THE IMMANENT WORD

The Turn to Language in German Philosophy,

1759-1801

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PART THREE
JENA ROMANTICISM: THE PROMISE OF LOGOLOGY AND
THE PRODUCTION OF INCOMPREHENSIBILITY

Introduction

Enlightenment, as Kant writes in 1784, involves a self-incurred and self-sustained freedom from thralldom; it involves the free use one's reason and the reasonable use of one's freedom. In his answer to the then urgent question, *Was ist Aufklärung?*, Kant calls enlightenment an emergence from *Unmündigkeit*; that is, from *immaturity*, but also from a fundamental inability to speak for oneself. Enlightenment is a self-determined independence that manifests as we contemplate and declare it. As did Lessing before him, Kant finds that enlightenment's highest value is in the pursuit, not the possession of truth. The courage to use one's own intelligence, Kant thinks, will have to be mustered perpetually: enlightenment involves the belief in rational and spiritual progress as much as it does the belief that all manifestations of progress are tendencies in a potentially endless process.

Reflecting on Kant's essay in the later twentieth century, Michel Foucault writes that modern philosophy is really the philosophy that is struggling to answer the question Kant distinctly raised two centuries ago: *Was ist Aufklärung?* [1] As Foucault points out, Kant introduces a political notion in his essay, namely the distinction between public and private exercises of reason; exceptionally, Kant makes the claim that the *public* use of reason, not the private, must be free. Enlightenment, for Kant, is not merely a guarantee or a natural progression of thinking, but the careful amalgamation of free, public and universal uses of reason. I think rightly, Foucault argues that the line from enlightenment to philosophical modernity, and hence a fitting delineation with which to orient our philosophical present, is one which should be characterized not as epochal but as positioned: instead of a philosophical *age*, we have an *attitude*, an approach to the moment chosen by individuals and detectable in their expressed thoughts, feeling and behaviors. Foucault proposes that the modern attitude entails a philosophical ethos specially geared toward permanent critique of its historical era.

In just this sense, each thinker whose work will be treated here cuts a paradigmatically enlightened figure: Johann Georg Hamann, Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, Johann Gottfried von Herder, Immanuel Kant, Johann Gottlieb Fichte, Friedrich von Hardenberg or Novalis, and Friedrich Schlegel each exhibit the attitude that Foucault associates with philosophical Modernity. While, on the one hand, this very trajectory seems to mark the initiation, zenith and degeneration of an era (viz. that of critical idealism), when taken as representative of the ethos or *limit-attitude* in which enlightenment becomes both radically self-critical, as well as public in its internal petitioning, these thinkers together convey the *Mündigsprechung* in which enlightenment reaches modernity.

The following is a work about the philosophy of language that these thinkers proposed, disputed, and in a more limited way, began to apply. Our thinkers did not agree on what language is or how it should be studied, yet for each of them, the evaluation of language is wholly bound together with the articulation of a philosophy of immanence. For Hamann, an immanent perspective is the only epistemic possibility, a necessary result of divine condescension and human fallenness. Hamann's religious convictions motivate his theory of language and meaning, but the theory he presents remains epistemically divergent from theology as well as any religious canon. For Herder, immanence leads to the call for and entitlement of a naturalistic study of language, psychology and anthropology. Kant, who among the thinkers of this study most systematically and successfully treats the ideas of reason, the central station of moral theology, and the unconditioned itself from *within* transcendental idealism's demarcation of immanence, himself *repudiates* the more radical immanence proposed by his contemporaries: namely, the mediation of thought by language. Each of these positions is completely indigenous to *Aufklärung*; indeed, it is only in their agonistic exchange that they each present arguments and appeals for the ability of reason to investigate and mark its own limitations. In other words, it is in the theoretical and literary clashes of the late eighteenth century that the single most definitive designation of philosophical modernity is tested and pronounced. Uniquely, themes of practical self-determination, of the precise claims of human mind on non-human world, as well as its counterclaims on reason, also meet in these thinkers' attempts to entitle and undermine different approaches to language.

This work is oriented by close readings of texts, or small sections of texts, that are vital to the distinctively philosophical turn to language, yet that are also under-examined by philosophers of language and by contemporary philosophy in general. Even in the case of Kant, around whose work

there flourishes perhaps no greater scholarly industry, the passages in which we see him engaged with linguistic issues, either actively repudiating a philosophy of language, or appropriating some of its key ideas for an equally key placement in his own system, remain relatively unstudied.

In the textual exegeses that follow, the reader will find contemporary linguistic terminology as well as polemical-critical refutation largely suspended, except where such reference is indispensable for conceptual orientation. For these inaugural texts must be appreciated on their own terms, difficulties intact. Moreover, their intricate ties of kinship to a concurrently developing idealism (both critical and absolute) must be recognized at the source. In Part I, two groundbreaking works by Hamann and Lessing are evaluated for the concerns they raise about an insufficiently critical enlightenment philosophy; their epistemological claims as well as their hermeneutic and aesthetic suggestions are garnered and appraised. In Part II, Herder's naturalistic reassessment of the prospects for linguistic study is considered also for its transcendental insight, and the exchanges between Hamann and Herder are reevaluated in the light of Kant's criticisms of linguistic philosophy. In Part III, Fichte's rejection of a Herderian program of linguistic inquiry is interrogated, and Novalis is shown to be developing, precisely in his critique of Fichte's philosophy, his own linguistic theory. Novalis's position on language is then compared with Schlegel's regressive alternative.

Before we can approach these texts, though, it is necessary to clear an amount of scholarly space. For the contemporary lens through which the thinkers of this study have yet been regarded has helped to obscure their consequence, and thus lends to the misapplication or dismissal of their work. The works of Hamann, Lessing, Kant, Herder, Fichte, Novalis and Schlegel have been individually regarded, as well as compared, in studies of early romanticism, the history of idealism, and aesthetic theory, to name a few; but explicit attention to the turn to language in German philosophy has recently taken one of three theoretical courses.

The first is the least developed to date; it is that put forth by the "radical orthodoxy" movement under John Milbank.[2] Milbank's approach is not unbiased; most significantly, he claims Hamann as the seminal figure for a modern, theological critique of philosophy. Milbank argues that the dichotomy of reason and revelation plotted during the enlightenment was challenged in Hamann's charge against the rational self-assurance possible for any finite being in its relational disparity with infinite, divine being. He mentions the way that Hamann's position was sharpened not only in rejecting Kant's "purism" of reason, but also through criticizing Herder's derivation of *Besinnung* (reflection), the distinctively human trait that should account for a

purely human (as opposed to animal) kind of language. Milbank argues that in his reviews of Herder's work on language, Hamann refines his claim that philosophy has become incapable of identifying a single, essentially human trait, and that human nature, insofar as it may be perceived at all, is articulated as a language of its own, in the whole, unfolding history of human endeavors.

Milbank, it seems to me, has a sense for Hamann's objectives and presents a reasonable assessment of his intellectual milieu. There is indeed no divorcing of Hamann's religious beliefs from his theoretical contributions. But the adoption of Hamann by theological interests mistakes the point of his assertions about the omnipresence of language and their epistemological consequence. For Hamann, and Herder following him, the immanent linguistic perspective entails a rejection of ontology and theology altogether *and* a critical appropriation and reversal of their arguments. Language marks an epistemic limit condition; it is also regarded as the *only* being whose *saying* or *thinking* actually entails its existence.[3] Not only ontological arguments, but all assertions of theology–a word Hamann calls oxymoronic–must be reread as declarations about, in, and through language. For Hamann, language alone mediates its own immediacy; which means that any holistic *faith*, which Milbank sees as Hamann's proposed alternative to a nihilistic reason, becomes a faith in language. More specifically, it becomes the faith to which language leads and which language itself presents, as it does any experience of divinity. Thus Milbank underestimates the insurgence of Hamann's linguistic paradigm shift:

> If there *is* a fault in Hamann, then it might be that he tends to *replace* altogether a sense of an analogical ascent to God, or of a continuously deepened participation in divine eternity, with the notion of God's kenotic adaptation to us–in creation as well as in redemption. This allows for the incarnation and rightly deploys it as a *cipher*, but it does not allow for the equally New Testament notion that God became man in order to incorporate us into the Trinity–to make us indeed more heavenly and more spiritual, if not, thereby, less corporeal.[4]

Milbank is correct; Hamann is not interested in explaining God's decision to incorporate humankind into the Trinity, because he does not think this can be addressed: it is outside of the position that induces his theory of language and that that theory reinforces. The strength of Hamann's linguistic "metacritique" of Kant lies in his reckoning with the unreservedly immanent character of language, as the genetically prior, shared root of sensibility and understanding, and thus as the ideal and real boundary of subjective consciousness. As I

will suggest, it is only in this sense that Hamann's distinctively philosophical, even epistemological, position on the *receptivity* of language, and with it the receptivity of a human cognition that hears the distinctive voice of things and translates them into signs, does present a viable alternative to Kant's theory. I mark this point of difference with Milbank not because he has entirely misused Hamann but because any failure to grasp the centrality of Hamann's linguistic undertaking must be at the expense of a real appreciation for his philosophical importance, or of mistaking his thought for a merely theological appraisal of philosophy.

The second approach to the philosophy of language emergent in mid-eighteenth century German philosophy has been instituted by Charles Taylor and by Cristina Lafont. In its 1999 English translation, Lafont's *The Linguistic Turn in Hermeneutic Philosophy*, equipped with a newly written preface and a new section on Jürgen Habermas, follows Taylor's (1985) designation of the "Hamann-Herder-Humboldt" tradition in early linguistic philosophy. Lafont's intention is to salvage the philosophical core of the linguistic turn from the meaning holism and reification of language that she takes to be characteristic of its "hermeneutic" expression, as well as from causalist and naturalist strategies characteristic of the "Anglo-American" tradition in analytic philosophy, which she thinks threaten to reverse the turn altogether. For Lafont, the term "linguistic turn" refers to bodies of thought on each side of the continental divide that either consider meaning or sense determinative of reference, or that have more recently reacted against that position, struggling in various ways to show that designation is fundamental to interpreting a world of things that are independent of our subjective expressions and beliefs. She accepts that both sides in this divide take the study of language to be the proper expedient for the solution of philosophical problems.

Lafont's use of the now standard "Hamann-Herder-Humboldt" title to designate the commencement of the linguistic turn is problematic, though, in that she scarcely discusses Hamann's thought, relying for the most part upon Simon's (1979) interpretative essay for the less than eight pages she allocates to Hamann. She does not discuss Herder's work at all. Her initial focus is on Wilhelm von Humboldt's work, which is appropriate insofar as Lafont takes Humboldt to be the main, founding figure of the German tradition, just as Gottlob Frege, crossing national boundaries, is taken to be the founding figure of the Anglo-American philosophy of language. Humboldt and Frege are understood as founding figures because they establish the explicit distinction between meaning and reference; both make the former determinative of the latter.

Lafont dedicates one fourth of her book to working through the German, hermeneutic tradition as much because she finds the excesses of its "world-disclosing" capacity incipient, and hence most easily identified there, as because she judges that this tradition alone has the resources to overcome a growing tendency toward "metaphysical realism" that essentially denies our interpretive, expressive modes of being in the world, by making all linguistic functions into those of designation. So on the one hand, she turns to early German linguistic philosophy in order to begin "identifying and problematizing the source of the reification of language (the linguistic idealism) typical of the German tradition."[5] On the other hand, she hopes to habilitate that tradition's detection of the predicative function of language and to combine it with a realist account of linguistic designation. To this end, Lafont virtually ignores Hamann and Herder and finds in Humboldt's work the links she seeks to Martin Heidegger and Hans-Georg Gadamer. Her trajectory is one that allows her to exercise Habermas's theory of communicative rationality, and then, relying upon Hilary Putnam's defense of "internal realism," to develop a constructive, internal-realist solution to the deficits in the Habermasian account. Helpful as this may be to the theory of communicative rationality, it is not the concern of this work, and thus I will not address the better part of Lafont's accomplishment.

However, insofar as she has made Humboldt the only real representative of early German linguistic philosophy—and even more critically for both this work and her own—insofar as linguistic philosophy begins, for Lafont, with the verdict that meaning determines reference, Lafont's study imposes a historical and conceptual misnomer. Her determination that the predicative function of language is definitive of the "Hamann-Herder-Humboldt" tradition ignores the richest and most provocative insights of no lesser personages than Hamann and Herder. Consequently, her attempt to salvage the linguistic turn from relativism, reification and infinite revisibility fails to utilize proposals that may have been juxtaposed to Humboldt's work, and that moreover would place the whole designation of sense and reference, as the mainstay of the tradition, into question. Likewise, more than two-thirds into her study, Lafont concludes:

> In the wake of the linguistic turn, the instrumental view of language, which reduces all functions of language to the single function of designation, becomes inadmissible. But we should also regard as equally inadmissible the *reduction of all functions of language to predication*, to its world-disclosing function. For it is precisely this reification that prevents us from grasping the internal connection between language and the possibility of cognitive learning.

This thesis, while true, rests on a truism, underestimating the scope of contemporary debates as much as the awareness of those issues now named linguistic *designation* and *predication*, and the importance of *cognitive learning*, in the opening works of the tradition. In part, this problem stems from the "Hamann-Herder-Humboldt" designation itself, or properly speaking, from its outcome. Taylor coins a phrase capable of calling to a mind a tradition that, otherwise named "German" or "hermeneutic," fails to distinguish the work of these three authors from later or dissimilar works. The "HHH" or "triple-H" conception of language, which he pithily calls it, is also shorthand for Taylor's depiction of early *expressive* or *evocative* theories of meaning, which he contends are crucial to our ongoing attempts to articulate the value and nature of language. And they are crucial. And there are imperative, constitutive formulations of their key arguments in Hamann, Herder and Humboldt. In Taylor's 1980 phrase-coining lecture, and in his 1991 essay on Herder, his HHH designation does the job of distinguishing and helping to describe a way of talking about *meaning* in which Hamann, Herder and Humboldt are pioneers. In fact, Taylor does such a fine job of spearheading the discussion of expressivism that philosophers of language have apparently felt spared the responsibility of having to read Hamann or Herder, or to independently discern in their writings any different aspects of their theories of meaning, expressive or otherwise. Nor could linguistic philosophers have felt compelled to cast around in the times and intellectual circles of the "triple-H," in order to contextualize their unprecedented turn, for had such an inquiry been undertaken, Taylor's preliminary, alliterative findings would have been upset by the addition of a different letter—to mark the crucial suggestions about the nature of language in the work of Lessing.

This is not to say that Lessing was ever forgotten by *Germanisten*, aesthetic theorists or intellectual historians; but it is to say that in explorations of the philosophy of language initiated in the eighteenth century, he has not been considered. Yet in 1759, just after Hamann published his groundbreaking *Socratic Memorabilia*, Lessing began publishing his *Letters Concerning Recent Literature*. While both works remain pertinent to aesthetics and German studies, they also make different, exceptional proposals about the study of language. Both forcefully contend that such study is a paradigmatically philosophical problem—not only in its aspirations, but insofar as philosophy cannot do without a critical reckoning with its own language. Lessing's investigation of linguistic *genius*, by which sensation, intuition and critical rationality are jointly utilized, and his defense of the *imaginative freedom* that the genius practices and provokes, is considerable for any deliberation of the expressive and didactic forces harnessed in language. It was so influential to

generations of thinkers (including Kant, who definitively revised Lessing's formulation), and so entrenched in later attempts to address the special character of language, that no account of early German linguistic philosophy could be realized without it.

Lessing's initial linguistic suggestions also provide a necessary corrective to the view of early German linguistic philosophy as unreservedly *schwärmisch*, or religiously enthusiastic. We will see that Lessing's linguistic concerns remain bound to his religious, as well as his hermeneutic, concerns. Lessing's religion, though, was the rationalist religion of Enlightenment neology (to say nothing of his posthumously-alleged Spinozism) and his study of language was occasioned in part by his critical evaluation of the symbolic language of Scripture, which he subjected to explanatory, rational exegesis. The fact that such exegesis was possible—that one form of language could double back to study another—Lessing found striking; for it meant not only that we can refer to the same thing in different ways, and to different things with the same term (a point Hamann was also to make), but that language itself provides the symbolic forms of such categorization, as well as the means to bare their hidden truths. If language can both construct and deconstruct its own symbolic meanings, then it presents a field on which to explore the stuff of concepts or mindedness, and it facilitates attempts to distinguish between meanings and to judge appearances. For Lessing, language thus functions as an arena of discrimination between the real and the merely apparent. Understanding the rules according to which language is able to successfully address language becomes important; Lessing comes to find that those rules are most evident in the critic's art. This thought was significant for the development of a viable method of linguistic analysis.

Lessing also makes clear, as early as his *Letters*, that the public use of reason, a cornerstone principle of Enlightenment, is a matter of developing a shared language, one open to (indeed thriving upon) difference and disagreement, as much as toward mutuality. He attempts to use the shared language of literary and cultural criticism to cultivate a certain national identity among his readers and to assist their confrontation with religious, political and cultural hegemony in as many forms as he can find to mention. What is perhaps Lessing's most important contribution to linguistic theory is only broached in the *Letters* and not worked out until years later in his *Laocoön*. In that work, Lessing forcefully describes the sense of intellectual and aesthetic appositeness that overcomes contingency, or that momentarily, poetically succeeds in making language's arbitrary modes of signification appear to be natural and necessary. Lessing defines *genius* as that which succeeds in making the constructed seem effortless. Lessing also uncovers a design

of sense and signification, extending out of language's unbound materiality, with which he begins to account for the discrete power of signs on emotional receptivity and cognitive operations.

For these and other reasons still to be clarified, it is not possible to simply repeat the "HHH" label for early German linguistic philosophy. I have also generally avoided the term "linguistic turn" because of its overladen associations, from which I mean to distinguish the authors in this study. The "turn to language" may ring of little advance, but at least it is unconstrained by the involvements of an already committed terminology. Nor would the addition of Lessing's name to the string of H's resolve that label's difficulties. For, as I have said, the very division of linguistic theories into those expressive versus those designative, or world-disclosing versus truth-conditional, is often unsuited to the work of Hamann, Herder and their inheritors.

Lafont also makes an acute observation in her review of the early hermeneutic and analytic traditions. She points out that once even marginally executed, the linguistic turn's *semantic* claim about meaning as much as necessitates an *epistemological* obligation. This epistemological burdening leads to "pernicious philosophical consequences" from which Lafont wants to distance the true philosophical merits of the linguistic turn. According to Lafont, the reason that a semantic insight must get tasked with an epistemological mission is that, in addition to holding meaning to be determinative of reference, philosophers of language take language to be a general scheme which allows for the solution (or dissolution, to borrow from Richard Rorty) of philosophical problems in themselves. Insofar as philosophical problems have always been problems about what there is to know, how we might know it, and why we can and should (or cannot and should not), these problems have occasioned the profoundest formulations of the relationship between thought and its objects. Philosophy, a body of these formulations, is the site between human knowing and an unknown world. If an analysis of language can ultimately solve or dissolve its problems, it will also resolvedly grant and illuminate epistemic access to the world, and will determine the appropriate limits of belief in its phenomena.

The pernicious philosophical consequence of this assurance is the conclusion that what a linguistic community can believe of the world is determined by the language they have adopted, or more properly speaking, by the language that circumscribes them, and that they cannot evade or circumvent. In other words, objective knowledge becomes a figment of the imagination, and intersubjective understanding (especially across severe linguistic divides) becomes equally unattainable. Lafont recognizes the principal way in which lexicological directives are grafted onto a notion of cognition, or a notion of

consciousness itself. She argues that epistemologizing the meaning-reference distinction involves a fallacy both about the mind's power to know and about its actual determination of the objects of its reference. Meaningful descriptions of things express beliefs; they do not establish the existence of what can be known. Lafont is right: in her detection of the way in which the semantic sense-reference distinction becomes epistemologically (and ontologically) burdened as well as in her rejection of that burdening. She is also right in insisting that a viable philosophy of language should address the expressive dimension of language, no less than the way in which language fails to determine referents and is thus implicated in the subsequent modifications and corrections of cognition.

However, it is in just the way that Lafont sees the pernicious consequences bequeathed by the "Hamann-Herder-Humboldt" tradition only gradually and arduously being put aright by their inheritors that she does the tradition an injustice and fails to communicate its strengths to contemporary thinkers. One of the principle aims of the elucidation of Hamann's *Socratic Memorabilia* and subsequent writings in Part I, is to demonstrate how Hamann constructs his linguistic enterprise to illustrate that a self-critical study of language is requisite for philosophy, and at the same time that we can and must believe in something that does not correspond to our propositional knowledge. Hamann certainly does make enthusiastic note of the expressive power of language; he also presumes a depth-structure model of consciousness, as Taylor credits him for doing. Thus, Hamann points out the way that only language allows us to draw forth, as though from hidden deeps, explicit ideas or realizations that require a linguistic delivery in order to be cognitively recognized. This is one reason why Hamann chooses Socrates, the practitioner of dialectics and the founder of the maieutic art in philosophy, as his animus. In this regard, Hamann's thought sparks a change in philosophical culture, and I want to pay heed to it as it arises, examining also his notion of genius and his assertions about the historical, social and sensuous entailments of language. Yet Hamann's epistemological vision, as was said above, comes from his religious revaluation of values. Hamann takes Pietism to its outer limit: his account of divine condescension and the fallen human nature that mistakes divine self-abasement for magnificence leads to a distinctive position on the possibilities of knowledge.

Following Simon's elucidation, Lafont rightly discerns Hamann's position, in his *Metacritique of the Purism of Reason*, that language is the shared source of understanding and sensibility that Kant fails to procure in his *Critique of Pure Reason*. She accurately recapitulates the way that, in Hamann, words must have both an aesthetic and a logical capacity; language is sensuous

and appeals to sensibility and intuition, and language is purposive and meaningful and appeals to conceptuality. Lafont also correctly notes Hamann's appreciation of the seriousness of his critique of Kant. For in asking for the transcendental condition of thinking itself, and finding reason enmeshed in the language that makes it possible, Hamann's charge disrupts the possibility of a priori deduction altogether. Also, since language is *both* transcendental and empirical, it flies in the face of the categorical regulation—and hence the very structure—of Kant's critical philosophy. Lafont therefore calls language, in Hamann, a "transcendental-empirical hybrid." She does not employ the term further, but it fits the view of language that Hamann and Herder, and also Novalis, work to develop, and thus it suitably names the most promising view of the nature of language in the early period of linguistic philosophy. In fact, the explanatory compass of the "transcendental-empirical hybrid" paradigm has never been systematically articulated. The idea that it can and should be motivates this undertaking—which remains limited to its historical recovery and its conceptual differentiation from the bodies of thought with which it is unconstructively associated.

Part of the force of the transcendental-empirical model Hamann proposes is that it undertakes a problem Lafont finds paramount, namely the independence of things from our referential or conceptual claims upon them. In effect, this is the problem of the sovereignty, even the authority, of nature vis-à-vis our rational machinations—a difficulty that has been a mainstay in aesthetics at least since Lessing. Hamann, via the condescension of God, and the limited, analytic character of reason, describes human communications that necessarily fall short of veracity, and that reveal a world that is beyond our demarcation, which we must struggle to describe and interpret. There is a fundamental reality, in Hamann, the elements of which all rational creatures reference; but the difference and disparity within our construal of it forces us to take note of the gap between interpretations and their referents. In Hamann's idiom, our subsequent perplexity invites us to "plow with another heifer than our reason," for we neither produce the world in expression, nor transparently name it in designation, but construct an ongoing "translation" of experience that must itself be deciphered. Hamann asserts the givenness of a reality that *is* deeper than our descriptions of it, as well as the givenness of language itself. With this in place, he makes plain that we must labor at the limited knowledge of reality that we may acquire, ever aware of our ignorance and ever in need of interlocutors.

Again, Hamann finds in Socrates' character the animating spirit of this assertion. Far from making the world a matter of predicative knowledge, Socrates precisely denies his own—to such an extent that he cannot

make a universal statement even about ignorance, and must proceed to test
(and instruct) his contemporaries. In Hamann's telling, Socrates, too, oper-
ates with an assumption about the hidden depths of consciousness, wherein
implicit ideas are held and from which they must be brought forth in lan-
guage. Hamann presents an exceptional reading of Plato's creation or expres-
sion of Socrates, which deepens his picture of the functions of language. The
Socrates of both Plato and Hamann teaches people how little they know
of the world, how fallacious and potentially dangerous their interpreta-
tions of it are, and how what *is* resists explanation as much as it provokes it.
For Hamann, Socrates' divine sign, his daimon or genius, is thus of crucial
importance for understanding Socrates' unique openness to a world that he
has not rationally mastered.

Given Hamann's insistent utilization of the figure of Socrates in the
Socratic Memorabilia, which is echoed in the *Letters* Lessing began publish-
ing only months later, it is unambiguously clear that the forebears of the
linguistic turn had Plato on their minds. Taylor knows this, but he devises
an epochal configuration that emphasizes the Neoplatonic and Augustinian
aspects of the triple-H theories at the expense of an undervaluing of their
interest in empirical observation and the experimental method.[6] The histori-
cal sequence Taylor proposes cannot, for example, account for Hamann's
reliance on Francis Bacon, the devisor of the model that Taylor calls resolu-
tive-compositive, as opposed to the semiological model that he sees HHH
renewing from out of the Middle Ages. Likewise, Hamann's consistent uti-
lization of Hume as well as his frequent assertion that his work is a faithful
extension of Humean skepticism is unexplainable from within this scheme.

Lafont's attempt to distinguish her account from Taylor's in this regard
is disasterous. She makes a confounding claim:

> Given its great importance, it is necessary to reflect on the precise mean-
> ing of the identification of language and reason by the authors in ques-
> tion [HHH]. For it is noteworthy that no such identification can be
> found in Greek philosophy, Gadamer's interpretative efforts notwith-
> standing (5–6).

The mind is boggled on two fronts. As it awaits a fresh reading of "Greek
philosophy" from Lafont, one that will brave the Socratic and perhaps the
pre-Platonic fixation on the complexities of *logos* that absolutely permeates
fourth and fifth century Greek thought, it is delivered instead to a citation
from Aristotle's *De Interpretatione*, and precisely to one of many places that
Aristotle is in the process of critically revising Plato's thought. Lafont does

not mention Aristotle's rejection of the Platonic model, let alone mention Plato, as she quotes from Aristotle and then from Schnädelbach's (1986) historical trajectory linking Aristotle to Herder, which she uses to support her claim about "the Greeks."

Aristotle's thoughts on language, especially where he repudiates the linguistic formulations of his teacher, are positively interesting, and careful study of them may help to link Aristotle more overtly to his early modern inheritors. Yet Aristotle's linguistic analyses are irrelevant to Lafont's project. Indeed, she presents her Aristotelian quotes on the first few of eight pages that she reserves for Hamann, who is virtually obsessed with the relationship between reason and language in Socrates and Plato, but who only occasionally addresses the thought of Aristotle.[7]

In another context, Lafont might be excused for her unawareness or dismissal of a sizeable portion of "Greek philosophy," Gadamer's interpretative efforts notwithstanding. However, in beginning a book on a tradition that itself began with interpretations of Plato, the oversight is indefensible; and this brings about a subsequent puzzlement. Lafont is trying to problematize a claim that she sees being made first in Hamann and then echoed until Heidegger and Gadamer, namely that "reason is language, *logos*." In fact, these are Hamann's own words, and words something like them can be found in Plato's dialogues as well as in Herder's work on language. But each time words like these are scribed, they are cross-examined, further pursued or set into a dialogic and dramatic context that destabilizes the authority of either "reason" or "language" to be what we thought it was, in first equating them. Nowhere is this made clearer than in Herder's work. Admittedly, it could be made clearer still, and Lafont is not the first to ascribe the "reason equals language" thesis to Hamann and Herder, even if she uses the dismissive ascription to avoid a careful study of their works. Nevertheless, Herder actually struggles, in his early *Treatise on the Origin of Language*, to show that while the *origin* of human, reflective being and linguistic being is shared in an active taking of awareness, reason and language then mutually unfold, co-dependently but distinguishably.

As we will closely follow, Herder presents a model of reflective awareness and its vehicle, conceptual marking, that is meant to account for both their shared genesis and the elaborate vicissitudes of their interrelation. "Reason is language" insofar as the generation of words manifests a basic cognitive composition that is vitalized by the words that it produces and positions. The "equation" of reason and language that Herder struggles to articulate disallows their conflation.

Even so, it is Hamann who first expresses the concern that Herder too closely conjoins reason and language; Hamann unequivocally disallows the

strict correlation of reason and language in his reviews of Herder. So it is hard to say exactly which works Lafont sees as straightforwardly depicting the identity of reason and language. That their relation is the primary *problem* in Hamann and Herder, and that it is a generative problem, producing various accounts of how linguistic and reasonable pursuits interact, is certainly true. But Lafont does not take up Hamann's comparisons of reasonable and linguistic functions, and she judges in a footnote (5.n3) that "although Herder's elaborate critique of Kant is interesting in its own right," she will have to leave Herder's work undiscussed, since it would only present a diversion.

Lafont is not under an obligation to discuss Herder, even if she utilizes the HHH label. She is obliged to say how the claim that "reason is language" is understood, if she intends to analyze just this understanding. Though Lafont hurries on to Humboldt's work, and then to twentieth-century thought, her historical and conceptual contextualization of that thought is amiss; and again, she overlooks an important contribution that might have been made to it. I now want to mention several elements of that contribution, in preparation for the close readings that orient this work.

The essential point that Lessing first makes—a point that passes between Hamann and Herder and is radicalized by Novalis—is one about media and their inherent demands. Lessing's discussion of media arises in a critical-aesthetic context. It then becomes a discussion of the way in which language, qua medium, is involved in the shape of cognitive and creative efforts. Just as a sculptor must pay heed to the quality of his marble for the figure he plans to sculpt, a philosopher must attend to the suitability of his given language for the concepts he wishes to convey. Both regard the demands of their media but they also assimilate those demands. Moreover, in analyzing philosophical systems and ideas, we find that the philosopher, like the good poet, succeeds in making look *evidential* something that is arbitrary and obscure. Unlike the poet's work, however, we do not aim simply to appreciate the beauty of a philosophical effort; we also want to know if it is true. To do so, we must trace the conceptual and material directives of its meaningfulness; that is, we must *retrace* the linguistic construction—the resistance of the resistance—of the theory at hand.

Novalis takes up Lessing's thoughts about media demands, but in criticizing Lessing's concerns about beauty and semiotic manipulation, he also raises the stakes for his own theory, coming to differ considerably from Lessing over the question of what modern art and critical philosophy are commissioned to perform. Contra Lessing, Novalis argues that the real demands of media, and through them of a sensuous and meaningful nature, entail the seizure and depiction not of a beautiful and imaginatively free "pregnant

moment," but of their subject's *petrification*, in which the moment of meaningful construction meets its own deconstruction, revealing the authentic, natural and intentional characters of sign and signified.

Both Lessing and Novalis, and Herder with them, are particularly interested in the way that complex, seemingly nonverbal situations are symbolized in a language that becomes simultaneously a cipher of subjective and communicative values and the medium for any experience of nature. They note that language must be studied as anthropology, or as a virtual deposit-bed of subjective and historical values; but maintain that it must also be newly engaged in our modern reckoning with the "objective" world of nature, relationships and institutions.

While Hamann points to this twofold dependence on language, and to the gap between linguistic reference and independent existence, Herder and Novalis attempt to work through it. Following both Kant and Lessing in order to critique Fichte, Novalis introduces a semiotic appraisal of identity itself, insisting that signs determine access to their referents by merely appearing to present those referents. This becomes most palpable in an analysis of Fichte's paradigmatic fact-act, the self-positing "I=I" of absolute identity, which, Novalis argues, is but a *Scheinsatz*—a statement of appearance. With Kant, Novalis shows how such subjective analogs must fail to generate inferential knowledge and likewise fail to penetrate any transcendent truth. With Lessing, he shows how it is the distinctive facility of language to represent, as though unified and unqualified, what actually requires the shaping, differential force of representation itself. Even where language accurately represents "what is," it does not thereby become it.

Perhaps the most significant contribution to a developing philosophy of language is found in the recovery of Herder's initial proposal for a pragmatic study of language. The goal of Part II of this study is to rearticulate the most decisive of Herder's concerns as they unfold in his *Treatise*, and to examine their prospects, bolstered with Hamann's criticisms, vis-à-vis Kantian idealism. Herder takes up the Hamannian challenge on the linguistic front; he attempts to utilize Hamannian insights, *mutatis mutandis*, for a novel, naturalistically inclined linguistic study. Hamann's reviews of Herder, as well as reference to their involved correspondence, will help to focus attention on the precise characteristics of the mode of study they together formulate, however undeveloped.

In Part III, I argue that Novalis, alone among the Jena Romantics, attempts to implement a Herderian proposal for linguistic study. While this requires freeing himself from Fichtean idealism and its regressive claims about language, it also distinguishes Novalis's thought from that of Schlegel,

who, I argue, reverts to a position that is ultimately obstructive for linguistic philosophy. Where Schlegel draws closer to the more dogmatic aspects of the Fichtean position, Novalis deploys ideas not only from Fichte, but also from Hamann, Lessing, Herder and Kant, in his own distinctive program and portrayal of linguistic inquiry.

Moreover, Herder establishes not only the "world-disclosing" scope of language that Taylor and Lafont locate in his work, but the idea that the world disclosed by language is a *world of words*. Like Hamann, Herder finds language remarkable for the way in which, like mathematics, it generates its own self-legitimating realm. Neither Hamann, nor Herder, nor Novalis subscribes to the later-formulated maxim of the linguistic-turn, viz. that language should be treated as the paradigm for the solution of philosophical problems. Their intention is not to reformulate philosophical problems under the aegis of a linguistic theory, but to study the language of philosophy as a special type of language, yielding insights into how meaning (personal, subjective and social) has been generated and has changed. Philosophy's study of its own specialized languages should be able to interpret, in their often metaphorical, analogical terminology, the empirical exhibition of thoughts and values; moreover, it should utilize the occasion of self-analysis to inquire into and identify the conditions of possibility for meaningful utterances in general. Herder proposes a study of the languages of religion and metaphysics in particular as those that are no longer productive of new meanings and can thus be isolated for examination. Novalis broadens Herder's suggestion into a study of philosophical language overall. He names this project, in which logos addresses logos, "logological."

The insight that Herder and Novalis share is one about the difficulties inherent in reference itself; this is again the difficulty of the gap between signs and their referents. Extraordinarily, Herder points out that while primitive words refer to things, phenomena, or conventions in the world, abstract language is built from analogical extensions out of these material signs. Abstract language functions most fully *as* language, for it is constructed entirely from linguistic resources. *Geist*, for example, does not designate anything found in the world, nor is it merely an expressive constitution of what is possible for thinking or knowing. Rather, infused over lifetimes that recede before its simple signification, *Geist means* a complex of associations that do not need to be recovered in its etymology—breath or wind—in order to be understood.

Herder is interested in examining abstract language as the purest form of language; here, its purity is not opposed to, but dependent upon, its historicity, its iterative embeddedness, and its empirical and aesthetic dimensions. When Novalis takes up this project, he adds that language is vitally

related to our appreciation of the parts of the world that are still unknown and still cognitively unmapped, but that remain compelling and potentially meaningful. In Novalis's work, the idea of the cosmos as an expressive, divine script reemerges and is linked again to human language. Novalis's associates, foremost Schlegel, but perhaps sometimes even Novalis himself, will not be able to make out where his renewal of the "divine language of nature" is to be distinguished from religious and theological initiatives. Yet the difference between Novalis's lingual re-enchantment of the world and a distinctly religious position, specifically a religious position with the authority to dictate to philosophy, manifests in Novalis's ironic, playful rebuff of Schlegel's *Ideas*, which Schlegel dedicated to Novalis. After reconstructing Novalis's uncompleted logological plan in Part III, I examine Schlegel's *Ideas*, and present their religious and philosophical underpinnings. The *Ideas* were finished enough to be published as a set; Schlegel makes his most concerted systematic effort to ground their premises in introductory lectures he gave concerning his (never finished) transcendental philosophy. By concluding with a reading of those lectures, my goal is to distinguish, as sharply as the texts make possible, the dynamism of the early philosophy of language from a concurrent dogmatism that undermines linguistic philosophy's hard-won immanence, and that replaces the demanding petition of language, and through it the claims of nature, with a surfeit of sentimentality.

For this reason, I also take issue with the third of the aforementioned recent approaches to early linguistic philosophy: that presented by Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe and Jean-Luc Nancy, in their jointly written *The Literary Absolute*. Of the three alternatives, this work lingers most on the linguistic contribution of some of our thinkers: Schlegel is the book's leading figure. Of the three approaches, Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy's work makes the most exorbitant assertions, recurrently pronouncing the "philosophical" denomination of Schlegel's and its own positions. Yet while Milbank misreads the theological directives of a philosophical position and Lafont confuses the genealogical inheritance of the current state of linguistic philosophy, Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy misjudge the philosophical significance of their subject in and through their literary exuberance for it. I will dwell on only one of the book's considerations, worked out in its second chapter. [8]

Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy are most concerned with Schlegel's *Ideas*, which they find paradigmatic of Schlegel's "fragmentary obstinacy" and of "Romantic exigency" altogether and which they humor Schlegel for advancing against the academic capitulations of his brother August, who is in turn seen as propped up by his wife Caroline and by Goethe. Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy connect the *Ideas* to the moral genre, on the model of the Roman

manuals and meditations of Marcus Aurelius and Epictetus. They also mention that Schlegel cannot be employing the term *Ideen* lightly, given the critical and absolute idealism with which he contends. Schlegel is taken to be making a radical break with Kant, with Fichte and with Novalis, when he writes that "no one can be the direct mediator for even his own spirit" (in *Idea* 44). Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy find Schlegel to be "confirming the rupture of the Cartesian subject—and thus the impossibility of auto-constitution." They conclude that Schlegel knows that nothing in philosophy "can provide the subject with access to itself."

Even to make this claim—whether Schlegel makes it or Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy make it for him—is to regress from the proposals for the study of language, and philosophical language in particular, explicitly outfitted in Novalis for a renewed project of self-knowledge. The idea that the Cartesian subject's self-constitution is ruptured by myriad internal and external difficulties is integral to the initiatives of Hamann and Novalis; both what I will call Hamann's "translational model of meaning" and Novalis's logological project are designed to put this insight to work aesthetically and philosophically. Likewise, the ferreting out of Schlegel's "manifesto" for a future *Bund* of artists who together would "present the unpresentable"–the subject's access to itself through all associated individuals–takes no notice of the way in which this task is already turned to interrogate the accomplishment of language in Novalis's considerations.

The graver problem with the evaluation of Schlegel's *Ideas* in Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy is not as much a theoretical oversight about the nature of "Romantic exigency" as it is a complicity with Schlegel's developing religious ideology, which soon enough after Schlegel pens the *Ideas* swallows his philosophical aspect altogether. More than halfway into their examination of the *Ideas* (a work in which Schlegel speaks of religion incessantly), the authors comment on Schlegel's idea that woman's destination or virtue is religion. They write "indeed, as we know, this is not 'religious' religion [. . .] but the 'sense' or the (speculative) intuition of the divine" (72). Yet this is precisely what we do *not* know of Schlegel, who loudly converted to Catholicism (together with his virtuous wife) several years after publishing his *Ideas*. The point is not to indulge in a psychologistic reading of Schlegel, but to determine with more accuracy how the religious tropes of the *Ideas* stand in relation to Schlegel's Romanticism and to Novalis's Romantic linguistic project.

Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy draw out the erotic logic of Schlegel's position, by reading the *Ideas* through Schlegel's earlier *On Philosophy: To Dorothea*. They show that in the Schlegelian ideal, man brings philosophy

to woman, thus educating her; while woman makes poetry possible for man, thus sensitizing him. Their union produces the religious ideal of man-woman, as well as philosophy-poetry. This is one way to explain how, for Schlegel, "poetry and philosophy fuse in religious man." Yet what Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy fail to mention is that Schlegel must reject any philosophy, poetry, man or woman who refuses exactly the role he assigns. Both a gentler and a more abstract feminity are out of bounds, as is a more aggressive or assertive masculinity. Philosophies that will not be poetic, and poetries that cannot be philosophically insightful, should become a literal impossibility. Under the all-controlling eye of Schlegel's philosophico-poetic hermaphrodite, nothing can be other and all is one in God.

Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy acknowledge, almost at the end of their examination, that Schlegel's new moral genre is "altogether inscribed under the sign of religion" (75). But, they insist, this is not at all the religion of Christianity; it is not even analogically related to Christianity, nor is it a religion of aesthetics. Instead, Schlegel proposes "art as religion." The authors rightly claim that Schlegel thereby rejects the Pietistic notion of an inaccessible deity and replaces it with art as the formal *Darstellung* of truth. Schlegel also thereby rejects the epistemic limit condition that was so productive for his Pietistic forebears. Moreover, in turning his artist into a high priest, Schlegel makes all philosophical critique superfluous to the ideal-real that already contains and exists beyond philosophical analysis or criticism.

Likewise, the claim that Schlegel's religious ideal is not so much as analogically related to Christianity, even if it is made for rhetorical flourish alone, is unconstructively inept. For Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy go on to quote from Schlegel's own *Idea* 131, on sacrificing the self, and on artists who consecrate themselves to eternal life with sacrifice. So they must know that Schlegel's artistic Christ-ideal pervades the *Ideas*, epitomizing a being who has represented to himself his own finitude and won infinity. The martyr, in Schlegel, exemplifies the integrated religious being, work of art, and knowledge of art as religion, and thus becomes the highest directive over meaningful inventions, utterances and criticisms—the way, the truth and the life.

One cannot take issue with those who laud in Schlegel's Romantic exigency the perfectly unfinished work, or who locate in his unrealized notion of Romantic poesy the impossible but necessary union of poetry and philosophy, or who find, in his notion of the "interesting," an apt description the originality and individuality of high modern art. Schlegel does make these and other contributions to philosophical aesthetics and the theory

of art; he also focuses the theoretical and artistic energy of a remarkable group of individuals, who, in the course of a few years, create an influential movement in thought. But where Schlegel ignores or dismisses the linguistic insights of Novalis and his predecessors, appropriating some of their form or style, and where he makes plain that both the loss of nature and the critique of the thinker are superfluous to "art as religion," his work must be differentiated and called to task. Schlegel's philosophical contribution, Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy fail to understand, even where it transcends the limits of critical idealism, marks the end of a chapter in the way of language and a reversion to a mistrust of language typical of the way of ideas. Schlegel's "ideas" are not like the ideas, however varied, of the early moderns, nor does his suspicion of language entail a proof-ordeal meant to recover its rational, non-linguistic core. Instead, Schlegel chooses to play with the ironies of language, and to point to its incongruous tendencies, finally deeming both language and Romanticism incomprehensible.

Thus, Schlegel's suspicion of language becomes his pretext for not being able to present a system, a work, or consistently comprehensible thoughts within it. In Schlegel, language is absolutely world-disclosing, not truth-conditional; but this is a world whose expressive reality is only guaranteed by an infinite art-as-religion. Schlegel inverts the religious prescription that occasioned Hamann's turn to language: he finds that the task of the ideal artist is to represent God's magnificent creation in a transcendent artwork that both grasps this idea and presents a vision of itself as its presenter. While Schlegel declares that the final realization of such a work is impossible, he insists that its approximation is the goal of artistic production. Thus, the inherent irony of language that Schlegel makes steps towards points him back to the perfection of ideas and the idea of the unconditioned, and traps him in its own tyrannical non-cooperation.

Schlegel is not only willing to allow that criticism and philosophy become superfluous to the Romantic artwork; he asserts that the artwork itself is a religious relic, embodying the religion of the future. Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy would be right in finding that Schlegel's understanding of religion is not (yet) identical with Christianity or Catholicism. Yet they are wrong to edge around and exempt the designation of religion in the *Ideas*, for it is patently tied to Schlegel's universalizing tendencies and thus to his reinstatement of an absolute, ideal unconditioned, which Novalis had already placed within a semiotic structure. As Novalis realizes in his *Fichte Studies*, "an object is an object, even if it is God." The codification of any idea, Novalis continues to insist, is a potentially dangerous idol, and always requires critical analysis and contextualization.

In order to make good on these claims, the bulk of the following work presents reconstructions and analyses of sections of texts from each of the thinkers mentioned at the outset. While elements of these reconstructions may be debated, this study as a whole means to identify a distinctive tradition within late eighteenth century thought; one explicitly concerned with the nature of language for reasons that, I argue, should continue to concern us. In the following series of readings, my goal is to delineate why language came to be a topic of central concern in the mid-eighteenth century, what was stake in theories of language and meaning and in their clashes with established epistemological positions and intellectual institutions, and what the turn to language finally accomplished.