

# Hamann and Kierkegaard<sup>1</sup>

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Between Johann Georg Hamann (1730-88) and Søren Kierkegaard (1813-55) there was an extraordinary connexion. Hamann indeed was the figure who more than any other of modern times influenced Kierkegaard both in the form and content of his authorship and also, at a deeper level, in his very existence.

It is notoriously difficult to understand Hamann's writings, and it is perfectly possible for varying interpretations to be established with some show of consistency with Hamann's own words. The trouble is that Hamann's range is so wide, and so deep, that his epigones do not find it easy to reflect his richness. As Lessing wrote in a letter to Herder:

His writings seem to be given out as tests for those gentlemen who call themselves *polyhistores*. For you really do need a bit of panhistory in order to read them. A traveller can be easily found; but a mere stroller is hard to come upon.<sup>2</sup>

(Seine Schriften scheinen als Prüfungen der Herren aufgesetzt zu sein, die sich für Polyhistores ausgeben. Denn es gehört wirklich ein wenig Panhistorie dazu. Ein Wanderer ist leicht zu finden; aber ein Spaziergänger ist schwer zu treffen).

Yet in spite of those difficulties, and in spite of the fact that I am not one of those *polyhistores* of whom Lessing speaks, I am not entirely convinced that Lessing is right when he attributes to Hamann a certain inconsequentiality and lack of deliberation in his interests. Nor is it enough to rescue Hamann from oblivion by setting him in the literary context of influences upon him and effects of his thoughts upon others. The grandiose edition of his works

<sup>1</sup> Based on a lecture given at Marburg University, June 12, 1963, on the occasion of the conferring on the author of an honorary doctorate of theology.

<sup>2</sup> January 25, 1780.

with commentaries deserves every praise<sup>3</sup>, but his significance is not exhausted by this kind of treatment. And if the impulse which Hamann gave to the German Romantic movement is not the whole story of Hamann, neither can it be confined within the story of his relation to Kierkegaard, far less within the story of his somewhat ambiguous acceptance in the early stages of the dialectical theology of this century.<sup>4</sup>

However, my purpose here is the modest one of elucidating the relation between Kierkegaard and Hamann. The ambivalent nature of this relation, which was compounded of attraction and a kind of fear, is well illustrated in an entry in Kierkegaard's journal for May 22, 1839:

It can be said of Hamann what is written on a stove near Kold in Fredensborg: *allicit atque terret*.<sup>5</sup>

It is especially in the journals that the pervading personal influence of Hamann may be traced, although in the published works, too, there are connexions of thought and interest, both explicit and implicit, which are more frequent and significant than have hitherto been noted, so far as I am aware, in any published work.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>3</sup> J. G. Hamanns Hauptschriften Erklärt, edd. Blanke u. L. Schreiner, Gütersloh, 1956ss.

<sup>4</sup> E. g., in H. E. Weber's *Zwei Propheten des Irrationalismus*, 1917.

<sup>5</sup> *Papirer* II A 442.

<sup>6</sup> Wilhelm Rodemann's *Hamann und Kierkegaard*, Gütersloh, 1922, Teildruck, Phil. Dissertation, Erlangen 1912, is a disappointing exercise, being not only incomplete in its references (to some extent understandable at the date of production) but also, more seriously, being content with superficial connexions. The following are the references in the Journals and in the works which I have discovered. The references are to the *Papirer*, ed. P. A. Heiberg, V. Kuhr (and E. Torsting), 1909-48, and to the *Samlede Værker*<sup>2</sup>, ed. A. B. Drachmann, J. L. Heiberg and H. D. Lange, 1920-36. I A 75, I A 100, I A 123, I A 233, I A 234, I A 237, I A 340; IIA 2, 12, 75, 78, 102, 105, 114, 118, 136, 138, 139, 214, 215, 259, 438, 442, 623, 658; III A 49, 235; IV A 122; V A 29; VI A 5, 6; VII A 236; VIIIA 251; IX 444, 475 (? - reference to »heterogeneity«, cf. Hamann's letter to Herder, June 3, 1781: »This fear in the world is the sole proof of our heterogeneity«): X<sup>1</sup> A 324; X<sup>2</sup> A 225; X<sup>3</sup> A 51, 53, 54, 69, 91, 319. The reference in I A 75 is on my view the first reference to Hamann, where in the course of his excursion to Gilleleie, K. writes, August 1, 1835: »What good would it do me if truth stood before me, naked and cold, not caring whether I recognised her or not?« Cf. H.'s letter to Kant, July 27, 1759: »Die Wahrheit wollte sich von Strassenräubern nicht zunahe kommen lassen, sie trug Kleid auf Kleid, dass man zweifelte ihren Leib zu finden. Wie erschracken (sie), da sie ihren Willen hatten und das schreckl. Gespenst, die Wahrheit, vor sich sahen«. SV I 253, III 66, 212 f., IV 245 f., 302, 306, 402, 472, 474, V 54, VI 104, 109, 117, 130, 149, 159, 206, VII 236, 277, 549.

What I wish to maintain is that concurrently with the weakening of Hamann's influence upon Kierkegaard, Kierkegaard reached a more and more unsatisfactory understanding of Christian existence.

Now of course there were many different reasons which contributed to lead Kierkegaard away from Hamann to his final position – to a view which Fritz Lieb has justly described as »spiritualism«<sup>7</sup>. First there are the well-known biographical events, especially the broken engagement and the conflict with the satirical journal *The Corsair*. And secondly, the major role played in Kierkegaard's life by suffering (though in a more detailed analysis it would have to be shown that this role was by no means identical throughout his life), and the increasing importance of the category of the single one (*hiin enkelte*), cannot be properly appraised without a special understanding of Kierkegaard's passionate inwardness and its highly dialectical relation to his whole authorship, including the diaries. The inwardness he certainly shared with Hamann – one has only to think of Hamann's own words in the *Kreuzzüge des Philologen*: »nichts als die Höllenfahrt der Selbsterkenntnis bahnt uns den Weg zur Vergötterung«<sup>8</sup>. He also shared with Hamann – at least formally – a hatred of the »system« and of speculation. But he was led by these elements in his life and thought – the personal relationships and the passionate demand for existence rather than uncommitted reflection – to a highly individual understanding of Christianity which was very different from Hamann's. In brief, he was led to a position in which he wished to present Christianity as a direct communication, involving, it is true, radical decision, personal witness, and martyrdom. But he did this as an author rather than in his life. As he himself said, he wished to be the »poet of the religious«. His authorship therefore stands in the end separate from his biography, close though the connexions between his authorship and his biography undoubtedly are.

It was the tension between the biography and the authorship which led Kierkegaard to turn the screw of paradox to an agonising extreme. He presented Christianity as an offence, and identified Christianity with suffering. If he had abided by his early enthusiasm for Hamann, he would cer-

<sup>7</sup> *Sophia und Historie*, p. 309.

<sup>8</sup> *Werke*, ed. Nadler, II, p. 164.

tainly have retained a more balanced view of faith. It is also of course true that in that case he would have ceased to be the Kierkegaard we know, able to attract and terrify us in his turn.

The fascination which Hamann exerted upon Kierkegaard in his early years reaches its fullest strength in certain journal entries of the year 1837, when Kierkegaard was just 24 years of age. They are all concerned with the concept of humour. The most striking are the following:

Humour is irony carried through to its greatest vibration, and although the Christian element is the real *primus motor* there are nevertheless to be found in Christian Europe people who have got no further than describing irony, and have therefore never been able to achieve humour as absolutely isolated and personally solitary: therefore they either seek rest in the church, where the whole gathering of individuals develops, in humour about the world, a Christian irony ... or, when the religious does not come into movement they form a club ... No, Hamann is surely the greatest and most authentic humorist, the real humorous Robinson Crusoe, not on a desert island, but in the tumult of life. His humour is not an aesthetic concept, but life ...<sup>9</sup>

Secondly, and even more explicitly about Hamann:

Hamann could be regarded as a good example of the humorous tendency in Christianity ... But this is developed in him in a one-sided way, as a necessary consequence a) of the humour in Christianity as such, b) of the isolation of the individual conditioned by the Reformation ... where the humour is in opposition to everything and hence fairly sterile. But this was not the case with Hamann, and the reason must be sought in his profound spirit and great genius ... and c) of his own natural humorous bent. So that one can say with truth that Hamann is the greatest humorist in Christianity, and that means the greatest humorist in the point of view which itself is the most humorous point of view in world history – and therefore he is the greatest humorist in the world.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>9</sup> Papirer, II A 136.

<sup>10</sup> Papirer, II A 75.

Lastly, there is one brief but profound remark:

The Christian humorist is like a plant whose roots alone are visible, whose flowers unfold in a higher sun.<sup>11</sup>

What does Kierkegaard mean by humour in these early journal entries? At this stage he is not entirely clear. The clarity, and with it the fixation of the concept in a scheme which has abandoned Hamann's view of humour, comes only later, in the Concluding Unscientific Postscript. Kierkegaard is still at this early stage not entirely successful in separating the concept of irony from that of humour. This comes out more clearly in certain other entries. For instance, he speaks of Christ's humour in the words, »My yoke is easy and my burden is not heavy«, and remarks: »It is surely heavy to the highest degree, the heaviest that can be thought – self-denial«. <sup>12</sup> Earlier in the same entry he speaks of the humour »which lies in Christianity in general, expressed in the statement that the truth is hidden in the mystery ... which is precisely the view of life which humorises to the highest degree the cleverness of the world«. This leads to Christian ignorance, »the pure Socratic view, as we find it, for example, in Hamann«, which is »by nature also humorous«.

But this is not consistent with Kierkegaard's insight that Hamann's view of humour is more than a concept, more than a method for understanding the contradictions between Christianity and the world, but is, as he says, life itself. It is certainly true that even at the level of irony there are close affinities between Hamann and Kierkegaard. Hamann, like Kierkegaard, did indeed understand the Christian mystery of the condescension of God in Christ in terms of irony, of a Christian-Socratic ignorance, and of humility. The contrast between Christianity and the wisdom of the world runs through all that he thought and was. Yet Hamann's view is not exhausted in the consequent sense of incongruity, which could at best lead to treating life as an isolated joke. Nor indeed is Kierkegaard's positive appreciation of Hamann at this stage exhausted by this reduction of the place of humour in Christianity to an isolated tendency which is expressed simply in a vivid sense of contrasts and incongruities.

<sup>11</sup> Papirer, II A 102, July 6, 1837.

<sup>12</sup> Papirer, II A 78.

At this point the difficulty of defining the positive content of humour is very great. It is a difficulty akin to that which we have with many concepts and views which we all live with in various degrees of acceptance, such as freedom, or democracy. We may justly say that we share a common understanding of such things – so long as we are not required to define them.

We can approach the matter best by recalling how Hamann understood his own life.<sup>13</sup> As he said himself, his whole life was a learning »von unten zu dienen«. <sup>14</sup> But this did not mean a naive pietism. His surrender was conscious, it was filled with joy, but it was also total. »Auch in der Küche sind die Götter«, he wrote to Jacobi, »und was Cartes von seinem Cogito sagt, davon überführt mich die Thätigkeit meines Magens«. <sup>15</sup> In other words, his life was not based upon a dichotomy between soul and body, or upon a gnostic separation of spirit from all the rest of creation, but upon what he called »das edle Sum«, upon the »noch Hebräischer, Est ergo cogito«. <sup>16</sup> The basis of his life is the givenness of life in a single body-spirit unity. Thus the words of the English poet Young, which were significantly reproduced by Kierkegaard on the title-page of *Either/Or*:

Are passions then the pagans of the soul,  
Reason alone baptized?

are for Hamann more than the motto for the importance of the aesthetic sensibility. Rather, for him they point to God as active in nature as well as in history; they point to a faith in the reality of creation which comes from a faith in the revelation in Christ. In the *Sokratische Denkwürdigkeiten* he writes:

Doch vielleicht ist die ganze Geschichte ... gleich der Natur ein versiegelt Buch, ein verdecktes Zeugnis, ein Räthsel, das sich nicht auflösen lässt, ohne mit einem andern Kalbe, als unserer Vernunft zu pflügen.<sup>17</sup>

And the ox with which he ploughed was faith. The controlling element in the human situation, to which this faith is the response, is the constant acti-

<sup>13</sup> For a fuller discussion of Hamann's life and thought the reader may be referred to the present writer's *J. G. Hamann: a study in Christian existence*, London, 1960.

<sup>14</sup> Briefwechsel, edd. W. Zieseimer and A. Henkel, II, 192.

<sup>15</sup> C. H. Gildemeister, *Hamann's Leben und Schriften*, V, 476.

<sup>16</sup> Gildemeister, V, 81.

<sup>17</sup> Nadler, *op. cit.*, II, 65.

vity of God through the whole of creation, both nature and history. God himself is the Giver, and at the same time he is the resting-point. For Hamann the Christian's criterion is therefore the eternity of God, which is to be discerned not in any separated activity of the autonomous reason, nor in any isolated activity of the religious or the aesthetic sense, but in the complex and continuous activity of God in his condescension throughout nature and history. This faith in this activity of God is at the same time strictly eschatological: it is not continuous like a natural process, but is ever renewed in the present.

Thus on November 14, 1784 he writes to Jacobi as follows:

Alles ist eitel – nichts neues unter der Sonne – ist das Ende aller Metaphysik und Weltweisheit, bei der uns nichts übrig bleibt als der Wunsch, die Hoffnung und der Vorschmack eines neuen Himmels und einer neuen Erde – in schönen und lieblichen aber ebenso vergänglichen und flüchtigen Augenblicken, wie die Liebe in Wollüsten.<sup>18</sup>

Here we may see how Hamann's attitude to the world is determined by an eschatological anticipation of a new heaven and a new earth: this means the anticipation of an ultimate peace which comes from God. It comes from the serenity of God, but it does not leave out the reality of the world. The relation with eternity is thus not direct; it remains a relation of faith. And it is expressed by Hamann in the whole course and deliberate intentions of his life, in a strict and constant engagement with the things and persons of his daily existence. We may therefore say that by means of his eschatological faith he is taken out of the world, but he is also straightway thrown back into the world. The reference to eternity is therefore to be found, and confirmed, within the life of the senses, in humility, in the life of children, even in the life of Pharisees or by means of Balaam's ass: in brief, through the sensibility or *Empfindung* and not by means of abstractions or speculative systems. The roots of the plant of faith are deep in the earth, and the way to the higher sun is not reached by cutting those roots: neither general world-denial, nor personal asceticism, is able to achieve or to express this faith. There is certainly an element of resignation in Hamann's life; but it is not the ironical resignation or disengagement such as we find in David Hume,

<sup>18</sup> Gildemeister, op. cit., V, p. 17.

who gave up philosophizing, and took to writing history, and playing backgammon with his ministerial friends of the Church of Scotland in Edinburgh. But we see in Hamann the expression of a thoroughly eschatological faith which, because it has overcome the world, is able to affirm it to the full. It is this kind of living faith which Kierkegaard sees in Hamann and describes as his humour.

As Kierkegaard himself says later, if he had known at the time of Hamann's »marriage of conscience« with Anna Regina, his own relation to his Regine might well have been different.<sup>19</sup> We may add that his relation to the world, and his view of Christianity, might well have remained closer to that of Hamann. Indeed, as early as 1843 he had an inkling of this, when he confessed in his diary: »If I had had faith, I should have remained with Regine.«<sup>20</sup> Hamann did have faith, of such a kind that he did not marry his Regina according to the forms of the world. But he lived with her in faithful and humorous acceptance of the *mala domestica* and *gaudia domestica* all his life. This marriage is perhaps the best illustration of Hamann's faith in God, whom he recognised primarily as *giving*, not demanding, and giving, moreover, the possibility of a life at peace with him: thus Hamann's life in humour may be seen as a clue to God's relation with the world.

There are however other elements in Hamann's writings which fill out the picture of the attraction and the repulsion which Kierkegaard felt. The first significant connexion between the two is an entry in Kierkegaard's diary for September 10, 1836. Here we read:

Hamann suggests a very interesting parallel between the Law of Moses and reason. He starts from Hume's words, »the last fruit of all worldly wisdom is the recognition of human ignorance and weakness« ... Our reason, says Hamann, is therefore just what Paul calls the law – and the command of reason is holy, righteous and good. But is reason given to us to make us wise? As little as the law was given to the Jews to make them righteous, but to convince us of the opposite, how unreasonable our reason is, and that our errors must increase through it, as sin increased through the law.

<sup>19</sup> Papirer VIII A 251.

<sup>20</sup> Papirer IV A 107.



And to this entry Kierkegaard adds another quotation from Hamann:

Ist es nicht ein alter Einfall, den du oft von mir gehört: *incredibile sed verum?* Lügen und Romane müssen wahrscheinlich sein, Hypothesen und Fabeln; aber nicht die Wahrheiten und Grundlehren unseres Glauben.<sup>21</sup>

One sees here how Kierkegaard was attracted by Hamann's splendid ability to tackle the problem of faith at the very point where the Enlightenment, in the person of David Hume, had reached its limit. When Hume said that »mere reason is insufficient to convince us of the veracity of faith«, Hamann replied, »That's just how it is«. For »Glauben geschieht so wenig durch Gründe, als Schmecken und Sehen«. <sup>22</sup> When Hume said, presumably in mockery, that you are persuaded »of a continual miracle«, Hamann himself was unashamedly convinced of that miracle.

Later Kierkegaard noted with approval that »it is the highest degree of irony for Hamann to say somewhere that he would rather hear the truth from a Pharisee against his will than from an apostle or an angel«. <sup>23</sup> Hamann's exact words, in a letter to Lindner, were:

Ich habe Ihren Herrn Schwager noch nicht gehört, und wähle mir keine Prediger mehr, sondern nehme für lieb mit dem, der liebe Gott giebt. Baumgarten, Reichel, Forstmann, Paulus und Cephas sind Menschen, und ich höre öfters mit mehr Freude das Wort Gottes im Munde eines Pharisäers, als eines Zeugen wieder seinen Willen, als aus dem Munde eines Engels des Lichts.<sup>24</sup>

But this seems to me to be more than irony, or a clever turning of the tables on Hume. Of course it is a declaration of war on a too narrow concept of reason, and this is doubtless what attracted Kierkegaard in the first instance to Hamann. For Kierkegaard was seeking a way out of the conflict which he knew in himself between philosophy and Christianity. At this point, therefore, we may see the closeness of the two in their movement away from the norms of the Enlightenment. And it was from this point, from the deli-

<sup>21</sup> Papirer I A 237.

<sup>22</sup> Nadler, II, p. 74.

<sup>23</sup> Papirer II A 2.

<sup>24</sup> Briefwechsel, I, p. 431.

berate assertion of the positive possibility of faith, that Kierkegaard moved into his massive attack upon the customary Christian apologetic in terms of the traditional proofs of the existence of God, and with its assumption that intellectual certainty was basic to faith.

Similar, too, is the starting-point for Kierkegaard's discussion of Lessing's necessary truths of reason, independent of contingent truths of history. Lessing for Kierkegaard played approximately the part that Hume played in Hamann's thought. And the common ground is clear. When Hamann, in a letter to Jacobi of February 18, 1786, writes:

Denn wenn die Narren sind, die in ihren Herzen das Dasein Gottes läugnen, so kommen mir die noch unsinniger vor, die selbiges erst beweisen wollen,

then it is clear that from this and similar utterances Kierkegaard found support for his attack on all systematic formulations as a substitute for an existential decision. That Kierkegaard ended as an anti-rationalist cannot, I think, be denied. It is, however, by no means so clear that Hamann can be so described (far less as an irrationalist). Kierkegaard moved in a straight line from Lessing to the need for that very *salto mortale* which Lessing could not take. But Hamann held on to his basic apprehension of the presence of God in his life in and through the signs given to him in and through the world. Certainly, both Hamann and Kierkegaard speak of the impossibility of a system of existence. Hamann could say: »Das System ist an und für sich ein Hindernis zur Wahrheit«,<sup>25</sup> and Kierkegaard adds, more precisely still, »the humorist has no system«. <sup>26</sup> And in the Concluding Unscientific Postscript he writes that there is a system of existence only »for him who is both inside and outside existence, eternally complete and yet containing existence in himself, namely God«. <sup>27</sup> For Kierkegaard the truth of Christianity is objectively uncertain, and subjectively true. But for Hamann the key to Christian existence is not the absurd, but God's continuous and absolute condescension. The connexion between God and the world is not broken. So Hamann's faith retains, through the events of the historical

<sup>25</sup> Gildemeister, op. cit. V, p. 228.

<sup>26</sup> Papirer II A 140.

<sup>27</sup> SV<sup>2</sup> VII, p. 107.

world, an intimate relationship with reason. His clearest words on the relation of reason to faith are probably to be found in a letter to Jacobi, where he writes:

Unsere Vernunft muss warten und hoffen – Dienerin, nicht Gesetzgeberin, der Natur sein wollen.<sup>28</sup>

One is forced to recognise, nevertheless, that there is a basic affinity between Kierkegaard and Hamann, echoes of which are to be heard even as Kierkegaard is moving far away from Hamann. Thus Kierkegaard quotes Hamann's words with approval in the *Concept of Dread*:

Diese Angst in der Welt ist aber der einzige Beweis unserer Heterogenität. Denn fehlte uns nichts, so würden wir es nicht besser machen, als die Heiden und Transcendental-Philosophen, die von Gott nichts wissen, und in die liebe Natur wie die Narren vergaffen; kein Heimweh würde uns anwandeln. Diese impertinente Unruhe, diese heilige Hypochondrie, ist vielleicht das Feuer, womit wir Opfertiere gesalzen und vor das Fäulniss des laufenden seculi bewahrt werden müssen.<sup>29</sup>

Kierkegaard shared to the full Hamann's sense of being an exception, a single person, full of contradictions, who recognised himself as called by God precisely through this knowledge of his difference or heterogeneity. »Periissem nisi periissem«, says Hamann repeatedly,<sup>30</sup> and Kierkegaard repeats after him, »periissem, nisi periissem is and remains the motto of my life«;<sup>31</sup> and he uses these words as the motto for a part of *Stages on Life's Way*. And again, in *Fear and Trembling*, the most personal of all Kierkegaard's writings – at least in its primary impulse – Kierkegaard asks the question about the teleological suspension of the ethical. He is speaking ostensibly of Abraham's intention to sacrifice Isaac, but the source of his question is his own experience of the breaking of his engagement with Regino, where the ethical demand is violated for the sake of a higher demand. We can better understand Kierkegaard's agonising effort to grasp the nature

<sup>28</sup> Gildemeister, *op. cit.* V, p. 16.

<sup>29</sup> SV<sup>2</sup> IV, p. 472; cf. *Papirer III A* 235.

<sup>30</sup> E. g. *Hamanns Schriften*, ed. Roth, III, pp. 151, 224.

<sup>31</sup> *Papirer IV A* 48.

of faith when we keep in mind Hamann's treatment of the same theme. In his little essay on the Wise Men from the East, the Magi aus Morgenlande, he raised the same question. For the coming of the wise man to worship Christ had introduced the possibility, and the actuality, of disaster: the slaughter of the innocents and the flight into Egypt of the new-born King of the Jews. »Es giebt Handlungen höherer Ordnung«, writes Hamann, »für die keine Gleichung durch die Elemente dieser Welt heraus gebracht werden kann«. <sup>32</sup>

Yet once again we must note how different the consequences were for Kierkegaard than for Hamann. For Hamann his position as an exception and as a single person, and the very wilderness in which he preached, did not lead him into isolation. But as it were by a divine sleight of hand the wilderness became the ordinary world of relationships in which he lived; whereas for Kierkegaard the wilderness was increasingly the construction of his own solitude.

Yet almost from the beginning of his attraction to Hamann Kierkegaard felt certain reservations. In an entry of the diary for 1837 we read:

Humour can approach the blasphemous. Hamann will rather hear wisdom from Balaam's ass or from a philosopher against his will than from an angel or an apostle. <sup>33</sup>

And in the same year he adds:

This polemic [of Hamann's] goes too far, and sometimes has something blasphemous in it, almost as though he wanted to tempt God. <sup>34</sup>

Our first reaction is one of astonishment. What is the point of Kierkegaard's qualms? Is Kierkegaard after all not the prophet of indirect communication? Why should the truth not come better from Balaam's ass or from a philosopher against his will than from an apostle or an angel? Is this not precisely what Kierkegaard wanted, with his immense stress on the indirect communication of the possibility of offence and the possibility of faith? And did he not share with Hamann the need for pseudonymity, for seeming worse than you are, for the lack of direct authority and the consequent

<sup>32</sup> Nadler, *Werke*, II, p. 140.

<sup>33</sup> *Papirer II A 105*.

<sup>34</sup> *Papirer II A 12*.

affirmation of the maieutic method which both of them admired so much in Socrates?

It is certainly true that Kierkegaard appeared to the world worse than he was. But there is a real difference here. Hamann lived out in his life what Kierkegaard proposed for himself as an ideal possibility. Hamann was thoroughgoing, and wrote all his works under pseudonyms. Kierkegaard sought in the end a way of directness. Even in his early days, alongside the aesthetic, pseudonymous writings, he published the *Edifying Discourses* under his own name. And in the end he reached a point which he described as that of immediacy after reflection, the second immediacy. At this point, in virtue of the paradox, he denied the relation of God to the world, and Christianity became identified with suffering, the suffering of the single person. In the strength of the paradox he denied the world, and his last writings were a direct and undialectical attack on the church in Denmark. But Hamann remained the humorist to the end. For him »lässt sich Gott ... gerade auf die Welt ein«,<sup>35</sup> and it is precisely this connexion of God and the world which both demands and makes possible the attitude of the humorist to the very end.

The deep difference between the two at this point might well be summarised in their respective attitudes to Luther. »Ich lutherisiere«, said Hamann once, and he never left the Lutheran fold. Kierkegaard on the other hand became increasingly critical of Luther. The later diary abounds in such criticism. Basically this criticism sprang from Kierkegaard's increasing interiority, and spiritualising of faith, with the concomitant assertion of the primacy of paradox as *the* category of Christianity. In fact one might almost say that he demanded the paradox as a kind of pre-requisite for understanding Christianity – a very different demand, it seems to me, from that of Rudolf Bultmann as a hermeneutical principle.

In brief, therefore, we may say that Kierkegaard located the blasphemous element in Hamann's view in Hamann's indirect and humourising relation to the divine revelation, in which the incognito of God in the world was never overcome.

At the same time one must recognise that Kierkegaard was conscious from

<sup>35</sup> Hamanns Hauptschriften erklärt, ed. Karlfried Gründer, I, p. 50.

a very early stage of his disagreement with Hamann. In the analysis of the spheres of existence, in the Stages on Life's way, and in the Concluding Unscientific Postscript, we find a subtle and massive rejection of humour as the mark of Christian existence. It is only in the strength of Hamann's life, as he understood it, and as I re-enact it in my understanding, that I dare to reject Kierkegaard's final position.<sup>36</sup>

Humour, writes Kierkegaard in the Concluding Unscientific Postscript, is a heathen speculation which has come to *know* the Christian element. »It can come deceptively near to the Christian position ... but where the decision grasps the existing single person ... where the decision takes place in the moment, and the movement drives forward to a relation with the eternal truth, which stepped into existence in time: there the humorist cannot follow«. <sup>37</sup> »The Christian position inheres in the decision and decisiveness«, <sup>38</sup> whereas humour is only the last terminus a quo for the determination of the Christian position. Humour means disengagement. Or, as he says in the Stages on Life's Way, humour is the last *confinium* before the religious. »The humorist touches in pain the mystery of existence, and then goes home again«. <sup>39</sup>

It seems to me that this view of Christianity ultimately means the destruction not only of the understanding but also of the world. As Kierkegaard himself says, »in my relationship to God I have to learn to give up my finite understanding«. <sup>40</sup> But we must say against this that the God-man, despite every temptation, is not against but for the world. Precisely in his suffering he is for the world. The end is not the exception, separated from the world,

<sup>36</sup> Yet even at this point I must enter a reservation. K's final position is not to be understood as a naive summons to a sectarian existence. His attack on the church is to be seen as the presentation of the ideal which as a »poet of the religious«, a »spy in the service of God«, and the like, he felt called to witness to. Thus neither the Diary of his last years, nor the brilliant pamphlets of the *Instant*, should be regarded as the expression of K's own biography: the directness which is here presented is not a directness of life, but a literary form. Nevertheless, Hamann, who never really wrote for writing's sake, far less in order to portray an ideal Christianity, kept himself from any such directness. His *tierische Ernst*, unlike K's, was controlled by humour.

<sup>37</sup> SV<sup>2</sup> VII, p. 259.

<sup>38</sup> SV<sup>2</sup> VII, p. 258.

<sup>39</sup> SV<sup>2</sup> VII, p. 437.

<sup>40</sup> SV<sup>2</sup> VII, p. 164.

but the society of faith in which the world is overcome, and thus renewed and restored. If Kierkegaard here objects that this is sheer immanence, then I answer with Hamann that the Christian humorist, precisely in the strength of his eschatological decision, is at once thrown back into the world. The humorist does not just go home again, after he has touched the pain of existence. He takes it with him into the world, but he does not see it as the ultimate mystery of existence. This does not mean that Hamann offers us a *theologia gloriae* without the cross. But it means that he discerns, not suffering, but humour as the form of faith in the world. For him, therefore, humour is the expression of the faith that God holds everything in his hand. That means that in Christ he is completely bound up with the world, but precisely in and through this binding he is sovereign and free over against the world. His love for the world can be grasped in and through the suffering of Christ. But it is not imprisoned in the suffering of Christ. Yet even through the suffering of Christ, on Hamann's view, we may discern the peace of God, which is the heart of his humour.

It is true that no reader of Kierkegaard's diaries will wish to deny that he too knew the reality of this eschatological peace. I am bound, therefore, to draw the conclusion that his categories, and especially the category of the paradox, are not an adequate expression of his own experience of faith. I am by no means inclined to suggest that the category of the paradox, and with it the determination of Christianity as suffering, is merely false. On the contrary, it is immensely fruitful, as Kierkegaard himself says, »as an ontological determination, which expresses the relation between an existing knowing spirit and the eternal truth«. <sup>41</sup> But this determination is not the last word in that relation.

One of Kierkegaard's last jottings shows us the destructive end:

What does God desire? He desires souls who can praise and pray and adore him – the business of angels. That is why God is surrounded by angels. For he does not desire the kind of beings of whom there are legions in Christendom, who are ready to trumpet his praises for ten shillings. No, it is angels that please him. And what pleases him more than angels is a man who, in the last lap of his life, when God is trans-

<sup>41</sup> Papirer, 1847 (exact reference mislaid).

formed into sheer cruelty, because he does everything to deprive him of pleasure in life, nevertheless holds fast to the belief that God is love ... Every time that God hears praise from such a man, whom he reduces to the last point of world weariness, God says to himself, This is the right note.<sup>42</sup>

In a world of cruelty and evil and fear, who can fail to be moved by this reality of the faith of Kierkegaard? And yet it is not the promised abundance of life which is here offered to us. In fact, there is here a demand for directness which is not given to us. The suffering which is undoubtedly inherent in living in an evil world is not the last word. But the last word is found in the reality of the being of God for the world in Christ, in such a way that the world is not destroyed but affirmed, re-affirmed. It is in this context that on my view the category of humour, which is more than a category but an actual life, as we see it in Hamann, achieves its full potency of judgment and invitation. Certainly it is a life which is fulfilled not without suffering, and not without radical decision and decisiveness in and through the historical world. But in the last resort it is a life which indicates, to faith, an overcoming of the world and of history which takes place in the world itself.

<sup>42</sup> Papirer XI<sup>2</sup> A 439.