

Anderson, Lisa Marie (Trans., Ed., and Intro.).
Hegel on Hamann. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2008. Pp.xliii +78; appendix;
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A number of recent works in English refer to G.W.F Hegel's review of J. G. Hamann's collected works, which began to appear in 1821 under the editorship of Friedrich Roth. In spite of the relevance of both thinkers and of the relatively sensational character of Hegel's review, Lisa Marie Anderson's edition marks its first full appearance in English. Anderson's able translation is a valuable resource for scholars of both thinkers as well as for any with a broad interest in the cultural and intellectual passage from the latter half of the eighteenth century to the early decades of the nineteenth. In addition to translating the review, Anderson has also provided a short appendix with Hegel's notebook entries on Hamann, indispensable editorial notes, and an introduction as well as a critical essay. The latter two elements comprise about a third of the volume.

By the time that Hegel published his review of Hamann's works, in 1828, Hamann was legendary on two counts: he was known to have profoundly influenced several thinkers of far greater renown (including Goethe and Herder) and his writings were considered to be unspeakably obscure. For those who rejected him no less than those who glorified him, Hamann was a baffling figure; beginning with his earliest work, in 1759, Hamann's thought, like an unsolved puzzle, proved both alluring and annoying. Likewise, the question of his influence not only on the *Sturm und Drang*, but on any movement keen on countering the thrust of the *Aufklärung*, remained pressing.

The idea of collecting Hamann's works had been discussed well before Roth's edition; Goethe and Jacobi each considered editing and publishing Hamann's essays and letters and Hamann himself turned down requests to do so during his lifetime (as Hegel notes at the outset of his review). Hamann, to borrow an image, was something of a specter haunting German thought at the end of the eighteenth century. He had published only infrequently and usually for specific and polemical occasions, and his missives, while packed with allusions, were gallingly abbreviated. The sense that comprehensive access to Hamann's writings would elucidate them all, that the answer to the Hamannian riddle lay within the mass of his unpublished works, was common enough to have sustained interest in such a collection for more than three decades between his death and the commencement of Roth's project.

Hamann's collected works finally appeared late in Hegel's life. The Hegel of this review is well established as the dominant philosophical figure of his age; he also chooses to place his review in the *Jahrbücher für wissenschaftliche Kritik*, a journal which he helped to found and labored to shape as a forum of serious consequence. Here then, the long-awaited works of Hamann should receive their definitive assessment before the intellectual community. As such, one is immediately struck by the lack of theoretical specificity and the stock of depreciatory remarks in Hegel's review. Before we learn anything of the content of Hamann's thinking, we find out that Hamann's failings as a thinker culminate precisely in "no book" and hence nothing substantial to study (6, 31). We hear that Hamann's notorious humor is "without richness or diversity" (6); and that "all order, all perception and continuity, or even delight therein, are obfuscated in him" (9). Hamann's much discussed religious conversion, his unapologetically devout enthusiasm and subsequent piety, we are

told, are but “pretension” (14) “peculiarity” and “hypocrisy” (27). Hamann is confident in his own perfection and his superiority over his friends (18); his written style is “sanctimonious,” “contrarious” (27) and “nasty” (35). Though Hamann was known for being exceptionally well read and for collecting a vast personal library, Hegel insists that Hamann read “without any sense of purpose” so that his readings “had more of a negative impact than a formative influence on his writings” (24). The usual form of those writings Hegel judges to be “inflated, enthusiastic, [and] repulsive” (44).

Indeed, Hegel insists that Hamann contributed nothing to philosophy or to “scientific criticism.” Given his denial that Hamann offers any real philosophical content or insight, the real question of this review is why it was written at all, and then published in Hegel’s carefully cultivated journal. While the answer to that question might seem unconstructive for understanding Hamann, it is significant for appreciating Hegel’s philosophical vision. For Hegel, Hamann is the absolutely singular individual. “Personal singularity” is Hamann’s nature and his mark; Hamann is known by his uniqueness, freedom, and unreserved independence. Yet just this singularity prevents Hamann from generalizing and developing his thinking; Hamann’s failure to unfold and articulate his ideas is a necessary consequence of a “spiritual depth [that] lingers in completely concentrated intensity and arrives at no sort of expansion.” For Hegel, precisely “singularity can bring forth neither any kind of work of art nor any scientific works” (31). Hamann embodies the oxymoron of a “category of one.”

Certainly, Hamann never writes a book or even a lengthy essay, and in fact, his essays are occasional texts, steeped in his own personality and tangled with allusions to specific events and letters, to scripture, and to classical literature. Hegel is also correct in asserting that Hamann overlooks or ignores some of the richest philosophical proposals of the Enlightenment works he attacks, particularly in Kant’s critical project. Yet Hegel’s problem with Hamann is not really Hamann’s pretentious or laborious style or the length of his writings, it is the fact that Hamann, bound to his personal singularity, refuses the notion of systematic spiritual expansion as such. At about the midway point in his review, Hegel comes to the reason for his overt rejection of Hamann: for Hegel, it is a “living reality of the divine spirit” to expand into creation and to become the finite spirit productive of its own distinctions. Hamann, in other words, did not produce a phenomenology of spirit. And not only does Hamann fail to be Hegel, according to Hegel he also fails to be God, for “Hamann did not go to the effort, if one may put it so, God did ... to *unfold* in reality the balled core of truth which he is ... into a system of nature, into a system of the state, of justice and morality ... (39). Hamann’s thinking never develops methodically and in this sense the truncated written forms he adopts are suited to his intense but barren thought. When Hegel finally comes to the point of his criticism of Hamann, he lets slip that the legitimate development of the concentrated intensity who Hamann *was* would have created none other than the system of Hegel.

This helps to explain why Hegel, as Anderson recognizes, as much as ignores Hamann’s most promising theoretical initiative, on the epistemic authority of language, and it similarly illuminates Hegel’s dismissal of Hamann’s attempts at a theoretical position on immanence, along with his discounting of Hamann’s handling of both Socrates and Kant. Where a thorough review would require careful treatment of each of these enterprises, Hegel is content to mischaracterize Hamann’s view of language and to sweep Hamann’s critical endeavors into a pile of claims about his bluster and aridity. Aware as Hegel was of the perennial celebrity of Hamann, and of the renewed interest generated by Roth’s edition, he uses this review to explain why recognition of Hamann has been only so much hype.

Though, as Hegel admits, Hamann's passion and singularity are undeniable, though his writing can be clever and even ingenious in form, and though occasionally his criticisms reveal his "deep-seeing genius," ultimately Hamann provides no system, no critique of a system, and no real alternative to a system. His dynamic specter, therefore, should finally be put to rest.

This leaves unexplained why Hamann was of such affirmed importance to thinkers like Goethe and later Kierkegaard, who were clearly no slaves to intellectual trends; it also leaves the contemporary reader quite sure—not of Hamann's irrelevance or Hegel's lack of hermeneutic generosity—but of the fact that too much remains unsaid in this review to fully grasp and compare its merits and its limitations. It is in this regard that Anderson's two introductory essays prove invaluable. In her Introduction, Anderson contextualizes Hegel's review, both in terms of its own milieu and insofar as Hegel takes up the task of addressing Hamann's place in the history of ideas. She points out the lapses in Hegel's review and incisively sketches the central matters for any Hamannian rejoinder.

Moreover, in a critical introductory essay on "The Notion of Friendship in Hegel and Hamann," Anderson provides a framework for understanding both what is most valuable in Hegel's review and in the tendencies of thought and praxis where Hegel and Hamann meet and part ways. To orient her essay, Anderson zeros in on the most productive suggestion of Hegel's review, namely that of the role of friendship in Hamann's life and thought. Rather than discounting Hegel for the psychologistic tenor of his review, Anderson shows, first, that Hamann's friendships played an indispensable role in his intellectual development. She then demonstrates how Hegel's review is implicitly structured by an appreciation of those relationships and of the stages in Hamann's thinking to which they correspond.

Anderson exposes the nature of Hamann's ideal of friendship and links his actual friendships to four distinctive stages in his development. While using this form to counterbalance the inaccuracies and omissions of Hegel's review, Anderson's essay establishes a foundation for understanding what follows, in that it underlines the reasons for Hegel's decision to pivot his review on the details of Hamann's personal life and "singularity." In the background of Anderson's essay, one can hear the strains of Hamann's engagement with the Aristotelian notion of friendship and even the anticipation of Nietzschean *agon*, while in the forefront, Hegel's reasons for rejecting an ideal of interpersonal interaction based on personal inwardness is made manifest. By addressing Hamann's friendships, Hegel is able to remark on what is most unique and compelling in Hamann and in his age, while tying that very "particularity" to unproductive thought and regressive politics. Discerningly, Anderson explains how Hegel comes to judge that Hamann's myopia in friendship and concentration in personal singularity resulted in an affront to particular friendship and to the general friendship which must be, following Aristotle, the basis of social and legal association. Doing justice both to Hamann and to Hegel, Anderson treats Hamann's particular form of production as well as Hegel's central notion of development. Ultimately, while the juxtaposition of two such different thinkers proves fascinating, Anderson's essay helps to explain why Hegel and Hamann remain irreconcilable. That one would choose to review the other, using the occasion to claim his own place in the trajectory of history, is as intriguing as the fact that the subject of this eviscerating review continues even now to resist systematic treatment and to spark philosophical fervor. Hamann survives Hegel's review; with the appearance of this absorbing volume, readers may trace the review's consequence, both intentional and unforeseen.

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