.174; (to Jacobi, 27.4.1787); see Dickson, *Relational Metacriticism*, p.344.

<sup>30</sup> H VII, p.165; (to Jacobi, 27.4.1787); see Dickson, *Relational Metacriticism*, p.346.

According to Hamann, while a false conception of elevated reason can lead us astray, reason is not without its positive function when disciplined properly. And it is only through submitting reason within a non-hierarchy that it might be disciplined. Thus, Hamann is not denying the capacity of reason or even suggesting that reasoning is not without its proper function and value. As he had stated, seen above, the precepts of reason are, like those of the law, “holy, righteous, and good.” Hamann expands on this idea in a series of passages found in his letters to Jacobi. For example, Hamann claims that the function of authentic or healthy reason can analyse and synthesise but it must not undermine the unity of the unique natures of the self: “Analysis and Synthesis must occur according to very similar laws. Analysis not dismantling, rather dissecting. Synthesis not intermingling but putting together. Both according to the distinguishing marks and laws of nature”.<sup>31</sup> And in another letter he wrote: “The entire mystery of our Reason...is based on nothing but a poetic licence to separate what nature has joined together and to pair what it wants to separate, to maim and to repair.”<sup>32</sup> Clearly Hamann does not have a merely negative view of reason (or our reasoning capacity). Reason has its positive and necessary function, as these passages make clear. Hamann’s point is this: reason must not be accorded an elevated status as this leads to disastrous existential consequences.

A final issue, before turning to Kierkegaard, requires brief attention: does Hamann hold reason to be actually elevated, and the self fragmented or does he detect a form of self-deception at work? In other words, can the self cause a divorce between its natures or does the self come to view itself in these terms in its drive to autonomy? A brief consideration of the above argument, along with the relationship between language and error in the previous chapter, and a consideration of Hamann’s correspondence with Jacobi, will aid in answering these questions.

To recall the above discussion of divine self-predication, Hamann had called elevated reason an *ens rationis* – a being of reason or that which is dependent on thought for its existence and is an invention of the mind which does not necessarily have a reference to an actual existing being. But Hamann goes further and suggests a hierarchical conception of reason is “a blatant superstition”. This indicates, as I understand it, that Hamann traces a faulty conception of selfhood to the elevation of

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<sup>31</sup> H VII, p.169-170; (to Jacobi, 27.4.1787).

<sup>32</sup> H VI, p.534; (to Jacobi, 24.8.1786).

reason which is ultimately grounded in a form of self-deception. This is why, I believe, Hamann describes such a self-ascription as “a triumph of profane blasphemies” which he mockingly refers to as “the summit of our geniuses.”<sup>33</sup>

As Hamann succinctly put it in a letter to Jacobi: “People talk of reason as if it was an actual entity, and of the good Lord as if he was nothing but a concept.”<sup>34</sup> Countering the hypostatisation of reason, Hamann suggests to Jacobi in a separate letter that it is a problem with language: “Metaphysics has its scholastic and courtly language; both are questionable to me, and I am neither in a position to understand nor to serve them. I therefore all but reckon, that our entire philosophy consists more of language than reason, and the misunderstanding of countless words, the Prosopopoeia of the most arbitrary abstractions”.<sup>35</sup>

This recalls the discussion of language and error from the previous chapter. That is to say, that a faulty notion of selfhood occurs through a misuse and seduction of language. This is signalled here by Hamann in the employment of the term Prosopopoeia – which denotes the representation of an abstract quality (or idea) as a person (similar to the literary device of anthropomorphism). When applied to Hamann’s claim to Jacobi, this suggests reason is attributed a distinct existence with its own agency, separate or distinct from the embodied self. As Dickson has commented, “by a kind of act of ‘Prosopopoeia’ ” our faculties “are hypostasized into entities...Thus ‘reasoning’ is distinguished from ‘feeling’, and turned from a verb or gerund into a noun – ‘reason’ – which is then named as a constituent of our mind. From here it is only a short step to a kind of personification of Prosopopoeia, as medieval morality mystery plays could make a dramatic character out of being chaste or being lustful. When applied to humanity, these hypostasized distinctions of Prosopopoeia create divisions in our being, such as those between ‘the mind’ and ‘the body’ or the ‘the senses’ and ‘the understanding’”. As Dickson further notes, when applied to a conception of the self this causes a separation of what nature has joined together.<sup>36</sup> In sum, the elevation of reason and the conception of the self as the rational self is the result of an inattention to language and arises through a seduction

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<sup>33</sup> N II, 154, p.11-12

<sup>34</sup> H VII, p.26; (to Jacobi, 5.10.1786).

<sup>35</sup> H V, p.272; (to Jacobi, 1-5.12.1784).

<sup>36</sup> Dickson, *Relational Metacriticism*, p.309-310.

of language whereby the self is deceived in relation to its own notion of its selfhood. It is to take the rational features of selfhood as the defining conception of the self, thereby undermining other possible conceptions. In this respect, it is through an attention to language that such faulty conceptions of the self may be avoided.<sup>37</sup>

This section has examined Hamann's conception of selfhood. Hamann's view of the self is one in which the self is viewed as a non-reducible entity comprised of body and soul, infinite and finite. As seen above, this unity is the self which he calls the third. In this respect, the self is not merely a dialectical unity but is that in which the dialectical unity has its ground. Furthermore, Hamann offers a view of the self as a triune relation, highlighting the self as created in God's image. However, Hamann argues that a faulty conception of the self emerges when selfhood is based on one unique power, i.e., reason. Accordingly, the elevation of reason to its hierarchical position causes a divorce within the self – both from its relation to the contingent realm and from its relation to God. As a result, the rational self takes an indifferent stance towards existence. Further, in diagnosing the existential consequences in this manner, Hamann uncovers the rational self imputing to itself divine predicates, thus supplanting the divine authority and ultimately the relation of the self to its divine creator. As a cure, Hamann does not argue against the positive function of reason but instead claims that reason must be disciplined and brought into *companionability* with feeling, willing and believing. It is only through this correct relation that reason might properly function and the self be correctly understood as a marital union, an embodiment imbued with passion, whose relation to the divine is maintained. Finally, for Hamann, the rational self does not actually achieve an elevation of reason, nor a separation of what nature has joined together. Rather, the Enlightened image of the rational self is rooted in self-deception, driven by the need for autonomy in the separation from the self's ground, God.

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<sup>37</sup> See Dickson, *Relational Metacriticism*, p.315.

## II. Kierkegaard: Despair, Forgetfulness, and Concurrency

In this section I examine two arguments from Kierkegaard's writings: despair in SUD and forgetfulness in CUP. In the first part I will address SUD, focussing on Kierkegaard's conception of the self and his diagnosis of infinitude's despair. Infinitude's despair is a failure to be a self, which is rooted in a false elevation of the imagination. Further I consider Kierkegaard's proposed cure for the existential sickness of despair by examining *Practice in Christianity* in which he claims the imagination must be coordinated with the will in order to avoid infinitude's despair. I then turn to consider Kierkegaard's articulation of forgetfulness in CUP and argue that he traces forgetfulness to the wilful, albeit false, elevation of reason. As with despair, forgetfulness is an existential crisis which is enacted by the self in order to avoid the task of selfhood. As a remedy for forgetfulness Kierkegaard argues for *concurrency* – the nonhierarchical relation between the faculties – which, when enacted, provides the means to achieve integrated, unified selfhood. I then consider the status of faulty conceptions of selfhood which Kierkegaard addresses. I understand Kierkegaard advocating for the following view: the self does not actually become fractured, separating its finitude and infinitude, but rather the self comes to conceive of itself in these terms by taking the deliverances of the imagination (in the case of despair) and reason (in the case of forgetfulness) as determining a conception of selfhood. In this respect, it is a form of self-deception.

### A. The Self and Infinitude's Despair in SUD.

At the centre of Kierkegaard's thought is a definition of selfhood. The most comprehensive articulation of selfhood which Kierkegaard presents appears in SUD, in a long quotation, which I provide in full:

A human being is spirit. But what is spirit? Spirit is the self. But what is the self? The self is a relation that relates itself to itself or is the relation's relating itself to itself in relation; the self is not the relation but is the relation's relating itself to itself. A human being is a synthesis of the infinite and the finite, of the temporal and the eternal, of freedom and necessity, in

short, a synthesis. A synthesis is a relation between the two. Considered in this way, a human being is still not a self.

In the relation between two, the relation is the third as a negative unity, and the two relate to the relation and in the relation to the relation; thus under the qualification of the psychical the relation between the psychical and the physical is a relation. If, however, the relation relates itself to itself, this relation is the positive third, and this is the self.

Such a relation that relates itself to itself, a self, must either have established itself or have been established by another.

If the relation that relates itself to itself has been established by another, then the relation is indeed the third, but this relation, the third, is yet again a relation and relates itself to that which established the entire relation.

The human self is such a derived, established relation, a relation that relates itself to itself and in relating itself to itself relates itself to another.<sup>38</sup>

There are three central points I wish to highlight from this lengthy passage. First, the self is composed of dialectical pairs. Kierkegaard names these as: the infinite and finite, the eternal and the temporal, freedom and necessity (although, later he alters this last pair by describing it as possibility and necessity).<sup>39</sup> As I understand him, Kierkegaard is not articulating three separate sets of dialectical pairs of which the self is constituted but instead adopts three different sets of terms in order to advance his conception of selfhood. In this respect, these synthetic dialectical pairs are fundamentally reducible to one – namely infinite and finite, with the others providing alternative descriptive possibilities. But what exactly does Kierkegaard have in mind when he establishes these pairs? Fundamentally, they are related because each pair denotes the same relation: an element which is constraining (temporal, necessity, finite) and an element which ensures that this constraint is never total (eternal, possibility, infinite). Stated differently, this means the self finds itself in a given-ness which it itself did not create (as, for example language) while also articulating a realm of freedom or self-determination (as, for example, linguistic creativity).

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<sup>38</sup> SUD, p.13-14.

<sup>39</sup> SUD, p.35.

Second, this dialectical constitution is not selfhood, but instead the self is a relation between the two. This relation is what Kierkegaard calls the “third” which is not merely a dialectic, but by virtue of the relation denotes a unity. This entails that in being related to the constraining element, the infinitude the self possesses is not total (as in self-autonomy), but it also maintains that the self is not reduced to a realm of necessity by virtue of its finitude.<sup>40</sup> Or, in other terms, the self is not reducible to a dialectic because its self-relation is more than just the sum of its parts. Further, this unity which is the self is only such insofar as it relates itself to itself. I take this to mean that the self is a self when it contributes to the maintaining of this relation to itself. In this respect, Kierkegaard stands in continuity with the Idealist tradition which holds selfhood to be characterised by the activity of integrating the elements which constitute selfhood. This activity Kierkegaard describes as freedom.<sup>41</sup> As he claims, “The self is composed of infinitude and finitude. However, this synthesis is a relation, and a relation that, even though it is derived, relates itself to itself, which is freedom. The self is freedom.”<sup>42</sup> Thus, the crucial feature of the self is its activity of maintaining the dialectical relation between these pairs and, therefore, is not reducible to them because the self is the constituting element.

Third, Kierkegaard claims that the self, in relating to itself, is in fact related to another, namely God. This means the self is not its own ontological ground but has its existence from the one who created the self. In this respect, the self is responsible within its own self-relation but is not the originator of its own being. The self, in this way, is constituted as a dialectical relation but this dialectical relation does not occur via a Fichtean act of self-positing. Moreover, Kierkegaard further

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<sup>40</sup> See Michelle Kosch, *Freedom and Reason in Kant Schelling and Kierkegaard*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), p.201. In the next chapter I will return to Kierkegaard’s critique of necessity and the reduction of the self to finitude.

<sup>41</sup> See Kosch, *Freedom and Reason*, p.200.

<sup>42</sup> SUD, p.29.

suggests, only within the correct self-relation does the self relate properly to God, the self's ontological originator.<sup>43</sup> As he writes:

The self is the conscious synthesis of infinitude and finitude that relates itself to itself, whose task is to become itself, which can be done only through the relationship to God. To become oneself is to become concrete. But to become concrete is neither to become finite nor to become infinite, for that which is to become concrete is indeed a synthesis. Consequently, the progress of the becoming must be an infinite moving away from itself in the infinitizing of the self, and in infinite coming back to itself in the finitizing process. But if the self does not become itself, it is in despair, whether it knows that or not.<sup>44</sup>

Thus, Kierkegaard claims that the self is responsible for itself – the “task...to become itself” – while at the same time suggesting that this can only be achieved in relation to God, who is the self's ontological ground. As such, only through the synthesising act, appropriately maintained, is the self actually a self and only in this self-relation does the self succeed in relating to its ground. As Martin J. De Nys has stated: “God enables one to establish oneself and then draws oneself to Godself.”<sup>45</sup> Kierkegaard indicates, however, that if the self is responsible for the relation which constitutes its selfhood, then it also the case that the self can fail in this task. Kierkegaard calls this failure despair. What exactly is despair? Kierkegaard provides the following definition:

To despair over oneself, in despair to will to be rid of oneself – this is the formula for all despair. Therefore the other form of despair, in despair to will to be oneself, can be traced back to the first, in despair not to will to be oneself, just as we previously resolved the form, in despair not to will to be oneself, into the form, in despair to will to be oneself (see A). A person in despair despairingly wills to be himself. But if he despairingly wills to be himself, he certainly does not want to be rid of himself. Well, so it seems,

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<sup>43</sup> See Kosch, *Freedom and Reason*, p.201. Kosch has noted this is the point at which Kierkegaard is differentiated from Fichte's “account of self-positing.”

<sup>44</sup> SUD, p.29-30.

<sup>45</sup> Martin J. De Nys, “Faith, self-transcendence, and reflection”, *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 51 (2002): p.124.

but upon closer examination it is clear that the contradiction is the same. The self that he despairingly wants to be is a self that he is not (for to will to be the self that he is in truth is the very opposite of despair), that is, he wants to tear his self away from the power that established it.<sup>46</sup>

Two points must be highlighted. First, Kierkegaard claims despair has two forms: (a) to will to be rid of oneself; (b) to will to be oneself.<sup>47</sup> However, he claims that these are both (a). Although this might appear to be contradictory, as Kierkegaard indicates, he clarifies his definition as follows: in willing to be a self (b), the self actually wills to be the wrong kind of self and actually wills to be rid of its selfhood (a). Second, in willing to be the wrong kind of self, the self “wants to tear his self away from the power that established it.” This means that in becoming a self, the self wants to be a self independent of its relation to its ontological ground. In other terms, the self wants to be self-determining in a radically autonomous, self-positing fashion. Reformulating Kierkegaard’s claims in order to clarify the two points, one could say that in willing to be oneself, the self wills to be rid of oneself because it wills to be a self apart from the ground that established it, i.e. God, and therefore it is the wrong kind of self which it wills to be.<sup>48</sup>

But how does the self find itself in despair? How does despair manifest itself and in what way is the self responsible for despair? Kierkegaard illustrates a series of

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<sup>46</sup> SUD, p.20. Kierkegaard continues, on the following page: “Thus, the eternal in a person can be demonstrated by the fact that despair cannot consume his self, that precisely this is the torment of contradiction in despair. If there were nothing eternal in a man, he could not despair at all; if despair could consume his self, then there would be no despair at all. Such is the nature of despair, this sickness of the self, this sickness unto death.”

<sup>47</sup> For a description of (b) see SUD, p.14.

<sup>48</sup> See Michael Theunissen, *Kierkegaard’s Concept of Despair*, tr. Barbara Harshav and Helmut Illbruck (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005), p.34-35. On this point, I am in agreement with Theunissen and in this respect disagree with Kosch. Kosch has argued that Theunissen fails to account for the earlier form of despair that Kierkegaard signals in this passage. However, the central element of this passage is that to despair is to will to be rid of oneself, which he then joins to a severing of ties with the ground of the self. Kosch has argued that this argument does not account for the earlier description of despair as willing to be oneself. This is resolvable if we take the argument to be that in despair to will to be oneself one wills to be the wrong kind of self, thereby, *de facto* willing to be rid of oneself. This is central to Kierkegaard’s argument and is signaled in his discussion here – to tear oneself from the ground that establishes the self. Thus, in willing to be oneself, one wills to be the wrong kind of self because it wills to be a self apart from its ground. This feature of Kierkegaard’s argument is that which provides the basis for him to claim that the despair to will to be rid of oneself is the formula for all despair. See Kosch, *Freedom and Reason*, p.206, fn40. For a similar critique of Theunissen see Marius G. Mjaaland, “Alterität und Textur in Kierkegaards ‘Krankheit zum Tode’”, *Neue Zeitschrift für systematische Theologie und Religionsphilosophie* 47/1 (2005): 61-73.

manifestations of despair and these are all related by virtue of their failure to maintain the dialectical relational synthesis. Which is to say, in each portrayal despair is manifested when a denial of one feature of the relational synthesis is either abrogated or subsumed by its opposite. Thus, possibility's despair is to lack necessity, just as necessity's despair is to lack possibility. Similarly, the eternal's despair is to lack temporality and temporality's despair is to lack the eternal. Finally, finitude's despair is to lack infinitude, and infinitude's despair lacks finitude. I wish to explore infinitude's despair in more detail.

Kierkegaard announces that infinitude's despair is to lack finitude.<sup>49</sup> Thus, in willing to be oneself, the self wills to be rid of itself by positing infinitude without relation to finitude. This is the self which, in willing to be itself (but the wrong kind of self), divorces or severs the relation to finitude. It is to see the self in terms of its infinite capacities. In this respect, one could say it is the failure to integrate the constraining element with the unlimited element. As Kierkegaard states:

...every human existence that presumably has become or simply wants to be infinite...is despair. For the self is the synthesis of which the finite is the limiting and the infinite the extending constituent. Infinitude's despair, therefore, is the fantastic, the unlimited...<sup>50</sup>

In other terms, infinitude's despair is autonomy without relation to a pre-given relational and causal nexus. However, Kierkegaard signals that this extends further because the misrelation in the failure to maintain the synthesising act also translates into a failure to be a self as one who is grounded in that which is not the self. Thus, it is not merely autonomy as self-legislating but it is also the self as self-positing, or as its own ground in an ontological sense.<sup>51</sup> Kierkegaard draws this connection between self-legislating and self-positing (or between normativity and

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<sup>49</sup> SUD, p.30.

<sup>50</sup> SUD, p.30. The passage continues: "for the self is healthy and free from despair only when, precisely, by having despaired, it rests transparently in God." I will return to this momentarily.

<sup>51</sup> See Kosch, *Freedom and Reason*, p.202-203. In particular, she has argued that Kierkegaard's arguments contra a self-positing self should be viewed against a Fichtean account which Kierkegaard is countering. She also notes that Kierkegaard has "stereotypical reading of Fichte" which claims "that selves are literally (ontologically) self-constituting" although this reading has been challenged by recent Fichte scholarship. See p.203, fn36. Although Kosch does not reference it in this connection, it is worth pointing out that Kierkegaard's first treatment of Fichte occurs in his dissertation. See CI, p.272-323, especially p.272-275. This will be discussed in the next chapter.

ontology) because they, in his account, are inseparable.<sup>52</sup> Which is to say, for Kierkegaard autonomy is tied to ontology because if we claim we are autonomous agents we must also claim, like Fichte, we are also self-positing agents.<sup>53</sup> For Kierkegaard, however, the self is not its own ontological ground and is thus not free and therefore not self-positing in the Idealist sense of autonomy. In this respect, Kierkegaard can claim that the responsibility for despair originates from the self, it is the self's own doing in the self's attempt to be itself, to be autonomous and therefore self-positing:

Where, then, does the despair come from? From the relation in which the synthesis relates itself to itself, inasmuch as God, who constituted man a relation relates itself to itself. And because this relation is spirit, is the self, upon it rests responsibility for all despair at every moment of its existence, however much the despairing person speaks of his despair as a misfortune and however ingeniously he deceives himself and others...<sup>54</sup>

As the above suggests, in willing to be rid of oneself, because the self wills to be the wrong kind of self, the self fails to maintain the dialectical relation between infinitude and finitude. In short, the self is responsible for the instantiation of the despair in which it finds itself. However, there does remain an important issue which is central to Kierkegaard's argument: if the self is a self only by instituting a proper relation between the constitutive, non-separable, elements of existence which thereby establishes a relation to the self's ontological ground, and despair is a failure to maintain this relation in order to posit itself as its ground, then how is this enacted? How does a failure emerge? Is there a relation in the self which constitutes a failure on the level of despair? Or, in other terms, how does the self go about enacting a failure? What is it about the self as this particular type of agency which makes possible this type of despair? I would like to propose that the failure to maintain the

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<sup>52</sup> See Kosch, *Freedom and Reason*, p.209. Kosch emphasises the argument from normativity where I have chosen to pursue the ontological version of Kierkegaard's account. Again, I agree with Kosch that for Kierkegaard (and as with Schelling which she points out and for which I am entirely dependent on her argument in this regard) to claim "that the self is not its own ontological basis and saying that it is not normatively self-sufficient go hand in hand."

<sup>53</sup> For an excellent account of this point see Samuel Loncar, "From Jena to Copenhagen: Kierkegaard's relations to German idealism and the critique of autonomy in *The Sickness Unto Death*", *Religious Studies* 47 (2010): p.1-16.

<sup>54</sup> SUD, p.16.

dialectical relation, as described in terms of infinitude's despair, is an act carried out by an improper elevation of the imagination over the other faculties. Stated otherwise, the self enacts this failure in itself through a complex misrelation in the faculties which it itself institutes, propagates, and for which it is ultimately responsible.

This argument comes into focus if one observes that Kierkegaard terms the self of infinitude divorced from finitude as the fantastical self. Kierkegaard attributes the emergence of the fantastical, unlimited, self to an improper use of the imagination, which supplants the other faculties and leads the self away from itself. Kierkegaard claims that it is through the faculty of imagination [*Phantasie*] that one considers the self as unlimited, i.e. removed from the constraint of finitude: "As a rule, imagination is the medium for the process of infinitizing; it is not a capacity, as are the others – if one wishes to speak in those terms, it is the capacity *instar omnium* [for all capacities]." <sup>55</sup> As this suggests, the imagination as the infinitizing faculty is that which grounds the operations of all other faculties.

The "process of infinitizing", carried out by the imagination, is that "which leads a person out into the infinite in such a way that it only leads him away from himself and thereby prevents him from coming back to himself." Kierkegaard then proceeds to describe the way in which a misrelation between the various faculties (feeling, knowing and willing) and the grounding faculty of imagination operate in order to produce a fantastical, i.e. infinite, view of the self.<sup>56</sup> Kierkegaard describes the issue in these terms: "When feeling or knowing or willing has become fantastic, the entire self can eventually become that...[and] the person is responsible."<sup>57</sup> This misrelation leads to "a fantastical existence in abstract infinitizing...continually lacking its self, from which it moves further and further away."<sup>58</sup> The central tenet of Kierkegaard's argument is the issue of responsibility, as he indicates: we are tasked in freedom to maintain the dialectical synthesis or relation between our constitutive

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<sup>55</sup> SUD, p.30-31. The Danish term, translated in the English text as capacity, is *Evne*. This denotes the ability to carry out an act or the power to be able to do x. In these terms, it is similar to the idea of a faculty; SKS, 11, p.147. Kierkegaard attributes this view, which he adopts, to the elder Fichte.

<sup>56</sup> SUD, p.31-32.

<sup>57</sup> SUD, p.32.

<sup>58</sup> SUD, p.32.

elements (infinitude/finitude; possibility/necessity; temporal/eternal) but we fail to maintain this. This failure, again, is despair.

As such, the self as the fantastic self of infinitude's despair has instituted despair through an unwarranted elevation of the imagination in relation to feeling, willing and knowing.<sup>59</sup> However, in instituting such despair, in attempting to claim radical autonomy and therefore according to the self ontological self-positing is not only to divorce the self from its contingent existence, but also to separate the self from the ground of the self's ontological being. In replacing the divine ground of our agency, the self through the infinitising move away from its contingent and dependent existence raises itself and imputes to itself divine predicates. In this respect, one could say that through a surreptitious elevation of the imagination, in the will to be a self independent of the self's ontological ground, the self fills the void created by the despair of separation which it institutes by predicating of itself the divinity which it has displaced. As Kierkegaard writes: "the infinite [self]...wants first of all to take upon himself the transformation of all this...and he wants to begin...not at and with the beginning, but 'in the beginning'." This is clearly a reference to Genesis 1:1.<sup>60</sup> Despair arises when the self attempts to create itself *ex nihilo* and emerges through an appropriation of divine activity. Kierkegaard clarifies this further when he claims that the self in despair "wants enjoy the total satisfaction of making itself into itself, of developing itself, of being itself; it wants to have the honor of this...masterly construction".<sup>61</sup> Such a self Kierkegaard describes as "the imaginatively constructed god", thus making an unambiguous connection to the appropriation of the divine predicates by the self of infinitude in its drive to autonomy and the resultant separation from the divine.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Kierkegaard suggests that the imagination does have an important role to play in relation to selfhood, specifically as the means to carry out self-reflection, a point that I will take up specifically in the following chapter. This, however, does not alter his criticism of imagination gone wayward; see SUD, p.31 and p.41.

<sup>60</sup> There are obvious Johannine overtones in this passage. One also notes an implied reference to Kierkegaard's earlier critique in CUP regarding the presuppositionless beginning and the impossibility of achieving the immediate; see chapter two.

<sup>61</sup> SUD, p.69.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

Kierkegaard continues this diagnosis and describes the infinite nature of the self as exercising “a loosening power as well as a binding power”<sup>63</sup>; a direct reference to the Gospel of Matthew, and in particular to Christ’s impartation to Peter.<sup>64</sup> In Kierkegaard’s hands, this is used to depict the infinite self which has displaced the divine initiative and relation and conferred upon itself this elevated and divinised status. For Kierkegaard, the conception of the self as infinitude is an instance of the self failing to acknowledge the source of its being *and* the limitations of its finitude, which Kierkegaard likens to “intoxication”.<sup>65</sup> The self, then, mistakenly confers upon *itself* that which only properly belongs to the source of the self, namely God: the power to loose and to bind, or, as we have seen above, to create *ex nihilo*. Thus, the ascription of that which only properly belongs to divine agency is consciously appropriated by the self-determining and self-positing agent in infinitude’s despair, instituted by the self via the apotheosis of the imagination.

This is not to say, however, the imagination does not play an important role in self-conceptualisation (as I will discuss in the next chapter).<sup>66</sup> Rather, it must be brought into relation with the will, as Kierkegaard articulates in *Practice in Christianity*: “Every human being possesses to a higher or lower degree a capability called the power of the imagination, a power that is the first condition for what becomes a person, for will is the second and in the ultimate sense the decisive condition.”<sup>67</sup> The will is, therefore, the element which the self of infinitude lacks. It is only through the will, in relation to the imagination, that the self is not lost in infinitude but instead relates itself to its finitude: “the earnestness of life is to *will* to be, to *will* to express the perfection...in the dailyness of actuality, so that one does

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<sup>63</sup> SUD, p.68-69.

<sup>64</sup> As Pattison notes, Kierkegaard is here “alluding to the words with which Christ gave St. Peter plenipotentiary powers relating to the forgiveness of sins.” Pattison, *Philosophy*, p.34. The issue regarding towards whom Kierkegaard is directing his criticism here is difficult to untangle as Kierkegaard does not always maintain a strict distinction between post-Kantian Idealists and post-Kantian Romantics in his arguments. Part of this is down to the tradition itself which drew on many of the same sources and whose arguments, superficially at minimum, appear very similar. Kierkegaard’s penchant for abbreviating complex discussions is keenly felt in these instances. I take the view that both targets of Kierkegaard’s critique are plausible given his allusions to Fichte who was central to the development of Romanticism.

<sup>65</sup> SUD, p.32.

<sup>66</sup> See SUD, p.31; and *Practice in Christianity*, p.186,

<sup>67</sup> *Practice in Christianity*, p.186.

not to one's own ruin once and for all busily abandon it".<sup>68</sup> As Rasmussen has commented, the "cure" for infinitude's despair "resulting from an imbalance of imagination...therefore, is a coordinate dose of earnestness to live in one's world, for earnestness is a function of the will".<sup>69</sup>

In the above, I have presented a reading of Kierkegaard's diagnosis of infinitude's despair. I focussed on four related topics. First, I presented Kierkegaard's notion of the self as a relational unity, grounded in the divine. Second, I focussed on a specific diagnosis of a failure of the self to achieve wholeness – infinitude's despair – which Kierkegaard traces to the unwarranted elevation of the imagination over the other faculties in a hierarchical relation. Third, infinitude's despair is driven by the attempt to gain radical autonomy. It is this which displaces the relation to one's self and ultimately the divine. Kierkegaard regards the autonomous self as appropriating to itself divine attributes in an attempt to fill the void created in the loss of the relation to the divine. Fourth, as a cure to the existential consequences of infinitude's despair, where the self is separated from itself and ultimately its relation to the divine, Kierkegaard argues that the imagination must be coordinated with the will. This reorientation in the faculties, as Kierkegaard proposes, is the means for the self to institute a healthy relation within itself and to the divine.

## **B. The Self, Forgetfulness and Concurrency in CUP**

In the following section I will continue with the above themes but shall do so by examining Kierkegaard's diagnosis of forgetfulness in CUP. First, Kierkegaard articulates a view of the self which is a demand placed on each individual. Stated differently, selfhood is something to be achieved and not merely a given. Second, the achievement of selfhood can only be attained by the appropriate relation which the self institutes between its natures (temporal/eternal; finite/infinite). Third, the self fails to achieve selfhood because it does not want to take up the task of selfhood and this is what Kierkegaard calls forgetfulness. Forgetfulness, therefore, is the wilful act of the agent to avoid the task of selfhood. Fourth, Kierkegaard traces the institution

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<sup>68</sup> *Practice in Christianity*, p.190.

<sup>69</sup> Rasmussen, *Irony and Witness*, p.126.

of forgetfulness to the agent through the surreptitious elevation of reason. Fifth, as a means to overcome forgetfulness, and thus become a self, Kierkegaard proposes *concurrency*. *Concurrency*, Kierkegaard argues, is a reordering of the faculties in a non-hierarchical relation. Finally, I will compare forgetfulness with despair and examine the question first treated in my discussion of Hamann: self-deception at the centre of a false conception of selfhood.

In CUP, Kierkegaard articulates the ethical claim placed on each individual in the following manner:

Ethics focuses upon the individual, and ethically understood it is every individual's task to become a whole human being. Whether no one achieves it is irrelevant; the main thing is that the requirement is there;...ethics does not haggle.<sup>70</sup>

In CUP Kierkegaard calls this wholeness "becoming subjective". What is subjectivity? It is a self which is keenly interested in his or her own existence, and approaches existence not from an objective point but from a concern about one's subjectivity. But this idea of subjectivity is described by Kierkegaard in more technical language which highlights what he understands by wholeness. Becoming a whole human being is the unity of our dialectical natures in a relational synthesis. While Kierkegaard articulates this idea most clearly in SUD, it was present in an abbreviated form in CUP: "the existing subject...is grounded in the subject's synthesis, in his being an existing infinite spirit."<sup>71</sup> And just as in SUD, Kierkegaard articulated the elements to be brought into a relational synthesis:

But what is existence? It is that child who is begotten by the infinite and the finite, the eternal and the temporal, and is therefore continually striving, that is, the thinking subject is existing. Only the systematicians and the objectivists have ceased being human beings and have become speculative thought, which dwells in pure being.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> CUP, p.346.

<sup>71</sup> CUP, p.82.

<sup>72</sup> CUP, p.92. See also CUP, p.301-302. Westphal has noted that this dialectical definition of the self anticipates that found in SUD; see Westphal, *Becoming a Self*, p.135. See also JP 56/VI B 49, 1845: "Man is blended in approximately the same way – finitude is like the child for whom it is expedient to come home early; infinitude is like the adult who wants to stay out at night – and the evening's leave-taking is puzzling." See also JP 55/VI A 102, 1845: "Who thinks of hitching Pegasus and an old nag

The employment of the term *synthesis* is key in this passage. It means, as in SUD, the dialectical components of the self are to be maintained in a relation or “synthesis”, and it is only in this act of maintaining a relation that the self is actually a self. Further, as Kierkegaard indicates, the self is not reducible to this dialectic but is the relation between them: “the child who is begotten”. In SUD, a failure in the synthesising act undermines the self, a point implied in the above passage: the advocates of speculative philosophy have failed to maintain the dialectical relation and as such dwell in “pure being”. In this respect, I take Kierkegaard to be making the following point: the self is composed of a synthesis, which the self is responsible for maintaining. This Kierkegaard calls the demand of becoming subjective and it is this notion of the relational synthesis which is his definition of wholeness. As Pattison has observed: “subjectivity is not a capacity we simply possess. In order to be subjective, we have to become subjective, and we only become subjective by actively engaging ourselves in the process subjectively, which, as Kierkegaard also emphasizes, can occur only by our doing so freely. And this, in Kierkegaard’s terms, is to say that the issue is an essentially ethical one.”<sup>73</sup> In this way, the task of becoming subjective is an activity with which the agent is charged. While Kierkegaard ties this view of agency to his understanding of the individual’s relation to Christianity, to which I will return, “the possibility of taking such a stance is itself pretheological”, as Pattison has commented. Which is to say, it is a requirement placed upon each self regardless of whether this is actually achieved and whether once achieved this leads to the acceptance of God’s salvation, i.e. the forgiveness of sin.<sup>74</sup>

If, as Kierkegaard argues, the self is tasked with achieving wholeness through the relational dialectical synthesis, then it is also the case that the self can choose to take up this task or not, which Kierkegaard terms freedom in SUD. It is precisely this decision to avoid the task which is forgetfulness:

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together to one carriage for a ride? And yet this is what it is to exist for one compounded of finitude and infinitude.” Significant to note in these entries is the construal of the dialectical elements of the self in terms of activity. The dialectical conception of the self is one which is consistent throughout Kierkegaard’s authorship.

<sup>73</sup> Pattison, *Philosophy*, p.38. As Stewart has also commented, ethics in CUP “concerns one’s own existence and self-understanding”; Stewart, *Relations to Hegel*, p.518.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.* See CUP, p.130-131.

Now, all in all, there are two ways for an existing individual: either he can do everything to forget that he is existing and thereby manage to become comic (the comic contradiction of wanting to be a bird is no more comic than the contradiction of not wanting to be what one is, as *in casu* [in this case] an existing individual, just as in the use of language it is comic when someone forgets his name which signifies not so much forgetting his name as the singularity of his nature), because existence possesses the remarkable quality that an existing person exists whether he wants to or not; or he can direct all his attention to his existence.<sup>75</sup>

Kierkegaard articulates the choice that the self encounters: either accept existence by directing attention towards it or forget existence. That is, one does not as a matter of course direct attention towards one's existence, nor does one simply forget existence *because* of speculative thought. Rather, it is a wilful intentionality to withdraw from existence or to accept it.<sup>76</sup> Forgetfulness therefore (or taking existence seriously for that matter) is not something that just happens, instead it is a conscious act of the agent – the self “can do everything to forget that he is existing”.<sup>77</sup> Thus, both possibilities – accepting the task or forgetting it – are acts the self can choose to pursue. In short, there is intentionality behind the removal from existence just as there is intentionality in one's inhabitation of existence, in actively accepting and engaging in the task of wholeness.

If, then, the possibility is available not to be led to forgetfulness, as Kierkegaard argues in the above, then why does it? What advantage do we gain by forgetting existence? Better still, what advantage does an active forgetting of existence accomplish? The answer is it provides the possibility, however fantastical the results, to not be what we are, and willing to be a self, we will to be that which we are not or we will to be the wrong type of self, as the above passage makes clear:

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<sup>75</sup> CUP, p.120.

<sup>76</sup> For an alternative view of forgetfulness and speculation see Stewart, *Relations to Hegel*, p.483-488.

<sup>77</sup> See Pattison, *Philosophy*, p.37: “Kierkegaard does not simply condemn these differing versions of idealism as having forgotten what it is to exist. He also offers an account of why and how they come to forget existence that depicts them as attempts to avoid becoming aware of a deep pain inherent in the condition of subjective existence. Self-forgetting is not an arbitrary happenstance; it is the outcome of a motivated strategy of survival, but, Kierkegaard believes, the strategy is entirely misconceived and, therefore, doomed to failure.”

“of not wanting to be what one is, as *in casu* [in this case] an existing individual”.<sup>78</sup> This recalls the argument from SUD above: the wilful act of not being oneself is also willing to be the wrong kind of self.

But what exactly does this mean in the context of CUP? I propose it suggests the following: in the act of forgetting the self does not want to accept itself as a task, it wishes to forsake its responsibility for selfhood in terms of wholeness. Thus, in wilfully directing attention away from the act of becoming subjective, the self wants to see its self apart from the task of selfhood which existence demands.

The question remains, how does the self go about enacting forgetfulness? How does Kierkegaard describe the way in which we go about enacting a move away from existence in forgetfulness? As I argued earlier, Kierkegaard traces the genealogy of infinitude’s despair to the imagination. In CUP, I believe, he advances a similar argument. However, here the offending faculty is not the imagination but rather reason (designated at times as the understanding), or the thinking faculty.<sup>79</sup> In CUP, section II, chapter III, §3 Kierkegaard opens with the following:

Suppose, now, that speculative thought is in the right in mocking a trichotomy such as that a human being consists of soul, body, and spirit; suppose that the merit of speculative thought is to define the human being as spirit, and within this to construe the elements soul, consciousness, and spirit as stages of development in the same subject\* who is developing before us. It is another question whether a direct transfer of the scientific-scholarly to existence, which can happen all too easily, does not produce great confusion. In the scientific-scholarly, the movement is from the lower to the higher, and to think becomes the highest. In the interpretation of world

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<sup>78</sup> Kierkegaard argues that regardless of whether one chooses engagement with or negligence of one’s existence, one can simply not be negligent because it is impossible to remove oneself from existence. This is why Kierkegaard calls it the comic.

<sup>79</sup> In his writings Kierkegaard never articulates a comprehensive treatment of the facultive nature, nor does he discuss in detail the interaction between the faculties. As Rasmussen has shown, Kierkegaard seems to be “unconcerned with articulating a full definition of human rationality and its appropriate operations.” Rasmussen also correctly notes that Kierkegaard rarely employs the term *Fornuft* [reason/Vernunft] and prefers to use *Forstanden* [the understanding/Verstand]. Rasmussen highlights that this is somewhat anomalous “given that many thinkers of the age sought to distinguish the capacities of understanding and reason precisely.” Rasmussen, *Irony and Witness*, p.89, fn #18 & #19. It is my view, however, that this appears anomalous only if we take Kierkegaard to be pursuing an articulation of a complex theory of knowledge, which he clearly is not.

history, the movement is from the lower to the higher; the stages of imagination and feeling are left behind, and the stage of thinking as the highest is last.<sup>80</sup>

The act of appropriating this view of history (the necessary unfolding and realisation of rationality) is down to the agent. Thus, the elevation of thinking is our responsibility because it is achieved in this act of appropriation. Reason is thus elevated by the agent whether she accomplishes this by appropriating the notion of realised rationality or through an individual act which is then associated with the development and realisation of rationalised history.<sup>81</sup> This acceptance of thinking as the highest is the problematic issue because when applied to existence, as Kierkegaard claims, it causes “great confusion.” As Kierkegaard wrote in a journal entry: “Reason minimizes everything that imagination and feeling hit upon...do feeling and imagination not belong as essentially to man as reason, or will reason perhaps first undertake to prove that it is the highest, and whom does it want to persuade – itself?...it is just as arbitrary to exalt reason as it is to exalt feeling and imagination exclusively...for reason is just as selfish and deceptive as feeling and imagination.”<sup>82</sup> The question is, what type of problematic confusion does this effect?

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<sup>80</sup> CUP, p.343-344. Kierkegaard also ties this to the view of the necessary unfolding of world-history in Hegelianism. The idea of necessity is equally important to Kierkegaard’s understanding of failed agency. In terms of the elevation of thinking to the highest status, the argument is that Hegelian philosophy makes two claims which Kierkegaard finds problematic: (1) that history is culminating in the realisation of reason; (2) that our agency is abrogated given that we find ourselves *in* history so that the highest task which philosophy places before humanity – the realisation of reason – is not addressed to the particular agent. We simply have achieved the highest task assigned to humanity by virtue of living at this time and place in history. Kierkegaard makes the straightforward point that if this is the case then freedom is undermined and the self is sheer necessity or finitude. I will address this part of Kierkegaard’s argument in the next chapter. Moreover, Kierkegaard argues, in identifying ourselves with this view of history we are acting as if we had freedom. That is, we require freedom in order to deny freedom; see Kosch, *Freedom and Reason*, p.93.

<sup>81</sup> On the other hand, Kierkegaard also suggests that the elevation of reason occurs separate from this view of history. We raise reason because the speculative process demands the achievement of the absolute beginning with which logic begins and the faculty for doing this is reason. The central point for the speculative system is the need to secure the absolute starting point and the faculty associated with executing this task is reason. Reason, although identified with an onto-metaphysical view of history, is elevated because it is required to meet the formal demand of the absolute beginning. See chapter two for a discussion of the absolute, presuppositionless beginning.

<sup>82</sup> JP 47/V A 20/JJ: 213; 1844. The term *reason* in this passage occurs in the Danish as *Forstanden* which, as noted earlier, is actually *the understanding*. This choice by the English translators serves to highlight the ambiguity in Kierkegaard and his lack of commitment to one particular term for the faculty of thought. In this instance, the translators have themselves diverged from the original text.

Kierkegaard articulates the issue in the following way:

Precisely because abstract thinking is *sub specie aeterni*, it disregards the concrete, the temporal, the becoming of existence, and the difficult situation of the existing person because of his being composed of the eternal and the temporal situated in existence.\* If abstract thinking is assumed to be the highest, it follows that scientific scholarship and thinkers proudly abandon existence and leave the rest of us to put up with the worst. Yes, something follows from this also for the abstract thinker himself – namely, that in one way or another he must be absentminded, since he, too, is an existing person.<sup>83</sup>

I take Kierkegaard to be sharpening his definition of thinking by describing it here as *abstract thinking*. It is this version of elevated reason, as the above passage indicates, which Kierkegaard views as problematic for existence: “If abstract thinking is assumed to be the highest, it follows that scientific scholarship and thinkers proudly abandon existence and leave the rest of us to put up with the worst.” But this is not all, because Kierkegaard indicates what exactly he finds problematic with granting abstract thinking the primary position: “it disregards the concrete, the temporal, the becoming of existence, and the difficult situation of the existing person because of his being composed of the eternal and the temporal situated in existence.”

How does abstract thinking come to “disregard” the self? What activity does Kierkegaard associate with abstract thinking in making this claim? In abstracting from existence, the self is cut off from its temporality, from its situatedness in existence. It is this act of abstraction, through reason, that Kierkegaard identifies as the problematic element because such an abstraction renders the self as pure being, *sub specie aeterni*, removed from becoming a self. As seen in the discussion of the imagination in SUD, it leads the self way from itself through a process of infinitizing which Kierkegaard describes as a subjugation of the finite. Here, through reason, Kierkegaard argues that it is the process of abstraction which leads the self away from itself by disregarding the temporal becoming of the self.

Thus, abstract thinking cannot account for the self as a dialectical relation in existence. It cannot do so because the specific function of abstract thinking is to

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<sup>83</sup> CUP, p.301.

subtract all particularity in order to achieve the universal. It is important to recognise, however, that Kierkegaard does not argue against the permissibility of abstract thinking *in totum*: “That objective thinking has its reality is not denied, but in relation to all thinking in which precisely subjectivity must be accentuated it is a misunderstanding. Even if a man his whole life through occupies himself exclusively with logic, he still does not become logic; he himself therefore exists in other categories.”<sup>84</sup> Rather, when abstract thinking is applied to the question of selfhood it produces an image of the self which is faulty. In this respect, abstract thinking is not able to consider the self in temporality, as a becoming, because it views selfhood as an abstract concept. Which is to say, abstract thinking renders the self as an object: “The process of becoming is the thinker’s very existence, from which he can indeed thoughtlessly abstract and become an object.”<sup>85</sup> As Kierkegaard claims, “To give thinking supremacy over everything else is gnosticism”, which recalls Hamann’s critique of Kant.<sup>86</sup> In other words, it is a denial of the embodiment of the self, the dialectical relation between the infinite and the finite in existence.

Kierkegaard argues, therefore, that the self willingly engages in abstract thinking and promotes this type of activity because the self does not want to be itself. The self wants to forget existence and the demands of selfhood. As such, the choice to engage in abstract thinking is a conscious act in order to avoid selfhood. This is why, I believe, Kierkegaard describes the elevation of reason in this way. For Kierkegaard, therefore, at the root of the systematic project is a deeply existential motivation, namely that it provides the means to avoid the task of selfhood, and this appeal is precisely why individuals engage in this particular practice.

The question is, of course, what does Kierkegaard offer as an alternative? More specifically, how does the self institute a healthy relation within itself, i.e. unity, which avoids forgetfulness and its existential consequences? What form of

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<sup>84</sup> CUP, p.93.

<sup>85</sup> CUP, p.93; Kierkegaard was not the first individual to level this complaint against post-Kantian thought. In fact it was Hölderlin who first raised this point in his critique of Fichte. As Bowie has argued, “Hölderlin poses the problem of the identity of the self in paradigmatic fashion. How does one avoid a fixed, dead identity that would be the result of total self-objectification, in which the point of being a living, moving self is lost?”; see Bowie, *Aesthetics and Subjectivity*, p.85

<sup>86</sup> CUP, p.341. Hamann was likely the source for this particular description. Of Kant’s claims regarding *a priori* cognition, Hamann detected “a *gnostic* hatred of Matter”; see N III, p.285/R VII, p.7.

cure does Kierkegaard propose as a means to counteract the malady of forgetfulness? Kierkegaard, I believe, advances an argument he calls *concurrency* [*Samtidigheden*].<sup>87</sup> He articulates this in the following way:

Scientific scholarship orders the elements of subjectivity within a knowledge about them, and this knowledge is the highest, and all knowledge is an annulment of, a removal from existence. In existence this does not hold true. If thinking makes light of imagination, then imagination in turn makes light of thinking, and the same with feeling. The task is not to elevate the one at the expense of the other, but the task is equality, concurrency, and the medium in which they are united is *existing*.<sup>88</sup>

In this passage Kierkegaard reiterates the central themes previously discussed while also spelling out his proposed cure for forgetfulness and thus the return to unity with which the self is charged. Of particular importance is Kierkegaard's designation of the appropriate non-hierarchical relation between the faculties – imagination, feeling, and thinking. Moreover, just as the self is charged with the task of maintaining the unity within the dialectical relational synthesis (infinitude and finitude; eternal and temporal) the self is also deemed to be responsible for maintaining the appropriate relation amongst the faculties. Recalling the above discussion, I take Kierkegaard to be reinforcing his point that the root of forgetfulness is located in the elevation of thinking and the remedy for becoming a self lies in correcting this. Which is to say, it is this primordial relation of the faculties which offers the potential to both disregard the ethical task of wholeness, as well as the location where unity can be achieved: “By the positing of the scientific-scholarly process rather than existential concurrency (as task), havoc is wrought with life...And in the individual the point is to enoble the successive in *concurrency*...to unite the elements of life in concurrency, that is precisely the task.”<sup>89</sup> Through

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<sup>87</sup> In the Hong translation the term *Samtidigheden* has been translated as *contemporaneity*. I have chosen *concurrency* because the idea of contemporaneity in PF is a particular notion denoting one's existential relationship to the God-man and is present in Kierkegaard's authorship in these terms; see PF, p.89-91. The passages that follow are from the Hong edition but have been altered slightly in this regard.

<sup>88</sup> CUP, p.347-348/SKS, 7, p.318; translation modified.

<sup>89</sup> CUP, p.348/SKS, 7, p.318. See also CUP, p.346-347/SKS, 7, p.317: “In a scientific-scholarly way it may indeed be quite proper – and perhaps masterly that I am far from assuming to be a judge – it may be quite proper to ascend abstractly-dialectically in psychological categories from the psychical-somatic to the physical, to the pneumatic – but this scientific-scholarly output must nevertheless not

articulating concurrency as an alternative to the false elevation of reason Kierkegaard could also, in this respect, be viewed as proposing the disciplining of reason. While he does not make this connection in CUP, in an early journal entry Kierkegaard quotes directly from Hamann's letter to Lindner discussed earlier and refers again to Hamann in a similar manner in a later entry.<sup>90</sup>

Regarding concurrency, Kierkegaard remarks in CUP that a failure to engage with this task results in a fragmented self: "... just as it is a mediocre existence when the adult cuts away all communication with childhood and is a fragmentary adult, so is it a poor existence when a thinker, who is indeed also an existing person, has given up imagination and feeling, which is just as lunatic as giving up the understanding [*Forstanden*]."<sup>91</sup> As this passage indicates, the failure to maintain this unity is attributable to the individual agent. This is seen when one pays attention to the claim that the self has "cut away" and forsaken the other faculties in the elevation of the understanding (or reason).

However, the individual who enacts this *concurrency* becomes, in Kierkegaard's terms, a subjective thinker.<sup>92</sup> And it is the subjective thinker who is passionately concerned about his own existence: "...the subjective thinker is an existing person, and yet he is a thinking person. He does not abstract from existence and from the contradiction, but he is in them...".<sup>93</sup> Which is to say, in taking up the task of concurrency, the self is able to approach his own existence with interest and passion, as opposed to abstract, indifferent, objectivity: "All existence issues are passionate, because existence, if one becomes conscious of it, involves passion. To think about them so as to leave out passion is not to think about them at all, is to forget the point that one indeed is oneself an existing person."<sup>94</sup>

The subjective, passionate existence made possible through the reordering of the faculties in a non-hierarchical mode is, in the first instance, a "pretheological" or

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play have with existence...In existence, the important thing is that all elements are present simultaneously. With respect to existence, thinking is not at all superior to imagination and feeling but is coordinate. In existence, the supremacy of thinking plays havoc."; translations modified.

<sup>90</sup> JP 1540/ I A 237; Sept. 12, 1836; JP 1559/X<sup>2</sup> A 225/NB14: 51; 1849.

<sup>91</sup> CUP, p.348.

<sup>92</sup> CUP, p.350.

<sup>93</sup> CUP, p.351.

<sup>94</sup> CUP, p.350-351.

ethical demand placed on all individuals, as noted at the start of this discussion. However, for Kierkegaard this opens up the possibility of, and is in fact the necessary condition for, relation to God and more specifically Christ, the paradox: “Subjectivity culminates in passion, Christianity is paradox; paradox and passion fit each other perfectly, and paradox perfectly fits a person situated in the extremity of existence.”<sup>95</sup> Thus, the forgetfulness which the self engenders therefore has deeply theological consequences for the individual such that to forget oneself is not only to avoid selfhood in an ethical sense, but to foreclose a relation to Christ: “At its highest, inwardness in an existing subject is passion; truth as a paradox corresponds to passion, and that truth becomes a paradox is grounded precisely in its relation to an existing subject. In this way the one corresponds to the other. In forgetting that one is an existing subject, one loses passion, and in return, truth does not become a paradox”.<sup>96</sup> And as Kierkegaard further claims, the self cannot become a self without the relation to the divine: “It is really the God-relationship that makes a human being a human being, but this is what he would lack.”<sup>97</sup> In short, becoming subjective and *via* this route a whole self is, to recall SUD, the task of the individual in order to properly relate to itself and through this to open up the possibility of “resting in the power that established it”, namely God.

In the above I have presented Kierkegaard’s conception of forgetfulness in CUP. I have shown Kierkegaard’s arguments relating to forgetfulness are structurally similar to those he provides for despair. In presenting forgetfulness, I therefore drew on the arguments developed in the discussion on despair in order to clarify aspects of the argument in CUP which are not fully developed in that text. I argued that forgetfulness is a willed position the self takes up in order to avoid the task of becoming a self. Furthermore, as in SUD, I argued that Kierkegaard traces the enactment of forgetfulness to a hierarchy established within the faculties. Different from infinitude’s despair where the focus is on the imagination, in CUP Kierkegaard traces the root of forgetfulness to a false hierarchy created through a surreptitious elevation of reason. I then turned to consider Kierkegaard’s proposed cure which he calls *concurrency*. Similar to the coordination of the imagination with the will,

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<sup>95</sup> CUP, p.230.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid., p.199.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid., p.244.

*concurrency* denotes the non-hierarchical relation reason must occupy in relation to the other faculties. As Kierkegaard argues, the unity of the self, the task of becoming a self can only be achieved if one maintains a non-hierarchical relation of the faculties. It is through this avenue that the self is able to pursue its task of unity and thereby fulfil its requirement to engage with selfhood. Crucially, this relation constitutes the means by which the self relates to God, both in terms of an ontological relation and the individual's relation to Christ.

In presenting Kierkegaard's view of the unified self in SUD and CUP, the existential motivation for disregarding this task, the origin of the fault and his proposed cure for the existential crises of despair and forgetfulness, a final issue remains, namely the status of the faulty conception of the self. In the form of a series of questions the issue is the following: Does the self actually become fragmented? That is to say, in detecting the centre of the problem of forgetfulness and infinitude's despair in the surreptitious elevation of reason or the imagination, is Kierkegaard suggesting the self actually achieves such a hierarchy? Can the self *actually* create a false hierarchy within its faculties? And related to this, can the self *actually* abstract from existence and become mere infinitude?

These questions are best clarified by considering two related terms Kierkegaard introduces in CUP: abstraction's language [*Abstractionens Sprog*] and abstract thinking's language [*abstrakte Tænkningens Sprog*].<sup>98</sup> Kierkegaard asks with regard to the latter, "What does it mean, then, in abstract thinking's language to ask about actuality in the sense of existence when abstraction expressly ignores it?" With regard to the former, Kierkegaard states: "In abstraction's language [*Abstractionens Sprog*], that which is the difficulty of existence and of the existing person never actually appears; even less is the difficulty explained."<sup>99</sup>

Kierkegaard does not provide any detailed analysis of these terms but the introduction of them points toward understanding him advancing the following argument: in elevating reason the self comes to view itself according to categories which are acceptable to rational criteria. As he writes: "All logical thinking is in

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<sup>98</sup> CUP, p.332/ SKS, 7, p.303. The term in the Hong edition appears as "the language of abstract thinking".

<sup>99</sup> CUP, p.301/ SKS, 7, p.274. In the Hong edition this is rendered as "the language of abstraction". I have adopted the alternative *abstraction's language* as this, I feel, better reflects the emphasis present in Danish. The remainder of the passage is drawn from the Hong edition.

abstraction's language and *sub specie aeterni*. To think existence in this way is to disregard the difficulty, that is, ...the thinker himself ...in a process of becoming."<sup>100</sup> As this suggests, the deliverances of abstract thinking remove the self as task and by appropriating this mode of thought as defining the self, the self forgets existence and the ethical task of becoming whole. Thus, the project which abstract thinking promotes rests on questionable grounds: "The dubiousness of abstraction manifests itself precisely in connection with all existential questions, from which abstraction removes the difficulty by omitting it and then boasts of having explained everything."<sup>101</sup>

As I understand Kierkegaard, the elevation of thinking in the speculative project, just as in the elevation of imagination in SUD, rests on a faulty notion. This also indicates, however, that abstracting from existence does not achieve an actual separation of the infinite from the finite, or an abstraction from existence. As seen earlier, Kierkegaard claims that the self cannot *actually* abstract from its existence, "because existence possesses the remarkable quality that an existing person exists whether he wants to or not".<sup>102</sup> In this respect it is chimerical, a form of self-deception: "The speculative result is an illusion insofar as the existing subject, thinking, wants to abstract from his existing and wants to be *sub specie aeterni* [under the aspect of eternity]."<sup>103</sup> In other words, abstracting from existence, through a wilful negligence, cannot actually be achieved. As Kierkegaard writes, "Whereas an actual human being, composed of the infinite and finite and infinitely interested in existing, has his actuality precisely in holding these together, such an abstract thinker is...a fantastic creature who lives in...pure being".<sup>104</sup> Instead, it is an issue of self-deception: "in the use of language it is comic when someone forgets his name which signifies not so much forgetting his name as the singularity of his nature".<sup>105</sup>

In this respect, Kierkegaard is not arguing that the self actually separates itself from its finitude, abstracts into pure being and becomes, as he articulates in

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<sup>100</sup> CUP, p.308.

<sup>101</sup> CUP, p.302.

<sup>102</sup> CUP, p.120; see above, p. 136.

<sup>103</sup> CUP, p.81.

<sup>104</sup> CUP, p.302.

<sup>105</sup> CUP, p.120; see above, p. 136.

SUD, mere infinitude. As he states in SUD, “A person cannot rid himself of the relation to himself any more than he can rid himself of his self, which after all, is one and the same thing, since the self is the relation to oneself.”<sup>106</sup> He is arguing that the self comes to view itself in these terms and while this is illusory, it is devastating for the self because it undermines healthy selfhood as a unity and institutes despair. In other words, it is to adopt a particular one-sided conception of the self as definitive, thereby precluding other conceptions, which results in deep existential consequences. A contemporary analogy is found in materialistic explanations of what constitutes a human being which exclude, for example, any possible reference to the spiritual nature of existence.

This recalls an issue raised in the last chapter. Specifically, both Kierkegaard and Hamann argue that language is the source of error. In relation to the current discussion, one could argue that a faulty conception of the self occurs via a seduction of language. Which is to say, in accepting a conception of selfhood which meets the criteria of rationality, the self fails to maintain the correct view of its selfhood. The self, in this sense, is actually seduced by language. But even more devastating, the self is self-deceived in language about itself.<sup>107</sup> As I have argued, this self-deception occurs because the self does not want to be a self. As Kierkegaard articulated in SUD and CUP, this is the result of a complex act of the agent. Thus, behind such a faulty conception of the self is a wilful forgetting of oneself’s selfhood, which Kierkegaard diagnoses as despair and forgetfulness. But this seduction of language has further consequences because as Kierkegaard argued in CUP, it is to view the self as above existence, in the perspective of eternity, existing in pure being. In SUD, Kierkegaard sharpens this into a diagnosis of the self which ascribes to the itself divine predicates, further heightening the self’s despair in its alienation from its true ontological ground, i.e., God.

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<sup>106</sup> SUD, p.17.

<sup>107</sup> See also CA, 45-48.

## Conclusion

Both Hamann and Kierkegaard were concerned with more than a philosophical critique of their contemporaries. Their concern was to diagnose and to cure the existential crises which originated in faulty conceptions of selfhood and resulted in the self's alienation from itself and ultimately from God. Thus, in a set of striking arguments Hamann and Kierkegaard focussed their attention on the ways in which the self contributed and instituted faulty conceptions which lead to the existential crises. For Hamann this was the result of the elevation of reason and the resulting *rational self* held to be the pinnacle of selfhood amongst his "Enlightened" contemporaries. Kierkegaard, in a similar manner, traced faulty conceptions of selfhood to the unwarranted elevation of the imagination (despair) and reason (forgetfulness). Further, both Hamann and Kierkegaard laid bare the root of the problem having shown the problems engendered by these hierarchies lay in a form of self-deception. Their writings move beyond this as well, as they also proposed a cure to overcome the existential consequences of the self's alienation from itself and the divine. For Hamann this was expressed as *companionability* and for Kierkegaard as *concurrency*. Both understood these notions in a similar way: as a non-hierarchical relation between the faculties. Such a view enables the self, as Hamann and Kierkegaard held, to relate properly not only to its own selfhood but ultimately to God.

Despite the similarities, one should caution against strong claims of influence, as I noted in the introductory chapter. Thus, it is recognised that a significant tradition of criticism of post-Kantianism informed Kierkegaard's writings and that many of the themes discussed in this chapter are present there too. For example in Jacobi (to whom Kierkegaard also gestures in CUP) and his critique of the pernicious demands of reason, and the Early German Romantics in their criticisms of the rationalisation of the world, resulting in a loss of passion, imagination, and feeling. At the same time it has to be acknowledged that Kierkegaard commended Hamann's existential protest. Given that Kierkegaard is notoriously vague when it comes to his sources, such explicit esteem of an individual, on such a central topic in his authorship, invites his readers to hypothesise as to what he found to be so praiseworthy. To this end, I have provided a series of arguments from Hamann's writings which have parallels in Kierkegaard's mature

existential diagnosis and cure. The similarities in their respective accounts suggests that Hamann contributed to Kierkegaard's thought. If this is in fact the case, then it would be the highest praise for Hamann's genius which Kierkegaard could offer.

## Chapter Four

### Reflection & The Dialectical Self: Pantheism, Infinitude, Socratic Ignorance, and the Word

#### Introduction

Is it possible to have knowledge of ourselves as these knowers when it is ourselves being known? Is self-knowledge possible, that is, are we able to gain purchase on the self without reducing the self to its own descriptions or elevating the infinite self at the expense of the finite? It is these questions which I believe are the centre of Kierkegaard's numerous discussions of selfhood and which go to the centre of his authorship. I will devote this chapter to exploring these core questions.

This chapter is divided into four parts. In section one, *Pantheism, Metaphysics and the Loss of Infinitude*, I will offer the reason that propels Kierkegaard to take up the issue of self-knowledge. The question that I am answering in part one, therefore, is what drives Kierkegaard to theorise about the infinite self and its relation to finitude, as outlined in the previous chapter? My argument is that much that Kierkegaard has to say – both critically and appreciatively – about the self can only be understood by answering this very question. I will demonstrate that Kierkegaard takes this up because of a loss of infinitude which he detects at the centre of Hegelian variations. In this section, therefore, I will show that the central problem with Hegelian thought that Kierkegaard identifies is that it reduces the self to finitude. For Kierkegaard the loss of infinitude undermines his conception of subjectivity at the centre of his writings. To accomplish this task I will examine Kierkegaard's arguments against this loss of infinitude found in CUP and SUD.

Section two, *Regaining Infinitude: Problems with Reflection and Romanticism*, will examine Kierkegaard's concern with rehabilitating infinitude. For Kierkegaard, the nature of the dialectical self requires the inter-relationship between infinitude and finitude, and only in such a relation can the self be truly called a self. In order to repair the Hegelian loss of infinitude, Kierkegaard moves to examine the ways in which infinitude might be accessed. As I will demonstrate however, Kierkegaard is equally critical of post-Kantian variants of the attempt to secure the

infinite nature of the self. Specifically I will focus on two separate traditions against which Kierkegaard directs his criticisms. First, I will show the problems that Kierkegaard identifies with a Fichtean account of reflection, arguing that while *reflection theory* achieves the goal of accessing infinitude it does so at the cost of finitude and thus ultimately fails. Second, I will turn to consider Early German Romantic theories of accessing the self, with particular focus on Kierkegaard's criticisms of art and poetry as a means to secure an adequate vision of selfhood.

Following this, section three - *Regaining the Dialectical Self: Limits and Possibility* – will be devoted to reconstructing from Kierkegaard's writings his view of the possibility of gaining knowledge of the dialectical self. In particular, I will outline a threefold strategy that he pursues and in so doing demonstrate the affinities that Kierkegaard shares with Romanticism. Specifically, I will argue that Kierkegaard develops the three following arguments in order to substantiate his claims for a dialectical self: (1) a priority of being over thought; (2) an appeal to feeling, i.e. passion; (3) a circumscribed role of reflection. While Kierkegaard outlines the possibility of gaining purchase on the dialectical self in this way, he does also, at the same time, point to the limits inherent in our ability gain knowledge of the self. Thus, Kierkegaard's arguments are for a minimal conception of selfhood which the self can achieve but falls well short of the demand for full self-disclosure central to post-Kantian varieties of reflection and access.

The fourth and final section, *Know Thyself! Socratic Ignorance and the Word*, will consider Kierkegaard's description of the limits of self-knowledge through a discussion of his appeal to a Hamannian understanding of Socratic ignorance. First, I will outline Hamann's articulation of this principle as found in *Socratic Memorabilia*. Focussing on his discussion of the limits of knowledge in general and self-knowledge in particular, I will show from Hamann's writing that Socratic ignorance not only indicates the limits of self-knowledge but is the point at which the self must arrive in order to gain a full image of the self. Turning to Kierkegaard, I intend to demonstrate that the central role of Socratic ignorance in his writings has its origin in Hamann. As such, I will follow a similar approach as that pursued in my discussion of Hamann. Namely, I will argue that Kierkegaard appeals to Socratic ignorance as a means to articulate the limits of self-knowledge and that, further, the limit one reaches is a propaedeutic to receive full self-knowledge.

Upon completion of the above discussion, I will then turn to consider – first Hamann and then Kierkegaard – the claim that they both advance: true self-knowledge can only be received from outwith the self, namely through the divine revelation in the Scriptures. Concentrating on Hamann first, I will argue that Hamann’s conception of the limits of self-knowledge is rooted in his view that we are dependent upon God for our being. In this way, Hamann argues, it is only through a relation to the divine that the self can receive its true image and end. Turning to Kierkegaard, I will show that he follows a nearly identical path to that of Hamann. In particular, I will highlight Kierkegaard’s conception of selfhood as being *reflected in the mirror of the Word*. As I will show, Kierkegaard claims that in order for the self to be properly reflected in the Word, the self must know itself beforehand. This, as will be demonstrated, substantiates Kierkegaard’s threefold argument for a limited, yet indispensable, view of the self which the self gains of itself. That is, prior to receiving true self-knowledge in the Word, the self must have a conception of itself and in so doing come up against the limits of self-knowledge. For Kierkegaard, this point at which the self arrives in its limited knowledge of itself, again described as Socratic ignorance, is the point at which the true image of the self can be received through the divine revelation.

## **I. Pantheism, Metaphysics and The Loss of Infinitude**

Kierkegaard is addressing the problem regarding the loss of the self which is understood as constituted as a dialectical relation between the infinite and the finite. In this section I will examine Kierkegaard’s treatment of a self which has lost infinitude or where infinitude is reduced to finitude. Throughout his authorship Kierkegaard has several terms for finitude: immediacy, necessity. Essentially, what he means is that a self which does not have infinitude is a self described as part of a necessary, historical-causal nexus. It is a self which lacks agency because it is wholly determined as mere finitude. Just as Kierkegaard has several terms to describe finitude, he also adopts differing terms for the positions which advocate such a self depending on his argumentative strategy. While there exist conceptual distinctions between these terms, I take Kierkegaard to be making a larger general point regarding the self as mere finitude. These terms are: world-history, the system,

Christendom, and pantheism. Kierkegaard argues that a loss of infinitude results in the loss of the personal *I*. But this has important qualifications attached to it as will become evident. The main point which I wish to make is that a loss of infinitude is a loss of the self, the *I*, arguments for which he pursues in CUP and SUD. I shall take these in turn.

In CUP Kierkegaard articulates the issue as follows:

If world history is the history of the human race, it follows automatically that I do not come to see the ethical in it. What I do come to see must correspond to the abstraction that the human race is, must be something just as abstract. The ethical, on the other hand, is predicated on individuality and to such a degree that each individual actually and essentially comprehends the ethical only in himself, because it is his co-knowledge with God. In other words, although in a certain sense the ethical is infinitely abstract, in another sense it is infinitely concrete, indeed, the most concrete of all, because it is dialectically for every human being as this individual human being.

Thus the observer sees world history in purely metaphysical categories, and he sees it speculatively as the immanence of cause and effect, ground and consequent. Whether he is able to discern a *τέλος* for the whole human race, I do not decide, but that *τέλος* is not the ethical *τέλος*, which is for individuals, but is a metaphysical *τέλος*. Insofar as the individuals participate in the history of the human race by their deeds, the observer does not see these deeds as traced back to the individuals and to the ethical but sees them as traced away from the individuals and to the totality. Ethically, what makes the deed the individual's own is the intention, but this is precisely what is not included in world history, for here it is the world-historical intention that matters.<sup>1</sup>

Kierkegaard argues here that a view of world-history, propagated by his Hegelian contemporaries,<sup>2</sup> is unable to account for individuality because it has lost the ethical. The main point conveyed here is summed up in the reference to the “metaphysical categories” which are the “immanence of cause and effect, ground and

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<sup>1</sup> CUP, p.155.

<sup>2</sup> See Stewart, *Relations to Hegel*, p.453-466.

consequent.” This means simply that if one views world-history as an adequate description of humanity then there is no place for freedom, i.e. ethics. It is to reduce the self to a mere causal nexus, giving up on a self which in some manner is deemed to be free in his or her actions. In such a description the self becomes part of a “metaphysical τέλος”, caught up in the stream of history towards which we are all inexorably moving out of necessity.<sup>3</sup> Kierkegaard claims that in such a view individual human actions cannot be seen as free, they are determined merely within a necessitated march of history towards a final metaphysical goal. Because of this, Kierkegaard makes the repeated claim that Hegelian philosophy lacks ethics.<sup>4</sup> In this way, individuals are stripped of their agency and moved towards a completion of history of which the individual has no say. For Kierkegaard this is the central problem of Hegelian philosophy, the loss of infinitude and therefore the individual, the I: “The newer science has wanted to teach us – and we have all learned all too much from it – to abolish the category of the individual and set up the generation. It is this πρότον ψευδος [proton pseudos] which has brought about an unrest, a hastiness, into existence, which makes an appalling bewilderment inescapable, and that extent also dishonesty”<sup>5</sup> The abolition of the I, which Kierkegaard describes as the establishment of the category of the generation, is an articulation of a loss of the self which is composed of the infinite and the finite. I take Kierkegaard to be communicating that the abolition of the *I* in the return to metaphysics – which he later identifies as pantheism – occurs through a loss of infinitude. Of course, Kierkegaard does not use this formulation directly in CUP, as it is not until SUD that his focus and terminology in this is sharpened. Below, I will show that this is the case.

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<sup>3</sup> See also JP 1616/X<sup>3</sup> A 786; 1851: “[The System] ‘goes forward by necessity,’ so it is said. And look, it never for a moment is able to advance as much as half an inch ahead of existence, which goes forward in freedom. This was the fraud.”

<sup>4</sup> The claim that the system has no ethics is made frequently but is not offered ‘any extended analyses’ in CUP. Stewart also notes that this was a view that Kierkegaard articulated not only under the pseudonym Climacus, but is a view which is advanced in *Stages on Life’s Way, Fear and Trembling* and in the Journals. See Stewart, *Relations to Hegel*, p.515 and fn. 287-289. For Kierkegaard’s argument in CUP regarding the relation of the ethical to the individual and the ethical heightening of the individual, see p.320.

<sup>5</sup> JP 654/ VIII<sup>2</sup> B 86; 1847. As will be recalled from chapter two, the notion of *proton pseudos* is a term that Hamann uses in his work. There is no clear indication that Kierkegaard has a specifically Hamannian use of the term in this context, although as a general diagnostic it could be argued that Kierkegaard was informed by Hamann’s work.

While Kierkegaard attaches central importance to his critique of the pantheistic turn towards race, the generation over the *I*, the single individual, it is clear that he uses this view to describe a number of consequences which result. For example, he claims that such a description of the self is one which has lost agency. It is a self which no longer exists as an individual. A favourite means for Kierkegaard to describe the resultant existential situation is to claim that such a construal of the self undermines the self as task. As such, the self is seen as complete, not responsible for his or her own life. Importantly, Kierkegaard extends this into his deliberations of the effects such a view has upon Christian faith. He holds that an infiltration of an immanent metaphysics binds the self to history in such a way as to avoid responsibility. In this way, Kierkegaard is able to argue that if one were to hold such a view of the self then ethics would be lost. Kierkegaard's claim of a loss of ethics is essentially the straightforward view that in a pantheistic system individuals are no longer responsible for their actions. As Kierkegaard contends, "So-called pantheistic systems have frequently been cited and attacked by saying that they cancel freedom and the distinction between good and evil. This is perhaps expressed just as definitely by saying that every such system fantastically volatilizes the concept *existence*."<sup>6</sup> Under such a system, individuals are no longer required to act in order to bring about a state of affairs. Kierkegaard also suggests that it promotes moral and spiritual laziness: "In other words, continual association with the world-historical makes a person incompetent to act."<sup>7</sup> Drawing on a favoured analogy, Kierkegaard likens humanity under such a description as nothing more than an animal species, where what counts is not the individual but the mass:

In the animal world, the particular animal is related directly as specimen to species, participates as a matter of course in the development of the species...And yet it is of this confusion that modern speculative thought is, if not directly the cause, nevertheless often enough the occasion, so that the individual is regarded as related to the development of the human spirit as a matter of course (just as the animal specimen is related to the species)...which is both a self-contradiction and an ethical abomination.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> CUP, p.122.

<sup>7</sup> CUP, p.135.

<sup>8</sup> CUP, p.345. The issue in this section of CUP is, of course, specifically addressed to what Kierkegaard calls "development of spirit" which encompasses his views of the self as a task to be

According to Kierkegaard, this is akin to viewing humanity as nothing more than an animal species, one in which genetic traits – and perhaps even evolutionary changes – are transmitted from one generation to another in a process of cumulative advancement which Kierkegaard argues is what the development of spirit (or one’s religious life) becomes. Again, this is part and parcel of Kierkegaard’s overall view of the task of selfhood which is abolished. The loss of the infinite means the loss of the self as a dialectical relation for which we are responsible. Kierkegaard terms this as the self as becoming: “however much the subject has the infinite within himself, by existing he is in the process of becoming.”<sup>9</sup>

Kierkegaard writes: “Indeed, what is an individual existing human being? Our age knows all too well how little it is, but therein lies the specific immorality of the age. Every age has its own; the immorality of our age is perhaps not lust and pleasure and sensuality, but rather a pantheistic, debauched contempt for individual human beings.”<sup>10</sup> It is clear that the main problem that he sees is the removal of a personal *I*. Kierkegaard claims, in CUP, that a pantheistic description leads to the inability for the individual to appear: “what it means to be a human being, not what it means to be human in general...but what it means that we, you and I and he, are human beings, each one on his own.”<sup>11</sup> The central idea of CUP of a loss of the individual self is stated clearly in the journals, for example: “One of the tragedies of

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accomplished in light of Christian faith. As I have already argued, Kierkegaard views the infiltration of the pantheistic, finitised as thoroughgoing. While his main concern is the effect that this has on one’s view of the Christian faith (and particularly one’s personal relation to the Christian faith), it is clear that he sees the consequences as disastrous in all construals of subjectivity. In his early journals, Kierkegaard addresses this issue from the vantage point of a criticism of predestination. JP 1230/ I A 5; Aug 19, 1834: “The concept ‘predestination’ must be regarded as a thoroughgoing abortion. Doubtlessly having originated in order to relate freedom and God’s omnipotence, it solves the riddle by denying one of the concepts and consequently explains nothing.” See also JP 3550/X<sup>4</sup> A 180 and JP1231/ I A 7; Nov. 23, 1834. Kierkegaard maintained this view throughout his life; see JP 3550/ X<sup>4</sup> A 180; 1851.

<sup>9</sup> CUP, p.93. See also CUP, p.307: “Therefore, despite all his talking about process, Hegel does not understand world history in a becoming but by means of an illusion of the past understands it in a conclusiveness in which all becoming is excluded.” See also CUP, p.91.

<sup>10</sup>CUP, p.355 Kierkegaard identifies the problem with the world-historical view as the abolition of the individual, whereby the individual is caught up in the historical-causal nexus. Kierkegaard also addresses what happens to a conception of the divine in a pantheistic view which of course goes naturally with such a conception. The pantheistic turn, while notably discussed from the vantage point of the consequences this has for a notion of self-hood, is also related – as it must be – to a conception of the divine. See CUP, p.156; see also JP 1983/III A 38 /Not5:22; 1840.

<sup>11</sup> CUP, p.120.

modern times is precisely this – to have abolished the ‘I’, the personal ‘I’.”<sup>12</sup> In a striking image, Kierkegaard likens this loss of the personal ‘I’ to a shoal of herrings: “But there surely is a difference between a generation of human beings and a shoal of herring, although it has become very fashionable to prefer to amuse oneself with the play of colors of the shoal and to disdain individuals, who have no more value than herring.”<sup>13</sup>

In taking up this issue in CUP, Kierkegaard is clearly advancing a series of arguments against a view which he held to be widespread and popular amongst his intellectual contemporaries. But who does he have in mind precisely? While recent studies, most notably that of Jon Stewart, have identified Kierkegaard’s main targets as a group of Danish Hegelians and not Hegel himself, I believe that on this point Kierkegaard clearly holds Hegel to be responsible for propagating such a view. In a rare occurrence in Kierkegaard’s writings, he identifies Hegel directly in this manner: “How frequently have I sworn that Hegel basically regards men, paganly, as an animal-race endowed with reason. In an animal-race ‘the single individual’ is always lower than ‘race’. The human race always has the remarkable character that, just because every individual is created in the image of God, the ‘single individual’ is higher than the ‘race’.” Kierkegaard concludes this entry with the claim that “*here* is where the battle must be fought.”<sup>14</sup>

The consequences of a metaphysical return to pantheism results, again, in disastrous consequences for the self. Apart from Kierkegaard’s descriptions of this phenomenon, it is obvious that he is making a larger conceptual issue. A construal of history and our place in it reduces the self to a realm of necessity, as a metaphysical immanence of cause and effect. This idea comes into focus if we examine Kierkegaard’s position in SUD. Here he claims that such a view is the result of the loss of infinitude and it is by viewing his position there that we are able to gain an alternative perspective on his description in CUP.<sup>15</sup> The loss of infinitude is taken up

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<sup>12</sup> JP 656/ VIII<sup>2</sup> B 86; 1847.

<sup>13</sup> CUP, p.346; see also p.159.

<sup>14</sup> JP 1614/X<sup>2</sup> A 426/NB15:91; 1850.

<sup>15</sup> In SUD, Kierkegaard traces the loss of infinitude to despair. This view is present in the earlier CUP. I am not interested in this part of his argument at this point.

by Kierkegaard in SUD. My concern is not with his diagnosis of despair,<sup>16</sup> but instead I shall focus on his assessment of the self which is constituted merely by finitude. As we soon discover, themes present in CUP are taken up again in SUD:

To lack infinitude is despairing reductionism, narrowness. Of course, what is meant here is only ethical narrowness and limitation...the reductionism and narrowness involved in having lost oneself, *not by being volatilized in the infinite, but being completely finitized*, by becoming a number instead of a self, just one more man, just one more repetition of this everlasting *Einerlei* [one and the same].<sup>17</sup>

As I have already discussed, the loss of ethics is the result of finitising the self, removing the infinitude. What occurs through the pantheistic description of the self is a loss of infinitude or infinitude reduced to finitude.<sup>18</sup> While Kierkegaard extends his discussion of world-history in SUD to despair, it is clear that his treatment also illuminates his view of the loss of the infinite in CUP. This is seen by noting that Kierkegaard's critique in CUP of the self reduced to the generation, the mass is here repeated in SUD: the self is no longer a self but reduced to "a number", a "repetition of this everlasting *Einerlei*". Kierkegaard returns to this issue when he discusses the person of immediacy:

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<sup>16</sup> In CUP, Kierkegaard also identifies the loss of infinitude with despair. CUP, p.356: "That our age has taken refuge in the generation and has abandoned individuals has its basis quite correctly in an esthetic despair that has not reached the ethical." CUP, p.279: "One scorns being subjective, despises the category of individuality, wants to console oneself with the category of the race, but does not comprehend what cowardice and despair there are in the subject's grabbing for a glittering something and becoming nothing at all."

<sup>17</sup> SUD, p.33; emphasis mine. The Hong edition provides the German translation here which I have included. It could just as easily be translated as 'monotony'. This would accord well with the more common German use of the term.

<sup>18</sup> In chapter three I argued that the reduction of finitude to infinitude was the result of a complex process instituted through a misrelation in our faculties which results in despair. Furthermore, I argued that this should be understood in terms of forgetfulness which Kierkegaard addresses in CUP. The same diagnosis can be found in Kierkegaard's treatment of despair in SUD, but unlike his treatment of infinitude's despair, Kierkegaard does not advance an argument as to how this type of despair (finitude's lack of infinitude) is instituted by the agent in terms of a facultive misrelation. Nevertheless, the point is the same. One can understand a loss of infinitude as leading to despair which is instituted by the agent to avoid selfhood. This is a repeated theme in CUP; see, for example, CUP, p.146. Here Kierkegaard looks at the psychological motivation of absentmindedness associated with the 'world-historical' view. At the same time, it is possible to restrict a consideration of Kierkegaard's point to more formal considerations. That is, a Hegelian variation of pantheism results in a self which lacks the infinite and as such has disastrous moral and religious consequences.

Immediacy actually has no self, it does not know itself...The man of immediacy does not know himself, he quite literally identifies himself only by the clothes he wears, he identifies having a self by externalities...There is hardly a more ludicrous mistake, for a self is indeed infinitely distinct from an externality.<sup>19</sup>

Immediacy means for Kierkegaard an identification of the nature of the self with mere externalities, living in life without a view to the infinite.<sup>20</sup> This concept should not be confused with the concept of *the immediate* which was discussed in chapter two. Kierkegaard is making the point that a loss of infinitude occurs when the self is defined – by itself? – as the accidental of his existence. It is to view the self as determined solely by external factors, to see one's life as constituted by that which happens to the self or which can happen to the self by altering outward appearances. In this respect Kierkegaard can state that,

In a deeper sense, the whole question of the self becomes a kind of false door with nothing behind it in the background of his soul. He appropriates what he in his language calls his self, that is, whatever capacities, talents, etc. he may have; all these he appropriates but in an outward-bound direction...<sup>21</sup>

Again, here, one notes the existential-religious tone. The self of externality is not interested in the self of inner deepening. Such a self concerns itself with the outer of appearance, that by which we are judged by others in terms of socio-economic class, etc. But such a self is only defined by its self according to such standards. It understands selfhood as something to be gained or appropriated in external features. It is a self which lacks a true character because the character here is defined by one's place in the world and the use to which one commits his/her talents in succeeding. To view the self in such terms, which is a form of despair for Kierkegaard (albeit unconscious), is to define oneself according to the temporal of the finite. It is to remove a concern for the self, a concern which is lacking because of a loss of infinitude.

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<sup>19</sup> SUD, p.53.

<sup>20</sup> The notion of immediacy here recalls the Aesthete of E/O I and Judge Wilhelm's critique of immediacy in E/O II.

<sup>21</sup> SUD, p.56.

However, as I have also been arguing, a loss of infinitude not only has serious existential, moral, and religious repercussions, but it is in fact a loss of the self proper. The self, to recall Kierkegaard's definition presented in the last chapter, is the dialectical relating synthesis between the infinite and the finite. If the infinite (or the finite) is lost then there is no such thing as self. One can speak of a self, but such speaking is a "playing with words".<sup>22</sup> In reducing infinitude to finitude, by abolishing the infinite, one cannot have a self; in fact the self can never be found as Kierkegaard claims:

In a world-historical dialectic, individuals fade away into humankind; in a dialectic such as that, it is impossible to discover the you and me... even if new magnifying glasses for the concrete are invented.<sup>23</sup>

It is impossible to locate the self – the *I* – on such a conception because the pantheistic view removes the infinite from the self. The self, as both infinite and finite, cannot be reduced to the historical causal nexus. To do so is to undermine the infinitude of the self. This is why Kierkegaard claims that in such a description the *I* cannot be discovered. Significantly, the idea of discovery and the allusion to "magnifying glasses" or an optical metaphor is important for our further discussion to be taken up in the next sections. The question, then, is how do we find "the you and me", that is, the *I*, the self? Is it possible to have a self which is both infinite and finite? Or, in other terms, is it possible to speak of an *I* which is located within a historical, causal nexus without being fully determined thereby? Can we have a self constituted of infinitude and finitude without reducing the one to the other? These questions related to the dialectical nature of the self are also important to Kierkegaard's other concern: is it possible to locate the infinite self without giving up on finitude? Is it possible, in light of the pantheistic turn, to regain the infinite *I* without giving up on our finitude?

Kierkegaard's corrective is to offer the personal, individual *I*. Sometimes he calls this a self but it is best described in his oft used term "the single individual." But what does he mean by this? At the very minimum, it suggests that the *I* is a

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<sup>22</sup> SUD, p.51. See also SUD, p.33-34: "Surrounded by hordes of men, absorbed in all sorts of secular matters, more and more shrewd about the ways of the world – such a person forgets himself, forgets his name divinely understood... finds it too hazardous to be himself and far easier and safer to be like others, to become a copy, a number, as mass man."

<sup>23</sup> CUP, p.350.

composite relational synthesis of the infinite and finite. The question, then, is how do I know that I am such an individual? Can I know or recognise my infinitude? As Kierkegaard states in his journals, “Is it the infinite which unites men? No, it is the infinite which makes them into individuals [*Enkelte*].”<sup>24</sup> These are central questions not only for Kierkegaard but also for the post-Kantian tradition to which he is, in my view, clearly responding. It is only by understanding Kierkegaard’s position regarding the nature of the self as both infinite and finite that one can appreciate his various criticisms of post-Kantianism and his attempted goal of rehabilitating the single individual.

## II. Regaining Infinitude: Problems with Reflection and Romanticism

Kierkegaard’s central critique of Hegelianism is that it abolishes the personal *I* because it reduces the self to finitude, as I argued above. This diagnosis of the problem does not answer the following questions: is it possible to gain purchase on our infinitude? How is it that we know we are dialectically composed of finitude and infinitude? If, as Kierkegaard claims, we are a dialectical relation between the infinite and the finite (which he at other times describes as the eternal and temporal), how are we able to access our infinitude? In this section I will reconstruct Kierkegaard’s position according to these questions.

In the first part I will show that Kierkegaard is critical of post-Kantian attempts to gain access to infinitude through reflection. This will be accomplished by examining his abbreviated treatment of Fichte in his dissertation, as well as drawing on passages from CUP and the argument I previously developed in chapter two. Kierkegaard’s criticism of Fichte, and reflection in general, is twofold: (1) the achievement of access to infinitude in reflection is won at the cost of finitude. For Kierkegaard this means, of course, an alternative problem for his claim of the dialectical relation. What was gained in a Hegelian system, finitude, is lost in Idealism. (2) Access to infinitude through reflection claims to accomplish what it cannot because direct access is unavailable owing to the mediation of language and

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<sup>24</sup> JP 2086/XI<sup>2</sup> 361; 1854.

our temporality. If thought is dependent upon language, as I argued in chapter two, then it follows that direct access to the infinite is unavailable.

In the second part of this section I will turn to consider problems which arise in light of Kierkegaard's critique and argue that it is possible to reconstruct a plausible account of the way in which he deals with them. The central problem that Kierkegaard encounters is evident in his criticism and both are related to one another. The problem is that if our infinitude is not directly accessible to us owing to the mediation of language, does this mean that we risk limiting the self to finitude and thus returning to a form of pantheism? If language is the medium which prohibits direct access to the infinite self, then is it the case that language always precedes the self? I will argue that this is a central problem that Kierkegaard faces but that he has the resources to address it. More specifically, I will argue that Kierkegaard holds to an infinite self that precedes language and which is available to us through feeling and a circumscribed role of reflection. In this way, Kierkegaard is able to maintain that the self is a dialectical relation of the infinite and the finite while avoiding the reduction of the finite to the infinite (Idealism) or the infinite to the finite (Hegelianism).

Kierkegaard introduces the topic of self-reflection in his dissertation, *Concept of Irony* (hereafter CI). In the opening paragraph of *Irony after Fichte*, Kierkegaard provides a brief sketch of Kant's critical turn and then writes:

The more the *I* in criticism became absorbed in contemplation of the *I*, the leaner and leaner the *I* became, until it ended with becoming a ghost ...Because reflection was continually reflecting about reflection, thinking went astray, and every step it advanced led further and further, of course, from any content. Here it became apparent, as it does in all ages, that if one is going to speculate, one had better be facing in the right direction. Speculative thought utterly failed to see that what it was seeking was in its own seeking, and when it would not look for it there, it was not to be found in all eternity. Philosophy walked around like a man who is wearing his glasses and nevertheless is looking for his glasses – that is, he is looking for

something right in front of his nose, but he does not look right in front of his nose and therefore never finds it.<sup>25</sup>

In this pregnant paragraph, Kierkegaard identifies the central themes which will form the basis of his critique. The first point to note is his specific interest in reflection and his association of this with the “contemplation of the *I*” which he pejoratively dismisses as an absorption. Kierkegaard’s criticism is that the *I* gained in reflection became “leaner and leaner” and strayed “from any content”. The second point to note is his reference to the inability of “Speculative thought” to find what it was looking for – namely the *I* – because it was looking in the wrong place. Related to this, is his analogy to the man wearing his glasses and the obvious optical metaphor he invokes. This second point will be addressed in the last section of this chapter.

Kierkegaard returns to the first point regarding reflection, the contentless *I* and does so in reference to Kant before he turns his attention to Fichte. Importantly, Kierkegaard points out that Fichte was responding to the problem raised by Kant, namely the status of the *I*. Kierkegaard puts it in these terms: “this *Ding an sich*, constituted the weakness in Kant’s system. Indeed, it became a question whether the *I* itself is not a *Ding an sich*.”<sup>26</sup> This is all that Kierkegaard has to say on the issue and it is obvious that he is condensing a fundamental feature of Kant’s critical system. However, he does capture in this small phrase the problem that the post-Kantians identified with Kant’s philosophy, namely the status of the *I*. Kant recognised the need to ground all of our intuitions and judgments in a thoroughgoing identity which he called transcendental apperception. The problem that Kant ran up against was substantiating the reality of this constitutive *I* in the manner of transcendental apperception. For Kant this could not be accomplished and he thus held that it is a regulative idea which is necessary in order for cognition to make sense over time.

Of course this did not satisfy Kant’s critics and followers alike. For them the idea of a unified identity was crucial to substantiating Kant’s own claims and that the status of a regulative principle could not carry the necessary philosophical weight which Kant required of it. This leads to the conclusion that Kant’s principle of transcendental apperception was akin to his notion of the *Ding an sich*. That is, it is

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<sup>25</sup> CI, p.272.

<sup>26</sup> CI, p.272-273.

necessary to hold to its reality in a constitutive and not merely regulative fashion although no further determinate claims can be made for it. It just is but cannot be an object of cognition. Just as we cannot cognise the *Ding an sich* so too does Kant claim that we cannot cognise the unified identity described in transcendental apperception. This is to say that the subject cannot be cognised in Kant's own terms because that which can be cognised is only applicable to the deliverances of sensible intuition.

Kierkegaard rightly argues that it was Fichte who paradigmatically "raised and answered" this question. Kierkegaard provides an account of Fichte's position; Kierkegaard writes:

[Fichte] removed the difficulty with this *an sich* by placing it within thought; he infinitized the *I* in *I-I*. The producing *I* is the same as the produced *I*. *I-I* is the abstract identity. By so doing he infinitely liberated thought. But this infinity of thought in Fichte is, like all Fichte's infinity...negative infinity, an infinity in which there is no finitude, an infinity without any content. When Fichte infinitized the *I* in this way, he advanced an idealism beside which any actuality turned pale...thought was infinitized, subjectivity became the infinite, absolute negativity, the infinite tension and urge.<sup>27</sup>

Kierkegaard continues and notes that Fichte's negative infinity therefore has "nothing to do with actuality, he achieved the absolute beginning, and proceeding from that, as has so frequently been discussed, he wanted to construct the world. The *I* became the constituting entity...an infinite power that still accomplishes nothing because there is nothing to which it can be applied. It is a potentiation, an exaltation as strong as a god who can lift the whole world and yet has nothing to lift."<sup>28</sup> Beyond this, Kierkegaard does not expand. His main argument against Fichte seems to be that an attempt to gain the foundation of philosophy in the *I*, leaves finitude behind. Kierkegaard is clearly rehearsing a well-known caricature of Fichte's thought but in *CI* he never discusses the ways in which Fichte's account ultimately fails and why it is viewed – as a commonly held assumption – that Fichte attributes to this *I* quasi-

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<sup>27</sup> *CI*, p.273.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, p.273-274. See also *CUP*, p.329-331, where Kierkegaard critiques the issue of the constitutive ability of thought. This position is generally identified with a strong or absolute version of Idealism.

divine powers of creating.<sup>29</sup> Thus one witnesses in Kierkegaard's discussion a broadly existential critique – namely the loss of finitude, and therefore the self – without an explanation of why Fichte's account is inadequate or fails to achieve the infinite *I*.<sup>30</sup>

An explanation of Kierkegaard's formal critique is possible if we consider the argument that I developed in chapter two. Kierkegaard had claimed, showing a high level of awareness of Hamann, that thinking is dependent upon language. Kierkegaard translated Hamann's critique of Kant and applied it to the Hegelian demand for the presuppositionless beginning. I would like to return to this argument and expand it in reference to the issue of reflection. Kierkegaard sketches this argument, in the posthumously published *Johannes Climacus*, in the following way:

Which is first, immediacy or mediacy? That is a captious question... Cannot the consciousness, then, remain in immediacy? This is a foolish question because if it could, there would be no consciousness at all. But how, then, is immediacy canceled? By mediacy, which cancels immediacy by *pre-supposing* it. What then, is immediacy? It is reality itself. What is mediacy? It is the word. How does the one cancel the other? By giving expression to it, for that which is given expression is always *presupposed*.<sup>31</sup>

The basic argument runs like this: the demand for access to the infinite is a demand for immediacy. This means that there can be no middle relation between that which I intuit and the act of this intuition itself. That is, there must be direct or unconditioned presence. But this unconditioned presence, the immediate intuition of the infinite is crucial because if there were something which operated between that which was being grasped and the grasping itself, then our access to the infinite would be conditioned and what we would have in thought would not be the unconditioned

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<sup>29</sup> See CI, p.275: "In Fichte, subjectivity became free, infinite, negative....This Fichtean principle that subjectivity, the *I*, has constitutive validity, is the sole omnipotence..."

<sup>30</sup> I will not attempt to decide whether or not Kierkegaard *gets Fichte right* in this regard because to do so adequately one would have to provide the following accounts: (1) Kant's project; (2) the reception of Kant, particularly by Reinhold; (3) Fichte's interpretation of Kant's project as mediated to him by Kant's early followers; (4) Kierkegaard's understanding of Kant's project, as understood by Fichte. As one can see, this would require a full-length monograph in and of itself. In my treatment, therefore, I will merely present what Kierkegaard took to be the problem with Fichte's account of reflection and demonstrate how this fits into Kierkegaard's overall conception of selfhood.

<sup>31</sup> *Johannes Climacus*, p.167-168.

immediacy of the infinite because it would be dependent upon that which was not infinite. Kierkegaard, in the above passage, argues that “the word”, i.e. language, is that which cancels immediacy. Thus, his argument is that any claim to have gained immediate access to the infinite in reflection runs aground on the fact that in thinking of the infinite we employ language and therefore the immediate is mediated and the infinite is conditioned in the mediate relation.<sup>32</sup> As Bowie has argued, “Access to the absolute I requires an intuition which is beyond any division of subject and object, but, crucially, this intuition cannot be conscious, because intentionality requires a split between subject and object for it to be consciousness *of* something.”<sup>33</sup> In terms of language, when we think of the infinitude of the self we employ language and in employing language we separate and therefore condition that which is meant to be unconditional.

Of course, the Idealist turn to reflection as a means to secure the *I* is not the only possible avenue which Kierkegaard encountered. Specifically, could art or poetry provide the necessary means to gain an adequate vision of selfhood, one which was not reduced to either finitude or infinitude? According to Kierkegaard, the short answer is no. In order to understand this one needs to consider his critique of Romantic attempts to solve the problem inherited from Fichte because, as I will show shortly, while Kierkegaard is critical of the Romantic turn with respect to art and poetry, he does adopt a set of arguments which have their genesis in that tradition.

The problem that the Romantics encountered in their criticism of post-Kantian Idealism was the following: given the inscrutable nature of the self, its mediation in language, a mystery and veiledness, and a pre-reflexive familiarity, is it possible to depict the infinitude of the self, can the self be re-presented in order to provide access to the self, access which had been cut off in light of their criticisms? The response of the Romantics was to turn to art and poetry as a means to gain that which philosophy could not, in their view, provide. Art and poetry therefore take on a preeminent significance because of central questions of the self. This means that art and poetry were provided an elevated status in theories of subjectivity because in art

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<sup>32</sup> See CUP, p.308-309: “Existence, like motion, is a very difficult matter to handle. If I think it I cancel it, and then I do not think it. It would seem correct to say that there is something that cannot be thought – namely existing. But again there is the difficulty that existence puts it together in this way: the one who is thinking is existing.”

<sup>33</sup> Bowie, *Aesthetics and Subjectivity*, p.82.

one was able to conceive the non-empirical aspects of the self. Art, therefore, provided a representation of that which was unrepresentable to itself, namely the infinitude of the self.<sup>34</sup>

In a note found in CUP, Kierkegaard states that poetry and art cannot gain access to the eternal: “Poetry and art have been called an anticipation of the eternal. If one wants to call them that, one must nevertheless be aware that poetry and art are not essentially related to an existing person, since the contemplation of poetry and art, ‘joy over the beautiful’, is disinterested, and the observer is contemplatively outside himself *qua* existing person.”<sup>35</sup> It is obvious, of course, that Kierkegaard is rehearsing Kant’s argument in the third Critique. However, what Kant saw as the necessary relation to art – disinterestedness – Kierkegaard criticises. This is Kierkegaard’s criticism of art understood in a broadly Kantian sense. But Kierkegaard is equally critical and even more explicitly so of Romantic views of art and poetry as access to the infinite.

In his dissertation, Kierkegaard offers explicitly critical remarks regarding the deficiency of poetry in adequately depicting the dialectical relation of existence. He takes up this argument in consideration of Schlegel’s *Lucinde*. The issue at stake for Kierkegaard is whether this can be considered a poetic work. Central to his views that it in fact is not is the enigmatic claim that it is unpoetic because it is “irreligious.” If we look closer at this section of CI we find that what Kierkegaard is suggesting appears to fit with the themes we are currently investigating. First, he claims that “poetry is a kind of reconciliation”, however “it is not the true reconciliation” because “it does not reconcile me with the actuality in which I am living” and that “only the religious is able to bring about the true reconciliation because it infinitizes actuality for me.”

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<sup>34</sup> See Manfred Frank, *The Philosophical Foundations of Early German Romanticism*, tr. Elizabeth Millán-Zaibert (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2004), p.178; see also Bowie, *Aesthetics and Subjectivity*, p.81. For an account of Danish Romanticism in relation to these questions see Klaus P. Mortensen, “The Demons of Self Reflection: Kierkegaard and Danish Romanticism” in *Kierkegaard Revisited. Proceedings from the Conference ‘Kierkegaard and the Meaning of Meaning It’*. Copenhagen, May 5-9, 1996, ed. Niels Jørgen Cappelørn and Jon Stewart (New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1997), p.442-459.

<sup>35</sup> CUP, p.313 \*. See note in CUP II, p.244, note 523; reference and passage from Kant’s 3<sup>rd</sup> critique. Kierkegaard is here rehearsing Kant’s argument from the third Critique.

The crucial point in this, I believe, is the idea that poetry is a type of reconciliation but not the “true reconciliation”. Kierkegaard defines poetry as “a negation of the imperfect actuality” that “opens up a higher actuality, expands and transfigures the imperfect into the perfect”. However, the perfection achieved “is more of an emigration from actuality than a continuance in it.” The problem that Kierkegaard identifies with poetry is that poetry is now seen as *the* medium for accessing the higher reality or in terms of the self it can achieve transparency of the *I*.<sup>36</sup> The problem, as Kierkegaard sees it, is that while poetry appears to tie the self to a world of emotion, feeling, sensation – concrete subjectivity – it does so only through redescribing this world in a manner which transforms the concrete and particular into a form of perfection and infinitude. Rather than poetising the difficulty of existence as it is, poetry redescribes finitude in such a way that it becomes unrecognisable – it describes finitude as perfection and thus infinitises finitude. One could say that poetry provides a romanticised view of the world which the self inhabits and a poeticised identity of the inhabitants of this world.<sup>37</sup> This is expressed in CUP when Kierkegaard critiques poetry in this manner: “The setting [ of existence] is not in the fairyland of imagination, where poetry produces consummation”.<sup>38</sup>

The criticisms that Kierkegaard levels against Romantic poetry can be summed up very briefly. For Kierkegaard, poetry claims to have gained access to the infinite but as a result has lost finitude. This is why, for Kierkegaard, Romantic poetry cannot be an appropriate candidate for describing the dialectical relation which is the self. Kierkegaard’s critique of poetry – the loss of finitude in favour of the infinite – parallels his critique of post-Kantian reflection theory which he

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<sup>36</sup> This transfiguration and expansion Kierkegaard ties to a longer tradition which shifted the character of poetry from a reflection on “the given actuality” or what we might call nature to a form of recreation of nature. Rather than reflecting the world, poetry, since the movement in Early German Romanticism, now creates the world in radical ways. In creating the world poetry achieved a status of quasi-divinity and the poet herself that of a demi-god. See Rasmussen, *Irony*, p.55. Kierkegaard critiques Romantic versions of poetry and this has been described in various terms by Rasmussen. A central theme is that Kierkegaard is critiquing the nihilism of the Romantic who had elevated poetry and therefore the poet to semi-divine status. See also Westphal, *Becoming a Self*, p.140. For an account of speculative poetry advanced by Kierkegaard’s immediate contemporary Martensen, and against whom Kierkegaard is likely directing his critique, see Pattison, *Religion*, p.106-107.

<sup>37</sup> See Pattison, *Kierkegaard: The Aesthetic*, p.46-47. See also Anna Paulsen, “Kierkegaard in seinem Verhältnis zur deutschen Romantik. Einfluss und Überwindung” in *Kierkegaardiana III*, ed. Niels Thulstrup (Copenhagen: Munksgaard, 1959), 40.

<sup>38</sup> CUP, p.357.

identifies with Fichte. This is a natural move for Kierkegaard to make because he clearly sees, correctly one might add, the Romantics as the inheritors of Fichte's Kantian problem. For Kierkegaard, however, the Romantics do not solve the problem of access. Instead they rearticulate it in a new environment. That is, he does not think they have solved the problem they inherited because in their poeticising finitude is lost.<sup>39</sup>

Kierkegaard raises another issue, found in the *Journals*, regarding the inability of art – by which in this context he means painting and sculpture – to provide access to the eternal. This passage, along with the above, summarises Kierkegaard's view of art as a means to gain access to the infinite and eternal. This brings him into stark confrontation with the Romantics who claimed the opposite for art as a vehicle for the infinite:

All art is essentially involved in a dialectical self-contradiction. The truly eternal cannot be painted or drawn or carved in stone, for it is spirit. But neither can the temporal essentially be painted or drawn or carved in stone, for when it is presented in these ways, it is presented eternally; every picture expresses a fixation of that particular moment. If I paint a man who is lifting a spoon to his mouth or blowing his nose, it is immediately eternalized – the man continues to blow his nose this one time as long as the painting endures.<sup>40</sup>

Kierkegaard, here, articulates an abbreviated critique of art as being conducive to either representing the eternal or capturing finitude. If art, according to the Romantic conception, is meant to represent the eternal it fails to do so because it captures in finitude that which is infinite. In this respect, Kierkegaard has a very narrow view of art as revelatory and so does not do justice to romantic claims regarding access to the eternal. Romantic art would not claim to accurately depict that which is spirit, but instead saw art as enabling one to glimpse the infinite through the object. Despite Kierkegaard's caricature, his criticism follows his own

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<sup>39</sup> As Bowie has argued, "The aesthetic product thus becomes a utopian symbol of the realisation of freedom: in it we can see or hear an image of what the world could be like if freedom were realised in it." Bowie, *Aesthetics and Subjectivity*, p.57. Where post-Kantian romanticism saw this as a benefit, Kierkegaard precisely conceives this as a loss of finitude. Poetry and art leave the realm of temporality and instead of adequately conveying the reality of our temporal existence present us with an image which distorts temporality precisely in conveying an eschatological fulfilment.

<sup>40</sup> JP 161/VIII<sup>1</sup> A 88/NB:198;1847; see also JP 170/ X<sup>2</sup> A 380/NB15:51; 1850.

views on the limitations placed upon us in our attempts to transcend finitude and access the infinite. Kierkegaard then takes a decidedly unromantic view of art by claiming that it cannot adequately depict temporality – a claim which seems counterintuitive. Certainly if art can render a subject adequately, this would be something found within the realm of finitude. However, Kierkegaard's point is that art cannot capture the self as dialectical relational becoming because the object rendered in art is static. In this way, if poetry infinitises the self out of finitude, the plastic arts subvert the actuality of existing subjectivity by rendering it as a motionless object.<sup>41</sup>

### III. Regaining the Dialectical Self: Limits and Possibility

If transparency, the achievement of the immediate, is seriously disrupted through attention to language, does this mean that we are fully determined in language, reducible to merely what we can say about the self? In other words, by claiming that access to our infinitude is mediated in language, does Kierkegaard therefore reduce the self to finitude, to commonly held language which either ends in a form of pantheism or radical scepticism (replicated in more recent postmodern claims that we are language all the way down)? Does infinitude thereby become a necessary fiction? Similarly, given Kierkegaard's critical stance towards Romantic attempts to overcome the Idealist position via art and poetry, how does Kierkegaard propose to rescue the *I*, to secure *personality* so central to his thought? And as his project in its entirety is dependent upon his particular conception of the self, how does Kierkegaard substantiate his claim that the self is both infinite and finite? Part of his strategy, clearly, is to show the disastrous consequences which emerge when infinitude (or finitude as we saw in the last chapter) is lost. In this respect there is a strong descriptive argumentative strategy at work in his authorship. While this is a dominant trait of his writings, I also believe that Kierkegaard himself was not satisfied with simply this approach. I hold that it is possible to reconstruct from his writings a series of arguments which he advances as a means to substantiate the

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<sup>41</sup> See CA, p.87: "It is remarkable that Greek art culminates in the plastic, which precisely lacks the glance. This, however, has its deep source in the fact that the Greeks did not in the profoundest sense comprehend sensuousness and temporality."

infinitude of the self without reverting to a Fichtean (in Kierkegaard's view) loss of finitude.

I will argue that Kierkegaard has three basic approaches to accessing infinitude. First, Kierkegaard holds that we have a feeling of the self. Second, and closely related, he sometimes describes this in terms of a pre-reflexive or non-conceptual awareness of our existence as infinite and finite. Both of these arguments, I will show, are found in Kierkegaard's predecessors most notably the Early German Romantics (in particular Novalis and Hölderlin) and in Hamann. Thirdly, Kierkegaard argues for a circumscribed function of reflection, one that does not provide direct access to the infinite ground of being but which enables the self to distinguish its constitutive natures from one another (infinitude from finitude and vice versa).

The issue of how we are aware of our selfhood, as a unity of the infinite and the finite (or thought and being) is, as we saw above, a key issue in post-Kantian construals. Kierkegaard being critical of reflection-theory appropriates and rehearses two related positions. The first is that we have a feeling of our self which occurs prior to any cognition which the self has of its *I*. According to Kierkegaard, writing in CUP, this is described as passion:

If the existing person could actually be outside himself, the truth would be something concluded for him. But where is this point? The *I-I* is a mathematical point that does not exist at all...Only momentarily can a particular individual, existing, be in a unity of the infinite and the finite that transcends existing. This instant is the moment of passion. Modern speculative thought has mustered everything to enable the individual to transcend himself objectively, but this just cannot be done. Existence exercises its constraint...In passion, the existing subject is infinitized in the eternity of imagination and yet is also most definitely himself.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> CUP, p.197; see also 312-13. See also CUP, p.350-351: "All existence-issues are passionate, because existence, if one becomes conscious of it, involves passion. To think about them so as to leave out passion is not to think about them at all, is to forget the point that one indeed is oneself an existing person." It must be noted that Kierkegaard, which I have previously pointed out is typical of his writings, uses the same term to denote or describe different themes. The most predominant use of *passion* by Kierkegaard is used to contrast with a form of disinterestedness that Kierkegaard argues is endemic to a speculative approach to existence. In this manner, Kierkegaard argues that existence demands not an objective, disinterested orientation but rather a subjective and passionate orientation towards one's life. See chapter three.

The significance of this passage should not be overstated, as it is difficult to find it repeated in Kierkegaard's works. However, the basic premise is that we have a pre-conceptual awareness of our dialectical existence, but which is only momentary. And this is the key. As soon as we begin to think of it, the immediate access is dissolved because our thoughts of our existence mediate this knowledge to us. If all thinking is dependent upon language, then any thought we have of the ground of our selfhood occurs in a statement about it. In this way, it becomes mediated to us. Prior, however, to our thoughts – or descriptions of our existence, even to ourselves – Kierkegaard argues that we have an unmediated or, which is the same, unarticulated access to being. He argues that this access occurs as a feeling or in passion. But such an appeal to feeling as providing access to non-objectifiable and central aspects of existence was not an innovation on Kierkegaard's part but is found in the central currents of Kantian and post-Kantian thought.<sup>43</sup>

While he does not expand specifically on the issue of feeling as providing unmediated access to the ground of selfhood, Kierkegaard does approach the issue from a related vantage point. In the journals he inverts the Cartesian cogito: "It is not *cogito ergo sum* – but the opposite, *sum ergo cogito*."<sup>44</sup> What relation does this have, though, to a pre-reflexive feeling of being?

Kierkegaard argues that thought about existence demonstrates that existence is prior to thinking about it. Without the priority of existence over thinking there would be nothing to be thought. In order for thought about existence to occur, in terms of the self, there must be existence to be thought about and which, of course, implies an existing self doing the thinking:

The Cartesian *cogito ergo sum* has been repeated often enough. If the *I* in *cogito* is understood to be an individual human being, then the statement

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<sup>43</sup> See Bowie, *Aesthetics and Subjectivity*, p.30, 37.

<sup>44</sup> JP 1846/IX A 49/NB5:46; 1848. Kierkegaard, again, cannot be said to innovative with respect to inverting the cogito. In fact, this means of reorienting the direction of philosophical investigation is found in the writings of Hamann, Jacobi, Fichte, Novalis and Schelling; see Frank, *EGR*, p.64-65. In a letter to Jacobi Hamann had written: "Not Cogito; ergo sum, rather reversed or more Hebraic Est; ergo cogito, and with the inversion of such a simple principle perhaps the entire System receives a different language, and direction." H V, 448, 26-28; ( to Jacobi, 1.6.1785). Kierkegaard too, interestingly attributes this insight to Fichte: JP 2338/IVC11/Not13:8; 1842-43 "...this is the position of the elder Fichte – not *cogito ergo sum*, but I act *ergo sum*, for this *cogito* is something derived or it is identical with 'I act'; either the consciousness of freedom is in the action, and then it should not read *cogito ergo sum*, or it is the subsequent consciousness." JP 2338/IVC11/Not13:8; 1842-43.

demonstrates nothing: I *am* thinking ergo I am, but if I *am* thinking, no wonder, then, that I am; after all, it has already been said, and the first consequently says even more than the last. If, then, by the *I* in *cogito*, one understands a single individual existing human being, philosophy shouts: Foolishness, foolishness, here it is not a matter of my *I* or your *I* but of the pure *I*. But surely this pure *I* can have no other existence than thought existence. What, then, is the concluding formula supposed to mean; indeed, there is no conclusion, for then the statement is a tautology.<sup>45</sup>

And on the following page, Kierkegaard continues:

I think, ergo I think; whether I am or it is (in the sense of actuality, where *I* means a single existing human being and *it* means a single definite something) is infinitely unimportant. That what I am thinking *is* in the sense of thinking does not, of course, need any demonstration, nor does it need to be demonstrated by any conclusion, since it is indeed demonstrated.<sup>46</sup>

When Kierkegaard specifies here that what he is discussing is the *I* as understood as “a single existing human being”, he is distinguishing his argument from a consideration of the ontological proof of God’s existence. What is at stake, therefore, is the notion that thought about the self presupposes, in a manner which cannot be demonstrated, a self which is doing the thinking about itself, because the demonstration is in the act.<sup>47</sup> In this respect, a pre-reflexive feeling (i.e. passion) of our existence is conceptually similar to the *a priori* nature of existence before thought. In this respect, Kierkegaard aligns himself with Jacobi who argued, according to Frank, that “If something did not underlie that which is unveiled by feeling, then thought would literally have no object.”<sup>48</sup> As Frank remarks later, “This relation between Being and the evident feeling of Being (*Seinsgefühl*) (Rousseau’s ‘*sentiment de l’existence*’) is not a relation that would be capable of or in need of a proof: It is a type of immemorial truth of fact whose factuality is indisputable.”<sup>49</sup> As Kierkegaard writes,

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<sup>45</sup> CUP, p.317.

<sup>46</sup> CUP, p.318-319.

<sup>47</sup> See CUP, p.329-331.

<sup>48</sup> Frank, *Early German Romanticism*, p.64.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, p.70. See also CUP, p.308-309, 329-330.

...although there have lived countless millions of such ‘selves,’ no science can say what the self is without again stating it quite generally. And this is the wonder of life, that each man who is mindful of himself knows what no science knows, since he knows who he himself is, and this is the profundity of the Greek saying γνώθι σεαυτόν [know yourself], which too long has been understood in the German way as pure self-consciousness, the airiness of idealism.<sup>50</sup>

Contrasting a pre-reflexive awareness of the self with the “German way” – Idealism – adequately sums up Kierkegaard’s view. Prior to any reflection on the self, any attempt to gain purchase on “pure self-consciousness”, the self has a familiarity with itself which falls outwith conceptual articulation.<sup>51</sup> The self, in other words, is intuitively aware of itself before any thematisation is done. In fact, such articulation – as I showed earlier – presupposes a self. Significantly, for the next section, Kierkegaard identifies his view with “the Greek saying” *Know Thyself* in contrast to Idealist position.

The final strategy that I see Kierkegaard pursuing is one in which there is a limited or circumscribed place for reflection. For Kierkegaard, reflection appears to provide the means by which we recognise that the self is not merely reducible to its position within the causal nexus or, in his chosen terms, finitude and necessity. While the self cannot be separated from its historical contingency, Kierkegaard clearly holds to a self which is not entirely reducible to this and it is through reflection that we can gain a separation – although not reductionary – between our infinitude and finitude. In SUD, returning to the theme of the self as mere finitude, here described as immediacy and not to be confused with the immediacy we discussed earlier – Kierkegaard states the following:

The advance over pure immediacy...can be brought on by one’s capacity of reflection...A certain degree of reflection is indeed present here, consequently a certain degree of pondering over one’s self. With this certain degree of reflection begins the act of separation whereby the self becomes aware of itself as essentially different from the environment and external

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<sup>50</sup> CA, p.78-79.

<sup>51</sup> Manfred Frank, “Fragments of a History of the Theory of Self-Consciousness from Kant to Kierkegaard”, *Critical Horizons* 5(1) (2004): p.119.

events and from their influence upon it...to a certain degree he has separated his self from externalities, because he has a dim idea that there may even be something eternal in the self.<sup>52</sup>

Kierkegaard continues in this passage suggesting that the idea of an infinite self is gained through infinite reflection. The person of immediacy has no conception of the self as divorced from all externalities, which Kierkegaard claims “is the first form of the infinite self and the advancing impetus in the whole process by which a self infinitely becomes responsible for its actual self with all its difficulties and advantages.”<sup>53</sup> Of course, one should not take Kierkegaard as advocating a return to infinite reflection and the abstract self, but what he is arguing is that reflection allows us to consider the self as not entirely determined by our finitude. I see Kierkegaard as arguing that reflection provides the means whereby we become aware of the self as distinguishable from mere contingency and finitude. This however must be understood in light of his critique of self-reflection, infinite abstraction and the abstract self – the latter two topics I discussed in chapter two.<sup>54</sup> This is to say that the immediate access to the infinite self is not available. What is available is a minimal recognition of the self as distinct from its contingency, while not forsaking contingency either (thus returning the self to pure infinitude).

I take this to imply that reflection allows us to establish that our finitude is not reducible to our infinitude. By providing the means whereby the self is distinguishable in its constituent parts, it is possible to advocate that a return to reflection is possible and that it provides the means to distinguish the infinite from the finite without subjugating the one to the other. Kierkegaard hits upon this in his journals, where he writes: “Or is reflection in itself evil? By no means. It is evil when it is selfish: either finite reflection which covets the advantages of finitude, or reflection selfishly terminating in the infatuation of the self with itself.”<sup>55</sup> Kierkegaard, as I read him, is advocating a place for reflection which must not

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<sup>52</sup> SUD, p.54-55; Kierkegaard appears to confuse his terms here, because he speaks of reflection and then moves to speak of infinite abstraction. I believe it is best to read him as discussing the problems inherent in infinite reflection which I discussed in both chapter two and chapter three.

<sup>53</sup> SUD, p.55.

<sup>54</sup> See also CUP, p.191: “...the abstract answer is only for that *abstractum* which an existing person becomes by abstracting from himself *qua* existing, which he can do only momentarily, although at such moments he still pays his debt to existence by existing nevertheless.”

<sup>55</sup> JP 6235/ IXA 223/NB6:70; 1848.

reduce the self to finitude or lead to the abstract or infinite self divorced from finitude. This seems to be the limits of what reflection can achieve – as Kierkegaard wrote in the above quoted passage, reflection provides “a dim idea that there may even be something eternal in the self.” In this respect, Kierkegaard articulates a positive role of the imagination in relation to reflection: “The self is reflection, and the imagination is reflection, is the rendition of the self as the self’s possibility. The imagination is the possibility of any and all reflection, and the intensity of this medium is the possibility of the intensity of the self.”<sup>56</sup> However, to recall the previous chapter, the imagination must be brought into relation with the will in order to avoid the negative consequences of the self of mere infinitude which accords well with the positive, yet limited, role Kierkegaard grants to the imagination in relation to reflection.

Kierkegaard’s threefold argument for maintaining the reality of infinitude, while having clear precedence in earlier thinkers, is central to his own project of articulating a view of the self which does not reduce the self to a metaphysics of necessity (Hegelianism) nor separate the self from its historical particularity (Idealism). By arguing for the need for the self of infinitude without forsaking finite temporality, Kierkegaard is clearly walking a difficult philosophical line. I am not interested in judging whether he succeeds on each of these points, but instead have simply shown how he conceived of his project in light of the dominant trends in post-Kantianism. On the other hand, the position for which I have argued should also guard against identifying Kierkegaard with a broadly postmodern (or Derridean) position, where the claim is made that because the self is mediated to itself in language, that language always precedes the self.<sup>57</sup> This can lead, I would argue, to a version of pantheism where the self is inseparable from its own descriptions, rendered in language which is socially mediated. The only manner in which Kierkegaard can be appropriated and identified with a postmodern agenda is by two related avenues: (1) overlooking Kierkegaard’s arguments for a pre-reflexive (i.e. pre-linguistic) familiarity with a primordial self or (2) showing that Kierkegaard’s

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<sup>56</sup> SUD, p.31 see also SUD, p.41: “In order for a person to become aware of his self and of God, imagination must raise him higher than the miasma of probability, it must tear him out of this and teach him to hope and fear – or to fear and to hope – by rendering possible that which surpasses the *quantam satis* [sufficient amount] of any experience.”

<sup>57</sup> See Shakespeare, *Kierkegaard*, p.61.

arguments do not hold. I think it is easier, and often the chosen route, to proceed with (1). Kierkegaard's view of a primordial self must be squared with postmodern readings of his writings – that is, shown to be deficient or superfluous – but they cannot be overlooked.

#### **IV. Know Thyself! Socratic Ignorance and the Word**

Kierkegaard's many discussions of the self can be summarised in the following way: the self is able to distinguish its infinitude from its finitude without necessarily subjugating the one to the other. However, full immediate presence to the self cannot be gained. Because of this, one discovers Kierkegaard attempting to articulate the notion of a self and the limits that the self encounters in conceptualising itself. In this section I will examine Kierkegaard's discussion of the limits of self-knowledge through an examination of his appeal and employment of a specifically Hamannian version of Socratic ignorance. I will show that Kierkegaard, following Hamann, adopts Socratic ignorance as a means to describe the limits of self-knowledge and the way in which the recognition of this limit provides the means by which the self is able to gain a true vision of the self, namely by being reflected in the Word.

In the first part, I will explore Hamann's articulation of Socratic ignorance in *Socratic Memorabilia*.<sup>58</sup> I will highlight the impetus behind this work and then focus attention predominantly on the issue of self-knowledge. I will then turn to Kierkegaard and his appeal to Hamann's use of Socratic ignorance. I will show that Kierkegaard, too, maintains that Socratic ignorance is the necessary limit which the self encounters in its attempts to know itself and that this limit is the point at which the self can receive its true image in the divine revelation of the Word.

Hamann articulates the principle of Socratic ignorance in his *Socratic Memorabilia*. He introduces this principle at the outset of the essay when, in the introduction from which Kierkegaard quotes in *CA*, he writes the following:

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<sup>58</sup> For an account of the context in which *Socratic Memorabilia* was written, particularly as this pertains to Hamann's relation to Kant and Berens, see chapter one.

Socrates was, gentlemen, no mean critic. He distinguished in the writings of Heraclitus what he did not understand from what he understood, and drew a very proper and modest inference from the comprehensible to the incomprehensible. On this occasion Socrates spoke of readers who were able to swim. Thus, a confluence of ideas and sensations in that living elegy of the philosopher transformed his sentences perhaps into a group of small islands for whose community life the bridges and ferries of system were lacking.<sup>59</sup>

The principle of Socratic ignorance is encapsulated in the above passage as the distinguishing between what one understands and what one does not understand, which Hamann later sharpens into the Socratic claim regarding the limits of knowledge in general:

The opinion of Socrates can be summarized in these blunt words, when he said to the Sophists, the learned men of his time, ‘I know nothing.’ Therefore these words were a thorn in their eyes and a scourge on their backs. All of Socrates’ ideas, which were nothing more than expectorations and secretions of his ignorance, seemed as frightful to them as the hair of Medusa’s head, the knob of the Aegis.<sup>60</sup>

The two themes present in these passages pertaining to Socratic ignorance highlight the themes which Hamann pursues throughout the essay. Namely, Socrates’ role in relation to his contemporaries and the centrality of Socratic ignorance.<sup>61</sup> In particular, Hamann holds that Socrates’ profession of ignorance is the key to understanding his life and mission – as Hamann argues that all which came forth from Socrates was grounded in his ignorance. As Hamann wrote a little later, “From this Socratic ignorance readily flow the peculiarities of his manner and teaching.”<sup>62</sup> Moreover, Hamann suggests that this profession of ignorance imbued in his office and enacted in relation to his contemporaries is what unsettled his interlocutors – the Sophists.

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<sup>59</sup> SM, p.143

<sup>60</sup> SM, p.167.

<sup>61</sup> O’Flaherty, *SM*, p.93. As O’Flaherty argues, the principle of Socratic ignorance is central to the essay, dictating the tenor of the piece in its entirety.

<sup>62</sup> SM, p.171.

When Hamann takes up these issues in *SM* he is challenging the conception of Socrates adopted by his enlightened contemporaries. Specifically, Socrates was vaulted as the hero of the Enlightenment, its patron saint, cast as a proto-rationalist.<sup>63</sup> But Hamann argues that such a view of Socrates is fundamentally skewed because it denigrates or even intentionally avoids, conveniently, the centrality of his ignorance in order that he might fit the model of an enlightened philosopher:

– Our present day Socratics, the canonical teachers of the public and patron saints of unjustly famous arts and merits, have not yet succeeded in measuring up to their model in all his pleasant shortcomings. Because they deviate infinitely from the charter of his ignorance, one must admire the ingenious versions and glosses of their anti-Socratic daimon concerning our master’s doctrines and virtues as the ornaments of free translations, and it is just as precarious to trust them as to follow their lead.<sup>64</sup>

In this passage Hamann provides a diagnosis of how his contemporaries have appropriated to themselves the mantle of Socrates while at the same time fundamentally undervaluing or overlooking his ignorance. He points to this in the second part of the passage, and indicates that the Enlightenment view of Socrates treats the problematic aspects of Socrates’ life as “ornaments of free translations”, that is as mere artistic or literary description, rooted in a mythologised world-view. Hamann signals this explicitly when he refers to “their anti-Socratic daimon”. As is typical of Hamann’s irony, he suggests that in overlooking the daimonic in Socrates that they themselves are controlled by a particular daimon: the daimon which imbues the age of reason, which purges all such references as superfluous and mythological. Not only is the issue of Socrates’ daimon problematic for his contemporaries, but so too is the delphic oracle,<sup>65</sup> which declared Socrates to be the wisest of all owing to his profession of ignorance:

The transmission of a divine oracle means, however, as little as the appearance of a comet for a philosopher of modern taste. In the book which the most foolish people handed down to us and in the relics of the Greeks and Romans we must, just as soon as it is a matter of oracles, appearances,

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<sup>63</sup> Dickson, *Relational Metacriticism*, p.32-33.

<sup>64</sup> *SM*, p.173

<sup>65</sup> See *SM*, p.157

dreams, and such meteors, remove, in his opinion, these fairy tales of our children and nurses (since all past centuries are, in comparison to our present one, children and nurses in the art of experience and thought)...<sup>66</sup>

The portrait of Socrates Hamann's enlightened contemporaries have produced has occurred because they have, in contemporary parlance, demythologised Socrates.<sup>67</sup> In so doing, Hamann sees them not as "present day Socratics", but as modern Athenians, the progeny of the sophists.<sup>68</sup> Hamann, therefore, sees his task as re-introducing Socrates to his contemporaries,<sup>69</sup> taking up the role of Socrates himself (as I argued in chapter one) so that they might be confronted with their errors – not merely their misunderstanding of Socrates but in their pursuits of Sophistical knowledge, their rationalisation of the world and their systematisation of reality:

Every new form of idol worship was a financial mine for the priests, who were supposed to augment the public welfare; every new sect of the Sophists promised an encyclopedia based on reason and experience. These projects were the sweet-meats that Socrates sought to spoil for his fellow citizens.<sup>70</sup>

Socrates, of course, spoils the projects of his countrymen through the profession of his ignorance and in taking up this mantle, Hamann wishes to undermine the drive towards a systematic account of the world and the place of the self within it. Thus, when Hamann explicitly connects the Sophists with the encyclopedists, he is contrasting his role as Socrates with that of his contemporaries – the French encyclopedists.<sup>71</sup> In this way, over and against the systematisation of

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<sup>66</sup> SM, p.157-159

<sup>67</sup> See Dickson, *Relational Metacriticism*, p.45.

<sup>68</sup> See Dickson, *Relational Metacriticism*, p.32.

<sup>69</sup> See SM, p.173-175.

<sup>70</sup> SM, p.181

<sup>71</sup> In this passage one notes the reference to both Berens – the merchant capitalist, and Kant – the philosopher. Kant wrote in a letter to Hamann, prior to the writing of *SM*, that Hamann should translate a portion of the French encyclopedia. This was intended to direct Hamann's energies towards the pursuit of Enlightenment ideals and away, by extension, from his new found faith. In this, and many other instances in *SM*, the tone is deeply personal. Hamann is Socrates and Kant and Berens are the Sophists and Athenians. To reintroduce Socrates to them was intended not merely as a philosophical apologia but as a defence of his Christian faith. On this point see Dickson, p.30-31. But Socrates also serves another function in this work. Hamann holds him up as a precursor, and at times as a proto-type, to Christ. For Hamann, reintroducing Socrates and his ignorance is to offer a defence of his faith and the operation of faith itself. While I leave aside a discussion of this topic, I direct my reader towards the following works which do so; see O'Flaherty, *SM*, p.83; see also Betz, *After Enlightenment*, p.80-81.

knowledge and the attempts to pursue the course of reason as the arbiter of reality, Hamann claims that Socratic ignorance is more indicative of the true state of human knowing:

The ignorance of Socrates was sensibility. But between sensibility and a theoretical proposition is a greater difference than between a living animal and its anatomical skeleton...Our own existence and the existence of all things outside us must be believed, and cannot be determined in any other way. What is more certain than the end of man, and of what truth is there a more general and better attested knowledge? Nevertheless, no one is wise enough to believe it except the one who, as Moses makes clear, is taught by God himself to number his days. What one believes does not, therefore, have to be proved, and a proposition can be ever so incontrovertibly proven without on that account being believed...Faith is not the work of reason, and therefore cannot succumb to its attack, because faith arises just as little from reason as tasting and seeing do.<sup>72</sup>

This view of the limits of reason amidst the elevation of reason in the *Aufklärung*, puts Hamann and his appropriation of Socratic ignorance into direct conflict with the proponents of Enlightenment (Kant and Berens specifically). In articulating this circumscribed role of reason and the need for *faith* Hamann is arguing simply that there are aspects of our existence – such as our own death – which we *know* but which cannot be proven. We hold to various propositions and claims which do not rest on indubitable principles or immediately verifiable claims. Instead, if we look at everyday, common sense existence there are many things that we hold and which we cannot prove. Our approach to our existence, therefore, must be one which encompasses or reflects the fragmentary or incomplete *knowledge* of existence, i.e. Socratic ignorance. As Dickson has remarked, “This discussion of knowing here then is less a matter of a philosophical examination of the limits and possibilities of knowledge, like Locke’s, or Kant’s later critique; and more of the human implications of knowing and not knowing. It is not so much the epistemological mechanics of knowing as the resulting effect knowledge has on us that is of interest to Hamann here; his main target being the hubris and arrogance that

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<sup>72</sup> SM, p.167-169.

he associates with rationalism.”<sup>73</sup> For Hamann, therefore, Socratic ignorance acts as a curative to such hubris: “Socrates seems to have talked as much about his ignorance as a hypochondriac about his maligned illness. Just as one must know this malady himself in order to understand a hypochondriac and to make sense of him, so perhaps a sympathy with ignorance is required in order to have an idea of the Socratic ignorance.”<sup>74</sup> Hamann intends, as Socrates had, to speak at length of ignorance in order that his contemporaries might become familiar with the cure to their affliction and at the same time focussing attention on the boundary of human knowing. As Betz remarks, “the *Aufklärer*, given their thirst ‘for encyclopedic’ knowledge...are unwilling to humble themselves and make a similar confession, namely, that, at the end of the day, for all the volumes of the *Encyclopédie*, they know next to nothing.”<sup>75</sup> However, while a profession of Socratic ignorance challenges the apotheosis of reason by focussing one’s attention on the limits of knowledge in general, Hamann also sharpens this in relation to self-knowledge specifically:

Know thyself! the door of that famous temple proclaimed to all those who went in to sacrifice to the god of wisdom, and to ask him for advice concerning their petty affairs. Everyone read, admired, and knew this saying by heart. They wore it on their foreheads, like the stone on which it was engraven, without understanding the meaning of it...Socrates excelled them...in wisdom, however, because he had advanced further in self-knowledge than they, and knew that he knew nothing.<sup>76</sup>

In sharpening the appeal to Socratic ignorance with the Socratic imperative to “Know thyself”, Hamann is signalling that what is at stake is of the most serious consequences. It is not merely the systematisation of nature or the over-reaching claims of reason, but rather the very heart of human knowledge, knowledge of oneself. But if our knowledge of ourself ends in Socratic ignorance, is it possible to fulfil the Socratic imperative to which Hamann appeals? If knowledge of ourselves is

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<sup>73</sup> Dickson, p.69. I agree with Dickson that one need not view Socratic ignorance as a parallel to Christian faith as it is at times construed by some commentators, for example O’Flaherty and Blanke; see Dickson, *Relational Metacriticism*, p.32.

<sup>74</sup> SM, p.161; see O’Flaherty, SM, p.98-99.

<sup>75</sup> Betz, *After Enlightenment*, p.77.

<sup>76</sup> SM, p.163.

the most intimate and fundamental type of knowing that the self encounters – *who am I, what is my end* – and this leads to a profession of ignorance, does this leave the self in a nihilistic scepticism? Hamann claims that Socratic ignorance, the confession that one knows nothing is the beginning of wisdom, of true self-knowledge:

For the testimony which Socrates gave of his ignorance, therefore, I know no more honorable seal and at the same time no better key than the oracle of the great teacher of the Gentiles:

εἴ τις δοκεῖ ἔγνωκέναι τι, οὐπω ἔγνω καθὼς δεῖ γινῶναι: εἰ δέ τις ἀγαπᾷ τὸν θεόν, οὗτος ἔγνωσται ὑπ' αὐτοῦ.

If anyone imagine he knows something, he does not yet know as he ought to know. But if one loves God, one is known by him.<sup>77</sup>

– Just as Socrates was known by Apollo to be a wise man. But how the grain of all our natural wisdom must decay, must perish in ignorance, and how the life and being of a higher knowledge must spring forth newly created from this death, from this nothing – as far as this the nose of a Sophist does not reach.<sup>78</sup>

The true path to wisdom, or more succinctly to true self-knowledge can only begin with a profession of Socratic ignorance. In this respect, Socrates is the forerunner of Paul who pointed out the foolishness of reason, our inability to know ourselves without the prior requisite humility. We cannot gain a perspective on the true nature of the self without this humility, the admittance and acceptance of our own ignorance.<sup>79</sup> However, Hamann also makes a further point which is crucial to understanding his appeal to Socratic ignorance in relation to self-knowledge above. In particular, he claims that only by arriving at the point of ignorance, that is the limits of knowledge, can true self-knowledge begin. In this respect, the reference to Paul is instructive, as is Hamann's claim that from the point of ignorance "a higher knowledge must spring forth newly created from this death, from this nothing". With this, Hamann is signalling, I believe, towards a crucial point: it is only at the limits of knowledge that one is able to recognise the need for divine revelation in order to

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<sup>77</sup> I Corinthians 8 [2-3]. Hamann provides the reference in a note to the text; the specific verse reference is provided by O'Flaherty.

<sup>78</sup> SM, p.169.

<sup>79</sup> See Dickson, *Relational Metacriticism*, p.47.

receive true self-knowledge.<sup>80</sup> By uncovering the limits of explanation, therefore, Socratic ignorance points beyond itself: “In short, Socrates lured his fellow citizens out of the labyrinths of their learned Sophists to a truth in the inward being, to a wisdom in the secret heart, and away from the idol-altars of their pious and politically shrewd priests to the worship of an unknown God.”<sup>81</sup> Thus, as was shown above, Socratic ignorance is not a stopping station but it is the beginning of true knowledge and, in our present context, self-knowledge. As I turn now to consider Kierkegaard’s appropriation of Hamann’s treatment of Socratic ignorance, I will show that these themes are reiterated in his writings.

Kierkegaard’s appeal to Socratic ignorance is one of the rare instances where he directly acknowledges his indebtedness to Hamann. Compare the epigraph to *The Concept of Anxiety*:

The age of making distinctions is past. It has been vanquished by the system. In our day, whoever loves to make distinctions is regarded as an eccentric whose soul clings to something that has long since vanished. Be that as it may, yet Socrates still is what he was, the simple wise man, because of the peculiar distinction that he expressed both in words and in life, something that the eccentric Hamann first reiterated with great admiration two thousand years later: “For Socrates was great in ‘that he distinguished between what he understood and what he did not understand.’”<sup>82</sup>

With an earlier draft to the above:

...yet my soul clings to Socrates, its first love, and rejoices in the one who understood him, Hamann; for he said the best that has been said about Socrates...: Socrates was great because he distinguished between what he understood and what he did not understand.<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> See Betz, *After Enlightenment*, p.78.

<sup>81</sup> SM, p.175.

<sup>82</sup> CA, epigraph.

<sup>83</sup> JP 1555/ V B 45; 1844.

And finally, from a draft of the title page to this work:

Socrates	—————	Hamann
†		†
400 b. Chr.		1758 after Chr. <sup>84</sup>

In Kierkegaard’s reference to Hamann, Socratic ignorance is the shorthand employed to articulate the principle of distinguishing between what one knows and what one does not know. And Kierkegaard, in CI, makes the connection between Socratic ignorance and self-knowledge explicit: “It is customary to characterize Socrates’ position also with the well-known phrase: γνώθι σαυτόν [know yourself]...This principle, ‘know yourself,’ is entirely congruous with...ignorance.”<sup>85</sup> Highlighting Kierkegaard’s appeal to Hamann, and his similar association of Socratic ignorance with self-knowledge does little to explicate the more fundamental role that Socratic ignorance plays in Kierkegaard’s thought, particularly as it relates to the idea of true self-knowledge as mediated through the divine revelation and thus the more significant congruence between Kierkegaard’s deployment of this principle and that found in Hamann. I will therefore reconstruct Kierkegaard’s appeal to Socratic ignorance from CI, as well as developing my argument from the Journals and other writings.

As a general principle, Kierkegaard appeals to Socratic ignorance as a means to critique his speculative contemporaries, while also providing a curative:

The majority of men in any generation, even those who, as it is said, are occupied with thinking (professors and the like), live on and die in the illusion of a continuous process, that if they were granted a longer life the process would be a continued direct ascent of comprehending more and more. How many ever arrive at the maturity of discovering that a critical point comes where it reverses, where from now on the ascending

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<sup>84</sup> JP 1553/V B 43; 1844

<sup>85</sup> CI, p.177-178. See also PF, p.37: “Although Socrates did his very best to gain knowledge of human nature and to know himself – yes, even though he has been eulogized for centuries as the person who certainly knew man best – he nevertheless admitted that the reason he was disinclined to ponder the nature of such creatures as Pegasus and the Gorgons was that he still was not quite clear about himself...”

comprehension is to comprehend more and more that there is something which cannot be comprehended.

This is Socratic ignorance, and this is what the speculation of our time needs as a corrective.<sup>86</sup>

For Kierkegaard, as with Hamann, the attempt to gain mastery over existence through an increasing in *knowledge* leads one further away from the truth, a point that Kierkegaard makes repeatedly, as we have seen in chapter one, in his writings. Thus, Kierkegaard states that it is the effort of a Socrates to remove the hubris at the centre of speculative thought: “Like Samson, Socrates grasps the pillars that support knowledge and tumbles everything down into the nothingness of ignorance.”<sup>87</sup> In this way, Kierkegaard wrote towards the end of his life:

Take Socrates! In those days one Sophist after the other came forward and showed that the trouble was a lack of adequate information, there must be more and better research, ignorance was the evil – and then comes old Father Socrates and says: No, ignorance is the restoration to health.

I wonder if it did not go with Socrates in his age as with me.<sup>88</sup>

Kierkegaard’s view that Socratic ignorance is a curative to the malaise of his age and himself in the Socratic role mirrors Hamann’s similar diagnosis and appropriation. But in order to understand the precise remedy that Kierkegaard had in mind and the relation that this has to self-knowledge, one must turn to Kierkegaard’s dissertation, CI. He wrote:

...when Socrates declared that he was ignorant, he nevertheless did know something, for he knew about his ignorance; on the other hand, however, this knowledge was not a knowledge of something, that is, did not have any positive content...If his knowledge had been a knowledge of something, his ignorance would merely have been a conversation technique... To know that one is ignorant is the beginning of coming to know, but if one does not

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<sup>86</sup> JP 3567/X<sup>1</sup> A 679/NB12:134; 1849.

<sup>87</sup> CI, p.40.

<sup>88</sup> JP 4555/ X<sup>2</sup> A 401/NB15:71; 1850.

know more, it is merely a beginning. This knowledge was what kept Socrates ironically afloat.<sup>89</sup>

The key idea in this passage is that while Socrates knew that he was ignorant, this is not knowledge about something: Socrates' ignorance had no positive content. But what does this mean? Kierkegaard suggests in this passage that because ignorance precisely denotes lack of knowledge regarding some fact about the world, it has no content. As he later describes it, ignorance is a truly negative position:

...ignorance is a true philosophical position and at the same time is also completely negative. In other words, Socrates' ignorance was by no means an empirical ignorance; on the contrary, he was a very well informed person, was well read in the poets and philosophers, had much experience in life, and consequently was not ignorant in the empirical sense. In the philosophic sense, however, he was ignorant. He was ignorant of the ground of all being, the eternal, the divine – that is, he knew that it was, but he did not know what it was. He was conscious of it, and yet he was not conscious of it, inasmuch as the only thing he could say about it was that he did not know anything about it.<sup>90</sup>

Socratic ignorance does not provide any determinate content. For Kierkegaard this means that it is the limit at which human knowing arrives. If we recall the discussion from chapter two regarding the speculative attempt to gain the absolute ground, i.e. the presuppositionless beginning, then one can understand the contrast that Kierkegaard makes with regard to Socratic ignorance and the systematic beginning and completion. According to Kierkegaard, Socratic ignorance is not a beginning point in terms of the absolute starting point, but instead Socratic ignorance always ends with the idea that human knowing reaches its pinnacle in recognition of its limits. Thus, where systematic philosophy attempts to achieve the beginning and thereby provide the base upon which to construct a system of knowledge (or existence), Socratic ignorance (in direct contrast) is an articulation of the claim that such a beginning is unavailable (as I have previously argued). Thus, Kierkegaard can claim the following:

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<sup>89</sup> CI, p.269.

<sup>90</sup> CI, p.169.

What modern philosophy has been so preoccupied with – to get all presuppositions removed in order to begin with nothing – Socrates did in his own way, in order to end with nothing.<sup>91</sup>

The contrast illuminated here between philosophy which attempts to achieve the presuppositionless beginning and Socrates brings into sharp relief the main thrust of Kierkegaard's appeal to Socratic ignorance. In adopting Socratic ignorance, Kierkegaard is claiming that the height of human knowledge is not the absolute ground but instead is a profession of ignorance. In this respect, Kierkegaard notes: "Every philosophy that begins with a presupposition naturally ends with the same presupposition, and just as Socrates' philosophy began with the presupposition that he knew nothing, so it ended with the presupposition that human beings know nothing at all".<sup>92</sup> For Kierkegaard this means that Socrates has achieved what systematic philosophy has claimed for itself, namely to have reached the pinnacle of human knowing, not at arriving at the absolute beginning in order to construct the system, but at the limit of human knowing, that is at the end.

If Socratic ignorance is congruous with the Socratic imperative to "know thyself", then how does this relate to the earlier discussion regarding self-knowledge? I would suggest that Socratic ignorance describes the limits inherent in self-knowledge and the resultant fragmentary or inaccessible areas of the self which were detailed earlier. On Kierkegaard's view, our ability to gain purchase on the self is limited. We cannot gain the ground of our existence because unlike post-Kantian ontologies (see chapter three) we are not our own ground. Furthermore, Kierkegaard holds that immediate, direct access to the ground of our existence is anyways unachievable (as I argued earlier in this chapter and in chapter two). In contrasting Socratic ignorance as the point at which human knowing ends with the systematic claim to begin with 'nothing', Kierkegaard is suggesting that ultimately self-knowledge is unachievable in terms of full self-disclosure. As I argued earlier, Kierkegaard does hold to a minimal view of the self which is attainable, but the knowledge which is available through feeling and circumscribed reflection merely achieves the notion of the dialectical self – that the self is composed of infinitude/eternal and finitude/temporal. But this minimum knowledge does not

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<sup>91</sup> JP 754/III A 7; July 10, 1840.

<sup>92</sup> CI, p.37.

provide us with the ground of our existence nor does it say anything about the true end of the self. As Kierkegaard claimed in a passage quoted above, Socrates “was ignorant of the ground of all being, the eternal, the divine – that is, he knew that it was, but he did not know what it was.”<sup>93</sup>

Because Socratic ignorance articulates the fundamental limitations of human knowing, Kierkegaard can claim that “in his ignorance, Socrates was in the truth in the highest sense in paganism.”<sup>94</sup> If Socrates in his ignorance articulates the pinnacle of human knowing, and this is fundamentally related to self-knowing as Kierkegaard claims, then is there a possibility where the self might “go beyond Socrates”<sup>95</sup> in order to gain full knowledge of the self? That is, is it possible to view Socratic ignorance as the end point to which human knowing reaches in contrast to speculative philosophy while at the same time proposing that it marks a beginning in order that Socratic ignorance might be transcended or transgressed? In other words, does Socratic ignorance signal a beginning for true knowledge of the self in Kierkegaard’s conception? Kierkegaard suggests this in an entry:

Paganism required: Know yourself. Christianity declares: No, that is provisional – know yourself – and then look at yourself in the mirror of the Word in order to know yourself properly. No true self-knowledge without God-knowledge or ...before God. To stand before the mirror means to stand before God.<sup>96</sup>

This passage forms part of an earlier draft of *FSE*, which I will discuss below; in particular the image of the mirror as standing before God. At this point, it is important to note what Kierkegaard is saying here in contrasting the Socratic imperative “Know yourself” and Christianity. Specifically, I think it is instructive that Kierkegaard does not critique the pagan, i.e. Socratic, imperative but instead claims that it is provisional. That is, the Socratic is not abolished but is an important point at which one must arrive prior to the ability to gain true self-knowledge. In this

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<sup>93</sup> CI, p.169; see above p.185.

<sup>94</sup> CUP, p.204.

<sup>95</sup> CUP, p.207.

<sup>96</sup> JP 3902/ X<sup>4</sup> A 412/NB24:159; 1851. Kierkegaard continues: “if someone without his knowing places a mirror where the image he sees is a reflected image and this image is himself – he cannot recognize himself.”

way, Socratic ignorance is a propaedeutic to true self-knowledge. Put otherwise, the self must reach the limits of self-knowledge, discover its inaccessibility, and recognise that our possession is fragmentary and limited, that there is a ground to the self which the self cannot itself access. It is only at this point that Socratic ignorance marks a beginning in relation to divine revelation while also establishing the end or limits of human knowing:

And what 'Christendom' needs on the largest possible scale is simply one man (not an aping of what it means to be a man, an aping of 'the others', the historical etc.), one man – and then the New Testament – one man alone with God's word, this secured by Socratic ignorance.<sup>97</sup>

In this respect, where Socratic ignorance marks a critical departure from speculative philosophy it also at the same time signals a continuity with the divine revelation. The self must arrive at the point of Socratic ignorance in order to receive true knowledge of the self in the divine revelation; as Kierkegaard stated in the above entry, the point at which the self is receptive to divine revelation is "secured by Socratic ignorance." Kierkegaard makes this connection explicit in SUD:

Precisely this is no doubt what our age, what Christendom needs: a little Socratic ignorance with respect to Christianity – but please note, a little 'Socratic' ignorance. Let us never forget – but how many ever really knew it or thought it – let us never forget that Socrates' ignorance was a kind of fear and worship of God, that his ignorance was the Greek version of the Jewish saying: The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. Let us never forget that it was out of veneration for God that he was ignorant, that as far as it was possible for a pagan he was on guard duty as a *judge* on the frontier between God and man, keeping watch so that the deep gulf of qualitative difference between them was maintained, between God and man, that God and man did not merge in some way, *philosophice, poetice* [philosophically, poetically], etc., into one...– in the system.<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>97</sup> JP 4296/ XI<sup>1</sup> A 15/NB28:70; 1854.

<sup>98</sup> SUD, p.99. See also NB15:12/ X<sup>2</sup> A 340/ JP 2797; 1850: "The system starts with nothing, the mystery always ends with nothing. The latter is the religious/pious nothing, just as Socrates' Ignorance was the fear of God, his Ignorance with which he, again, did not begin but ended or [the point] to which he continually came."

The claim that Socratic ignorance is in continuity with Christian revelation is a crucial point in Kierkegaard's conception. Specifically, the claim made in the above that Socratic ignorance protects or ensures the maintenance of the qualitative difference between God and man – a notion that Kierkegaard draws specifically from Hamann – is instructive. As I argued earlier, Kierkegaard's critique of post-Kantian variations of the self as either the loss of infinitude in Hegelianism or the loss of finitude in Fichte and Romanticism is recalled here. Kierkegaard claims that Socratic ignorance establishes the difference between God and man by ensuring that they do "not merge in some way *philosophice, poetice*" returns us to the earlier critique. In short, the merging of the divine with the human occurs in the philosophical turn to pantheism through a loss of infinitude and occurs in the reverse direction in poetry through the elevation of the human to the divine. According to Kierkegaard, the recognition of our limits secured through Socratic ignorance maintains the integrity of the divine and the self's relation to the divine. It is what brings us to the point where we recognise that the ground of the self is beyond finitude and that our ability to reach the infinite comes up against its limits. As pointed out above, Socratic ignorance is the "critical point" where one discovers that "the ascending comprehension is to comprehend more and more that there is something which cannot be comprehended."<sup>99</sup>

Socratic ignorance, therefore, is a necessary point that human knowing must reach in order for the true knowledge of the self to be received, a knowledge which comes from outside the realm of human endeavour through divine revelation. According to Kierkegaard, Socratic ignorance is in continuity with the religious in order that it might be transgressed by revelation. It is only in divine revelation that the self discovers its true self and its true end: "Socrates did not have the true ideal, neither the conception of sin nor that the salvation of man requires a crucified god. The watchword of his life therefore could never be: The world has been crucified to me, and I to the world... [Socratic ignorance] can never come up to the dreadful fact that salvation means God crucified".<sup>100</sup> It is by coming to the end of human knowledge that Socratic ignorance marks a beginning where true self-knowledge becomes possible through the reception of divine revelation. As Hamann so

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<sup>99</sup> JP 3567/X<sup>1</sup> A 679/NB12:134; 1849. See above, p.183.

<sup>100</sup> JP 4279/X<sup>3</sup> A 253/NB19:90; 1850.

poignantly wrote: "...the empty understanding of a Socrates can become fruitful as well as the womb of a pure virgin."<sup>101</sup>

If Socratic ignorance brings us to the limit of self-knowledge as both Hamann and Kierkegaard claim, then is it possible to move beyond ignorance in order to gain true knowledge of the self? I have argued that Hamann and Kierkegaard point beyond Socratic ignorance by suggesting that true self-knowledge can be gained through divine revelation. For Kierkegaard, the limits of self-knowledge establish the idea of a dialectical self which can be intuited through feeling which prioritises existence over reflection. This limited self-knowledge, described as Socratic ignorance, does not provide us with the ground of our existence as this is unachievable as I argued above and in chapter two. Furthermore, chapter three has shown that for Kierkegaard we are not self-positing agents but instead are posited by God. In this way, Kierkegaard argues that the ground of our being is unintelligible to us in a manner which cannot be overcome by an act of the self.

Hamann advances a similar position, which I believe is echoed later by Kierkegaard. This central aspect of Hamann's thought was first articulated in *Brocken*, a piece found in his *Londoner Schriften*.<sup>102</sup> In *Brocken*, Hamann addresses several topics, with the issue of self-knowledge at the centre of his discussion: "Why is it that man cannot know himself? This must simply rest in the condition of our souls."<sup>103</sup> Hamann's short answer to this question is that our knowledge is fragmentary, a patchwork and this statement is a reflection of the title of the work: "*We live here from crumbs. Our thoughts are nothing but fragments. Indeed, our knowledge is but patchwork.*"<sup>104</sup> In a letter to Herder, Hamann makes the connection between our fragmentary knowledge and specifically self-knowledge explicit: "Gaps and lacks – are the highest and deepest knowledge of human nature...the *summum*

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<sup>101</sup> SM, p.171.

<sup>102</sup> For an account of Hamann's time in London and the events leading up to and surrounding the writing of these texts Bayer and Weißenborn, *LS*, p.3-10; see also Bernd Weißenborn, "Auswahl und Verwendung der Bibelstellen in Johann Georg Hamanns Frühschriften" in *Johann Georg Hamann. Autor und Autorschaft. Acta des sechsten Internationalen Hamann-Kolloquiums im Herder Institut zu Marburg/Lahn 1992*, ed. Bernhard Gajek (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1996), p.25-26; Betz, *After Enlightenment*, p.29-32.

<sup>103</sup> LS, p.408.

<sup>104</sup> LS, p.407.

*bonum* of our reason.”<sup>105</sup> The limits of self-knowledge which the self encounters, the mystery at the centre of selfhood can only appear as “gaps and lacks” to reason. This letter to Herder is also significant because just prior to this, Hamann wrote the following words: “I believe, that nothing in our souls become lost, just as with God; at the same it seems to me that we have certain thoughts only once in our life”. What significance does this have? These words were underlined by Kierkegaard in his copy of Hamann’s writings, indicating that he had read this letter carefully.<sup>106</sup>

In suggesting that our inability to gain mastery of our self-knowledge is owing to our nature, and this is reflected in the “patchwork” nature of our knowledge in general, Hamann lays the groundwork for explicating this issue and, for our purposes, recalls the issue of Socratic ignorance. For Hamann, as with Kierkegaard, the limits of self-knowledge is encapsulated in Socratic ignorance. That is, our natural knowledge reaches its end point and can go no further. But as I have also shown, this end point marks a beginning for both Hamann and Kierkegaard in relation to divine revelation. Thus, in *Brocken* one finds Hamann articulating themes which were discussed earlier in relation to Kierkegaard: the limits of self-knowledge is the result of the fact that we are dependent upon the Other for our existence, namely God. As such, our understanding of ourself is limited to Socratic ignorance apart from a relation to the divine through revelation. As Betz has pointed out, Hamann’s interest in the philosophical issue of self-knowledge demands a “theological answer.”<sup>107</sup> Thus, the fundamental feature of our nature which Hamann articulates can only be illuminated in relation to the Other in whom we have our existence:

The impossibility of knowing ourselves may lie just as easily in the ground of our nature as in its particular purpose and condition. Just as the movement of a clock presupposes a proper organisation in its construction and the condition of being able to be wound. *If* our nature, in a specific way, is dependent upon the will of a higher being *then* it is clear that one requires

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<sup>105</sup> ZH III, 34; (to Herder, 13.1.1773).

<sup>106</sup> JP 1557/VI A 6/JJ:295; 1844-1845: “There is something rather curious about this: Hamann says that God forgets nothing but that there are ideas and flashes which men get no more than once in a lifetime – and this statement appears twice in the third and fifth volumes. I have marked them in my copy.” R III, p.392; (to Herder, 17.1.1769) and R V, p.25; (to Herder, 13.1.1773).

<sup>107</sup> Betz, *After Enlightenment*, p.57.

help from the latter in order to enlighten the former; *and the more* light we would receive with respect to this being, the more our own nature would become illuminated.<sup>108</sup>

According to Hamann, the very constitution of our being suggests that we cannot transcend our limitations in order to gain knowledge of ourselves. Which is to say that the limitations we encounter in our self-knowledge are those which cannot be overcome, since they are natural to our self-hood. Thus, Hamann holds that our fragmentary knowledge and our inability to gain self-knowledge can only be rectified through a relation to a higher being, namely the one who created us:

That we do not have the knowledge of ourselves in our power, [from this] *one sees* how necessary that our self is grounded in the Creator...*in this alone can the entire mystery of our nature be determined and resolved.*<sup>109</sup>

One notices Hamann's emphasis on the powerlessness of our ability to gain self-knowledge. Furthermore, it is only through the Creator in whom we are grounded that self-knowledge is possible in spite of our weakness. Thus, the limits articulated as Socratic ignorance are here described as an utter inability, heightening the border which cannot be transgressed. Crucial to recognise in the above passage is Hamann's invocation of mystery which was encountered in the previous two chapters – the mystery of language and the mystery of the unified nature of the self. As Hamann wrote in *Aesthetica in nuce*:

He created man in the divine figure; – – in the image of God he created him. This will of the Creator solves the most tangled knots of human nature and its purpose...The cloaked figure of the body, the countenance of the head, and the extremities of the arms are the visible schema in which we move; yet are nothing but an index finger pointing to the hidden self in us;<sup>110</sup>

However, if we are powerless and at our limit, Hamann indicates that the relation to the one in whom we are grounded offers the possibility that the mystery of our existence may be illuminated. Thus, the question becomes, if true self-knowledge can only be gained through relation to the Other which has established us, then how

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<sup>108</sup> LS, p.408.

<sup>109</sup> LS, p.409.

<sup>110</sup> N II, p.198/R II, p.259.

does this occur? For Hamann, it is through the divinely inspired Word of scripture which illuminates that which would otherwise remain dark and hidden from our view, namely true self-knowledge.<sup>111</sup> Hamann's central insights here, which infuse his writings in their entirety – being present even in his last papers,<sup>112</sup> were first articulated in the midst of his well-known conversion in London.<sup>113</sup>

When Hamann recounts his conversion in *Gedanken*, the emphasis is on his own life history as reflected in the story of Israel: “I recognized my own crimes in the history of the Jewish people, I saw the course of my own life and thanked God for his long-suffering with these, his people, since nothing but such an example could entitle me to the same hope.”<sup>114</sup> But more specifically, Hamann saw himself reflected in the story of Cain and Abel, with himself in the role of Cain as a participant in the death of Christ.<sup>115</sup> Thus, Hamann began to understand that Scripture revealed to himself his true nature, one that had previously remained unknown to him. In reading Scripture he saw that it referred directly to himself, that it was his self being told in the narratives of Scripture.<sup>116</sup> As he wrote later, “Whoever compares the map of Israel's journeys with the course of my life, will see how they correspond with each other.”<sup>117</sup>

Thus, what he says about self-knowledge and Scripture was first described in very personal terms.<sup>118</sup> This idea did not remain merely autobiographical, for Hamann saw that true self-knowledge for humanity could only be gained through

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<sup>111</sup> Hamann's views of divine revelation, in particular the centrality of kenosis in his conception, is a topic that has been well-covered. For a discussion of kenosis see Fritsch, *communicatio*, p.69-75.

<sup>112</sup> See Bayer and Knudsen, *Kreuz*, p.147

<sup>113</sup> See Chapter One.

<sup>114</sup> LS, p.343; translation in Oswald Bayer, “God As Author of My Life-History”, *Lutheran Quarterly* 2(4) (1988): p.441. See also Weißenborn, *Auswahl*, p.27; Weißenborn discusses the specific books that Hamann concentrated on during this period, noting that his reading of the Old Testament and the appearance of Old Testament citations in the *Londoner Schriften* outweighs those of the New Testament.

<sup>115</sup> Betz, *After Enlightenment*, p.40-41.

<sup>116</sup> As Betz remarks, “through a sudden, uncanny transposition accomplished on the part of Scripture itself, Hamann discovered that Scripture was ‘living and active’ (Heb. 4:12), that in some strange way it was also addressed to him.”

<sup>117</sup> LS, p.345; translation in Bayer, *God Life-History*, p.453 n29.

<sup>118</sup> See LS, p.345. Here Hamann describes the very personal nature of the *Gedanken*: “I have drafted these thoughts regarding my life for myself or for my dear father and brother...In them I have spoken with God and myself.”

Scripture. As Bayer has noted, “Hamann does not perceive his own life-history in an isolated way because he understands it as Israel’s history *en miniature*. Thus, Israel’s history is not limited to the soul of an individual. Rather, through it...an individual man with his concrete life-history experiences that he is guided out of an empty subjectivity...and...into the openness of creation and history.” Accordingly, Hamann articulates both the particularity and universality of divine revelation as it pertains to the individual and to all individuals.<sup>119</sup> Thus, in his *Biblical Meditations* and his discussion of Newton’s treatise on Prophecy (*Betrachtung[en] über Newtons Abhandlung von den Weissagung[en].*), one finds the extension of this view, which began as a personal experience, to humanity in general. Particularly in *Weissagung*, one finds the claims extended beyond the autobiographical and are now seen as applicable to humanity: “Every biblical story/narrative is a prophecy – through every century – and is fulfilled in every human soul.”<sup>120</sup>

According to Hamann, God’s work in Israel is not only applicable to each individual in its universality, but God’s work in the individual is reflected in the history of Israel, which Hamann (the importance of which will soon be evident) likens to a mirror: “The Jews still remain a mirror, in which we see God’s mystery in the redemption of the human race as in a riddle.”<sup>121</sup>

For Hamann, true self-knowledge is only gained through God’s Word. Apart from this, our knowledge is fragmentary, patchwork without coherence and direction. While Hamann’s intensive ruminations began with his own encounters with scripture, where the text addressed him specifically – as for example when he considers himself as Cain, in “the story of the primeval fratricide”<sup>122</sup> – Hamann also expanded in his own experiences into a larger ontological vision of revelation and identity. As Betz has noted, the articulation of self-knowledge and divine revelation in the *Londoner Schriften* “challenge the modern notions of subjectivity inasmuch as, for Hamann, the individual subject is not a pre-given identity or *cogito* but linguistically constituted – ideally, by the biblical texts, such that one’s subjective

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<sup>119</sup> Bayer, *God Life-History*, p.446.

<sup>120</sup> LS, p.421. See also Fritsch, *communicatio*, p.70; he notes: “The biblical narrative between the fall and the event of the cross becomes a biographically distinctive salvation history for the reader, in fact it is first fulfilled in this transfiguration through the individual life-history of the reader. ”

<sup>121</sup> LS, p.425.

<sup>122</sup> Bayer, *God Life-History*, p.447. see LS, p.343.

identity is constituted, so to speak, *ex auditu* by the Word of God.”<sup>123</sup> As Hamann wrote in *Gedanken*, “I conclude, with evidence drawn from my own experience, with heartfelt and sincere thanks to God for his saving Word, which I have tested and found to be not only the light whereby we come to God, but also to know ourselves”.<sup>124</sup>

The relation between Socratic ignorance and self-knowledge taken up by Hamann and repeated by Kierkegaard, finds further elaboration in Kierkegaard’s *For Self-Examination* (hereafter, FSE), and is found scattered across his other writings, both published and unpublished. In particular, Kierkegaard holds – as Hamann did before him – that true self-knowledge can only be gained through the divine revelation in the Word. I quoted earlier a passage from Kierkegaard regarding the relation between the Socratic imperative to “*Know Thyself*” and the Word. Owing to its centrality, I provide it here again:

Paganism required: Know yourself. Christianity declares: No, that is provisional – know yourself – and then look at yourself in the mirror of the Word in order to know yourself properly. No true self-knowledge without God-knowledge or ...before God. To stand before the mirror means to stand before God.<sup>125</sup>

As I argued above, Kierkegaard holds that the Socratic view of self-knowledge is the utmost limit at which human knowing arrives. Furthermore, I suggested that Kierkegaard holds that this is the necessary point that the self must arrive at before true self-knowledge becomes possible. Kierkegaard maintains that our ability to gain self-knowledge falls outwith the ability of the self and this in contrast to post-Kantian attempts. When Kierkegaard takes up this issue in FSE, and in other places, he invokes the optical metaphor of the mirror – which he draws from James 1:22-25. The appeal to the metaphor of the mirror signals not only the priority of Scripture but is meant, I believe, as a contrast to post-Kantian reflection theory which I outlined in the first section of this chapter. There, it will be recalled,

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<sup>123</sup> Betz, *After Enlightenment*, p.39.

<sup>124</sup> LS, p.345.

<sup>125</sup> JP 3902/X<sup>4</sup> A 412/NB24:159; 1851. Kierkegaard continues: “if someone without his knowing places a mirror where the image he sees is a reflected image and this image is himself – he cannot recognize himself.”

Kierkegaard had characterised the speculative attempt to gain the *I* as akin to “a man who is wearing his glasses and nevertheless is looking for his glasses – that is, he is looking for something right in front of his nose, but he does not look right in front of his nose and therefore never finds it.”<sup>126</sup>

Significantly, Kierkegaard holds that prior to looking in the mirror of the Word one must have a conception of one’s own selfhood in order for the self to recognise itself.: “One must to a certain extent know oneself beforehand. He who does not know himself cannot recognize himself, either; one is continually able to recognize oneself only to the extent that one knows oneself.” Kierkegaard continues by noting that “if someone without his knowing places a mirror where the image he sees is a reflected image and this image is himself – he cannot recognize himself.”<sup>127</sup> While Kierkegaard does not discuss this in relation to the provisory limit of Socratic ignorance directly, I believe that it fits well with his overall view which I explicated earlier. That is, the Socratic imperative to self-knowledge is absolutely fundamental in order not only that we recognise our limits but that we recognise our selfhood. Without such prior knowledge that I am this particular individual, I cannot have the Word spoken to my self. As I outlined earlier, Kierkegaard suggests that we can gain a view of the self as a dialectical relation so that the self is not apotheosised in infinitude or denigrated to a metaphysics of necessity. Crucially, Kierkegaard maintains that such self-knowledge of ourselves is not only important, but indispensable to hearing the Word addressed to the *I*.<sup>128</sup> In this way, the limits of self-knowledge bring us to the point where we recognise our *I-ness* in order that we might receive the image of the self as it is meant to be. Or, in terms which I discussed earlier in the chapter, Kierkegaard maintains that we must have an awareness of the self, both pre-reflexive and reflexive (although limited), in order that we might recognise our self-hood as belonging our-self.

In this respect, it is instructive that Kierkegaard adopts the optical metaphor of the mirror in his description of the self of infinitude and the self of necessity. Thus, with regard to the self of finitude and necessity, Kierkegaard makes the following remark in CUP: “Let world history be a mirror, let the observer sit and

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<sup>126</sup> CI, p.272; see above p.160.

<sup>127</sup> JP 3902/X<sup>4</sup> A 412/NB24:159; 1851.

<sup>128</sup> See JP 4548/X<sup>2</sup> A 145/NB13:76; 1849.

look at himself in the mirror, but let us not forget the dog that also looked at itself in the mirror – and lost what it had.”<sup>129</sup> He proceeds to pose the following issue for consideration: “*what there is to see in the world-historical.*” Which is to say, that the image of the self rendered in the mirror of “the world-historical” is a self which lacks infinitude, as I argued in the first section of this chapter. A similar theme is raised in SUD, but there the discussion turns towards the self of possibility, i.e. infinitude, as discussed above:

...the tragedy is that he did not become aware of himself, aware that the self is a very definite something and thus the necessary. Instead, he lost himself, because this self fantastically reflected itself in possibility. Even in seeing *oneself* in a mirror it is necessary to recognize oneself, for if one does not, one does see *oneself* but only a human being. The mirror of possibility is no ordinary mirror, it must be used with extreme caution, for, in the highest sense, this mirror does not tell the truth. That a self appears to be such and such in the possibility of itself is only a half-truth, for in the possibility of itself the self is still far from or is only half of itself.<sup>130</sup>

This passage draws on themes which we have previously discussed. For example, one notes the reference to a recognition of the self – that is, I am just this person looking in this mirror. As we recall, for Kierkegaard this is the view that we have an intuitive grasp of the self without a need to appeal to reflection theory. Second, Kierkegaard notes that this is only half of a self. While a certain type of reflection might provide a specific type of access to the self – the self as sheer possibility in this instance and sheer infinitude in others as we have seen – this is not a true image of the self being reflected. It is only half of the self because it lacks its particular finite and concrete relations, which Kierkegaard here designates as necessity. Thus, while the self achieves a particular type of reflection on the self it only renders the self in half of its nature, i.e. it lacks finitude or necessity. Moreover, as Kierkegaard says, “this mirror does not tell the truth.” And while in the context of

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<sup>129</sup> See CUP, p.153. The editors of both the SKS and Hong edition suggest that the reference to the dog in this passage is drawn from Aesop’s fables. The Hongs have provided this passage: “A dog, while carrying a piece of meat across a river, caught sight of his own image floating in the mirror of the waters and, thinking that it was another prize carried by another dog, decided to snatch it. But his greed was disappointed: he let go of the meal that he held in his mouth, and failed besides to grasp the meal for which he strove.” See CUP II, p.221, n.200.

<sup>130</sup> SUD, p.36-37.

SUD, this refers to the lack of finitude, it also fits with Kierkegaard's larger claims in his writings that this mirror cannot tell the truth because the only true reflection of the self occurs in the mirror of the Word. Kierkegaard, in FSE, makes this explicit in that it is only by being reflected in the Word that we obtain true knowledge of the self, a vision of selfhood. Kierkegaard writes by being reflected in God's Word, one

...will succeed in becoming a human being, a personality, rescued from being this dreadful nonentity into which we humans, created in the image of God, have been bewitched, an impersonal, an objective something... And if you want to relate impersonally (objectively) to God's Word, there can be no question of looking at yourself in the mirror, because it takes a personality, an *I*, to look at oneself in a mirror; a wall can be seen in a mirror, but a wall cannot see itself or look at itself in a mirror. No, while reading God's Word, you must incessantly say to yourself: It is I to whom it is speaking; it is I about whom it is speaking.<sup>131</sup>

For Kierkegaard, like Hamann, true self-knowledge is not within our grasp but must be given through divine revelation. Central to Kierkegaard's view, again, is the requirement of being able to recognise oneself in the mirror in order for the self to recognise itself. Thus, the limits of reflection and the minimal purchase the we gain on the self, as outlined above, is an indispensable yet provisional point at which the self arrives in order that the self might receive the self's true knowledge of itself through divine revelation. As Kierkegaard wrote in *Works of Love*, "The divine authority of the Gospel does not speak to one person about another, does not speak to you, my listener, about me, or to me about you – no, when the Gospel speaks, it speaks to the single individual. It does not speak *about* us human beings, you and me, but speaks *to* us human beings, to you and me".<sup>132</sup>

According to Kierkegaard, as with Hamann, God's revelation in and through the Word marks the point at which the self receives its true knowledge of itself. Contrary to post-Kantian versions of autonomy, and Romantic attempts to gain the self through artistic endeavour, the notion of selfhood at the centre of Kierkegaard's

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<sup>131</sup> FSE, p.43-44.

<sup>132</sup> WL, p.14. See also Kierkegaard's discussion in *To Need God is a Human Being's Highest Perfection, Four Upbuilding Discourses* (1844) in *Eighteen Upbuilding Discourses*, ed. and tr. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), p.297-326.

and Hamann's thought acknowledges its dependence upon that which lies outwith the self's own construction. This, however, does not mean that the self abrogates responsibility as both Hamann and Kierkegaard hold that we must be selves, in the recognition of our limitations in order to see ourselves in the Word. As Bayer claims (and Betz follows), the self is not a self-constituting entity, but is rather revealed to itself in the Word.<sup>133</sup> In this way Hamann, and Kierkegaard following him, offer a stark alternative to the modern notion of subjectivity while also, I would argue, maintaining its *I*-ness and integrity.

## Conclusion

I have sought in this chapter to illuminate Kierkegaard's conception of selfhood, both in his critical arguments against Hegelianism and post-Kantian alternatives and his reparative proposals. I began by arguing that Kierkegaard takes up the issue of selfhood in his authorship because of a loss he diagnoses at the centre of Hegelian philosophy. Specifically, I outlined what Kierkegaard describes as a loss of infinitude, the reduction of the self to a realm of metaphysical necessity. In order to rescue the self from such a disastrous predicament (moral, religious, and philosophical), Kierkegaard sought to rehabilitate infinitude into a dialectical relation with finitude.

In his reparative rehabilitation of infinitude, Kierkegaard also articulated two central criticisms against post-Kantian varieties: that of reflection, represented in the Fichtean account and that of art and poetry represented in the Romantic view. For Kierkegaard, these two attempts share a family resemblance in that they both gain infinitude but do so at the cost of a loss of finitude. Thus, in their attempt to overcome the presence of pantheism, the particular and contingent nature of existence was abolished. However, Kierkegaard does not merely point out the loss of finitude in these accounts but offers a series of arguments as to why such a gain of infinitude is illusory. That is, we are unable to gain the ground of our being immediately in reflection (or art) owing to the radical disruption to transparency that language highlights.

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<sup>133</sup> See Bayer, *God Life-History*, p.449; see also Betz, *After Enlightenment*, p.41.

This does not mean, though, that Kierkegaard gives up on the notion of a discrete self and he pursues, as I have reconstructed, a threefold method whereby the self may gain purchase on itself. As I have shown, Kierkegaard appeals to the priority of being, passion as a feeling of our selfhood, and a circumscribed role of reflection. However, for Kierkegaard this ability to reflect upon the self does not conclude with transparency but ends at the recognition that such transparency is not available. Following Hamann, Kierkegaard describes this as Socratic ignorance.

In invoking Socratic ignorance Hamann, and Kierkegaard following him, articulates the limits of self-knowledge. It is this limit which the self reaches in conceptualising itself. However, for both thinkers the limits of the self's knowledge of itself does not lead to scepticism or nihilism but instead is the point at which the true image of the self can be received. In this way, Socratic ignorance marks an end for human knowing while at the same time marking a beginning of true self-knowledge.

Hamann, and Kierkegaard later, hold that true self-knowledge – owing to the inherent limits of self-knowledge – must be mediated to the self and both appeal to the divinely revealed Word. As both maintain, it is only through a relation to the Other which has created us that we are able to receive an image of our full nature and end. In this respect, Hamann appeals to the story of Israel and what began as his personal experience became a guiding and foundational view in his thought. Similarly, Kierkegaard holds that it is the text which speaks to the self of the self and it is only through this movement and medium that the self becomes truly itself.

## Conclusion

The importance of Hamann to the development of Kierkegaard's authorship has been widely acknowledged. However, apart from a handful of articles, not a single in-depth study has been produced since the early twentieth century which examines Kierkegaard's reception of Hamann. The present work has sought to advance our understanding of this relation, thus contributing to the correction of such an obvious oversight. In this respect, this study has had three central aims: (1) to demonstrate that some arguments which Kierkegaard advances can be illuminated by paying attention to Hamann; (2) to show that standard themes which are taken to be original with Kierkegaard stem from his reading of Hamann; (3) to introduce readers of Kierkegaard to Hamann's writings, while also transmitting the wealth of scholarship that exists devoted to Hamann – the vast majority of which has been produced in the last 35 years in Germany and which remains untranslated. To these ends, I have provided a study of Kierkegaard's relation to Hamann, covering major themes in their writings, over four chapters.

In the first chapter, *Style, System, and Socrates*, I explored Kierkegaard's early reception of Hamann. I argued Kierkegaard's formation in this early period, as he set out to conceptualise an authorship distinct from his Hegelian environment, was influenced by his reading of Hamann. I argued this influence is detectable in the centrality of Socrates, style, communication and humour as an alternative to the system building projects of post-Kantian philosophy. Contrasting Hegel's *Review* of the Roth edition with Kierkegaard's appeal to Hamann found in the *Journals*, I presented the development of these ideas, particularly the non-systematic nature of his writings, by which Kierkegaard distinguished himself from the dominant philosophical milieu of his native Denmark. As well, I also corrected two long standing views of Kierkegaard's reception of Hamann: (1) the claim that Kierkegaard criticised Hamann for not being systematic enough I have demonstrated to be incorrect and indicated how this has come to be part of the standard portrait of Kierkegaard's appraisal of Hamann; (2) the claim that Kierkegaard came to Hamann via Hegel, showing that by paying attention to Kierkegaard's interest in Hamann's marriage of conscience one can reasonably conclude that Hegel was the unlikely source for Kierkegaard's introduction to Hamann's writings.

The second chapter, *The Presuppositionless Beginning*, presented Kierkegaard's formal critique of the presuppositionless beginning found in CUP. Placing Kierkegaard within the post-Kantian tradition of the "All or Nothing", I sought to demonstrate Kierkegaard's critique of that tradition. I argued Kierkegaard provides two distinct critiques of the presuppositionless beginning in which he demonstrates the absolute beginning is unachievable. The first critique presented was from agency, in which I showed, for Kierkegaard, the process of infinite reflection is unable to gain access to pure being. I indicated the origins of this argument are to be found in Early Romantic critiques of Fichte. I then focussed on Kierkegaard's critique of infinite abstraction and the achievement of pure thinking. I argued Kierkegaard approaches his critique of pure thinking through a consideration of the dependence of thought on language. This argument, I indicated, was drawn from Hamann, while also acknowledging that it appears in abbreviated form in Kierkegaard. I then considered Hamann's critique of Kant, to which, I argued, Kierkegaard appealed. Hamann's argument is that reason is dependent on language, which undermines Kant's claims to *a priori* cognition. Hamann summarised this argument in the pithy statement *Vernunft ist Sprache*. Focussing exclusively on Hamann's *Metacritique of the Purism of Reason*, I rehearsed the central aspects of Hamann's arguments and demonstrated the manner in which Kierkegaard reproduced them in his own critique of the speculative project.

Chapter three, *The Existential Self*, presented Hamann and Kierkegaard's conceptions of selfhood, their diagnoses of faulty notions of selfhood and the existential maladies engendered through these, as well as addressing their offered cures. I began with Hamann, rehearsing his conception of the self as a unity which is grounded in its divine origin. Attention then turned to consider Hamann's critique of the rational self at the centre of the Enlightenment. The rational self, for Hamann, causes a divorce between the self's infinite and finite natures by overvaluing reason and thus devaluing the embodied nature of existence. This results in an existential crisis which deprives the self of passion, while at the same time separating the self from its divine origin in a drive for self-determination. This leads the self to ascribe to itself divine predicates in the self's attempt to fill the void created in the separation from the ground of its being. Hamann's remedy for this existential crisis was then presented, where it was shown Hamann argues for *companionability* – a non-hierarchical relation between the faculties. In the next step, it was argued Hamann

traces the origin of a faulty conception of selfhood to self-deception in a misuse of language.

Turning to Kierkegaard, I presented his conception of the self as a relational unity, ontologically grounded in the divine and his diagnosis of two existential ailments arising out of faulty conceptions of selfhood – infinitude's despair and forgetfulness. Treating infinitude's despair first, I indicated Kierkegaard traces the root of despair to an unwarranted elevation of the imagination. The hierarchical rule of the imagination causes the self to disregard its finitude in favour of infinitude, which results in the self coming to see itself as radically autonomous, separated from its embodied existence and its divine, ontological, ground. In the displacement of the relation to itself and the divine, the self of infinitude's despair ascribes to itself divine predicates in an attempt to fill the void created. As a cure for infinitude's despair, I argued, Kierkegaard demands that the imagination be coordinated with the will in order that the self may relate its infinitude to its finitude properly and, through this, to its divine ontological ground.

Following the treatment of despair, I then considered Kierkegaard's existential diagnosis of forgetfulness, highlighting the structural similarities it shares with despair. I presented Kierkegaard's view of forgetfulness as a choice which the self enacts in order to avoid the task of selfhood. This was followed by a consideration of the root of forgetfulness which Kierkegaard traces to the surreptitious elevation of reason. As a cure, Kierkegaard presents a notion which he terms *concurrency*. *Concurrency*, I argued, is the reordering of the faculties in a non-hierarchical relation which opens up the possibility of achieving selfhood. For Kierkegaard, the achievement of selfhood not only entails the self's own self-relation but also provides the means whereby the self can relate to the paradox, i.e., Christ. In a final step, I considered Kierkegaard's view that despair and forgetfulness arise through a form of self-deception. In concluding the chapter, I highlighted the similarities between the accounts of selfhood, existential crisis, and cure offered by Hamann and Kierkegaard. While Kierkegaard, admittedly, drew on varied sources for his existential arguments, I have proposed Hamann should be viewed as an important contributor to the development of Kierkegaard's mature existential views.

The final chapter, *Reflection and the Dialectical Self*, considered Kierkegaard's treatment of self-reflection. Dealing with central post-Kantian themes of self-knowledge and the ability to gain access to the self when it is the self

accessing and being accessed, I highlighted the two reasons why this issue was important to Kierkegaard: (1) a loss of infinitude in Hegelianism, and (2) a loss of finitude in Romanticism. In short, both Hegelianism and Romanticism fail to provide an adequate means of access to the self because infinitude is lost in the former, and finitude is abrogated in the latter. I then reconstructed Kierkegaard's arguments for the possibility of self-reflection, demonstrating that he appeals to a Hamannian and Romantic notion of the priority of being over thought via feeling, while also maintaining a minimal role for reflection.

However, as I presented, Kierkegaard argues the self meets its limits of its own self knowledge which he describes as Socratic ignorance. I argued Kierkegaard's conception of Socratic ignorance as the limits of self-knowledge shows a high level of similarity to Hamann. Further, Socratic ignorance is not only a limit, but it is the point at which the self must arrive in its own self knowledge in order to receive the true image of the self via divine revelation. Rehearsing Hamann's view that the self is reflected in the story of Israel as delivered in the Word, I presented Kierkegaard's description of the true image of the self given in the reflection in the Word.

This study has shown Kierkegaard's reception of Hamann has more depth and breadth than previously held. At crucial junctures in Kierkegaard's authorship one can detect Hamann's presence – in Kierkegaard's early formulation of his authorial task, the development of his philosophical critique of speculative philosophy, the formation of his mature existential diagnoses, and in his comprehensive views of selfhood. At the same time, much work remains to be done. Thus, there are three issues implicitly raised in thesis that merit future research and which deserve brief mention.

First, I examined Hamann and Kierkegaard and their conceptions of relational selfhood in chapter three. For both, however, this extends beyond a concern with the self's relation to itself and to God and includes the self's relation to other selves. This last aspect of the relational self has not featured in the current study and deserves future attention, particularly in light of their discussions of love. Related to the issue of inter-relationality, is the need to attend to the role of tradition in their writings, which also implicates the topics of language and silence. Attention here would provide rich ground for a comparative study. In general, Kierkegaard is weary of granting too much authority to the weight of tradition (as seen in his various

arguments against “the masses” and “Christendom”), which is perfectly in line with his criticisms of Hegelianism. Specifically, the emphasis in Kierkegaard is to distance his claims from those which would grant too much authority to cultural institutions and practices as he diagnosis the existential problems that occur when this becomes a dominant force in existence, supplanting the subject’s integrity in order to uphold the primary authority of custom and tradition. This leads, in Kierkegaard’s later thought, to a diminished role of language in favour of silence which tends towards individualism. Hamann, on the other hand, operates in the opposite direction, focussing on the ways in which our inherited traditions and customs, via language, are fundamental to our existence.

While Kierkegaard and Hamann both offer a dialectical relation between freedom and tradition, they can tend, at times, to favour either a full immersion in tradition (Hamann) or individualism (Kierkegaard). To mediate between these two claims – the self and tradition – is a difficult task which they both in their own ways acknowledge. Drawing on the best aspects of their views, together they could offer the potential to construct a contemporary theological conception of selfhood – one which would offer a critique of postmodern conceptions of autonomy and radical subjectivism, but which at the same time would maintain the integrity and dignity of the self by accounting for the embodied, linguistic nature of existence.

Second, as I argued in chapter four, both Hamann and Kierkegaard appeal to divine revelation in relation to self-knowledge. However, I have not discussed their views of divine revelation itself, the manner in which God reveals himself in both the Word and the Word incarnate. Again, this deserves more consideration particularly in light of their claims that God is a “poet” and “author”. Moreover, their designation of the infinite qualitative distinction between God and man, while also accounting for their understanding of sin are also related. A study which examined their notions of divine revelation would not only need to draw out the above similarities but also take into consideration the differences that exist between their accounts. There are two worth noting: (A) Hamann unmistakably understands God’s self-revelation as occurring in nature and in the course of history. In these respects, Hamann’s notion of incarnation is more immanent than Kierkegaard is willing to concede. This is not surprising, however, given Kierkegaard’s apprehension towards Hegelian thought which he viewed as undermining the difference between God and humanity through a pantheistic immanentization of God’s relation to the world.

(B) The use of sexual imagery in their writings, and the various images of the female they deploy. Where Hamann celebrates sexuality explicitly in his writings, and is not adverse to describing God (and even the self's relation to God) in sexual imagery, Kierkegaard is more circumspect and the sexual appears in a negative fashion, often deployed in illustrations of selfhood which are to be avoided. This could prove to be a very fruitful avenue of research, particularly in light of Kierkegaard's explicit interest in Hamann's domestic arrangement.

Third, Kierkegaard appeals to Hamann in an intellectual environment which is quite different from that which Hamann inhabited. This historical distance is important in two respects, both of which must be borne in mind by future students of Kierkegaard's relation to Hamann: (I) While Kierkegaard read widely in the Roth edition of Hamann's writings (which is well attested in his published and unpublished materials), it is also the case that central Hamannian themes could have quite possibly come to Kierkegaard through a circuitous and indirect root, most notably via the Early German Romantics, and Jacobi. In this study, I have attempted to indicate when this might be the case, highlighting other possible sources for Kierkegaard's arguments. However, untangling these multiple routes of transmission is a difficulty readers of Kierkegaard perpetually encounter, given his vagueness with sources and his tendency to condense and abbreviate complex arguments. Despite this, it is important that those interested in Kierkegaard's relation to Hamann become conversant with the intervening fifty years of post-Kantian thought in order to properly assess Kierkegaard's influences. (II) Equally important is a continued understanding as to how the parameters of theology and philosophy change between the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. This must be particularly borne in mind when considering the transition from the Enlightenment to Kantian criticism and into the post-Kantian Idealist and Romantic tradition.

As an example, Hamann's writings contain significant theo-metaphysical claims. In the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century such an appeal to God as the ground of reality would have not been a controversial position to hold, even amongst the Rationalists. After the publication of Kant's *KrV* in 1781, though, metaphysics is no longer deemed to be a viable route. With the critical turn, appeal can no longer be made to an all encompassing reality, independent of the self, with a first being as its guarantor. Thus, for Kierkegaard the questions of God's existence, divine revelation, and the relation between nature and freedom appear in different forms to those which

Hamann encountered. In short, the questions Kierkegaard asks are different than those that Hamann poses, although they do share a family resemblance. Understanding this is central to comprehending the ways in which Kierkegaard deploys Hamannian arguments in addressing specific issues in a post-Enlightenment environment. In this respect, more work is required which examines Hamann's influence on the post-Kantians, as well as Kierkegaard's reception of these thinkers. In this way, it might be possible to continue the task of unravelling the complex and varied tradition Hamann influenced and Kierkegaard inherited.

Much more work is required in order to appreciate the depth and significance of this fascinating and complex relation. In this respect, research devoted to Kierkegaard's reception of Hamann remains in its infancy. It is my hope that future readers of Kierkegaard will take this up and that the present study has provided a small contribution to furthering our understanding of Kierkegaard's relation to Hamann, his post-Kantian inheritance, and the ways in which Kierkegaard, in asking certain questions, looks to Hamann as an important resource.

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