It is unfortunate that Bering doesn't spend more time thinking about the implications of his theory for the rationality of religious belief, because I think there are some interesting discussions to be had (see, e.g. the essays in Schloss and Murray's *The Believing Primate* (Oxford: Oxford, 2009), and my essay 'Does Cognitive Science Show Belief in God to be Irrational? The Epistemic Consequences of the Cognitive Science of Religion' (*International Journal for Philosophy of Religion*, Aug. 2013)). For a scintillating and entertaining presentation of recent work in the cognitive science of religion, Bering's book is a great place to go. But, for a thoughtful discussion of the implications of such work, the reader will want to look elsewhere.

THORSTEN BOTZ-BORNSTEIN
Gulf University for Science and Technology, Kuwait

John R. Betz, *After Enlightenment: The Post-Secular Vision of J. G. Hamann,* Wiley-Blackwell, 2009.

Betz's study of the German philosopher Johann Georg Hamann (1730-1788) sheds light on a relatively obscure figure usually mentioned in connection with the philosophers and linguists Johann Gottfried von Herder and Wilhelm von Humboldt. Hamann is a Christian philosopher who has been marked by an awakening experience. John Betz teaches theology at the University of Notre Dame and tackles Hamann from a clearly religious angle, which seems to be in keeping with the book series 'Illuminations' launched by Blackwell. The editors claim that the series 'is unique in exploring the new interaction between theology, philosophy, religious studies, political theory and cultural studies'.

In the preface Betz explains that the title 'After Enlightenment' is supposed to '"get over" and beyond the Enlightenment, i.e., over and beyond the cherished illusion that reason alone is able to provide a sufficient basis for morality or culture' (p. xii) and refers to Alasdair MacIntyre's *After Virtue*, which was 'also proposed as a way forward that we look again to tradition (which the Enlighteners for the most part spurned as a source of wisdom)'. The central question is if Betz (together with Blackwell's book series) is really looking forward or if this post-secular project is taking us back to a 'Before Enlightenment.'

Taking up Hamann is a risky choice. Betz mentions Isaiah Berlin's estimation that the German philosopher is not only an 'irrationalist', but 'the pioneer of anti-rationalism in every sphere', For Berlin, Hamann was simply an anti-modern obscurantist. I understand that Betz's aim is to prove the contrary. However, right on page 1 Betz explains that he wants to steer a decidedly post-secular and implicitly eschatological course 'toward Christ'; and on page 336 we read that 'reason needs faith and the authority of a prophetic tradition to tell it what it is: to tell it that its light is not merely a random consequence of material causes, or merely pragmatic and instrumental, or merely a function of the will to power, but a participation in and reflection of the light of a transcendent Logos, which allows for varying degrees of luminosity'. Does this mean that anybody who has no faith has no reason? And that reasonable people must consult with religious 'authorities'? In that case, this is not the 'After Enlightenment' that I and many others are waiting for.

I have skipped the 335 pages in which Betz produces a valuable and sophisticated analysis of how reason is for Hamann a matter of language. I most often concur, especially when it comes to the clarification of points from Hamann's *Aesthetica in Nuce* in which Hamann explains that 'an overly rational approach to language renders one incapable of speaking with the kind of creative authority with which he himself speaks' (p. 92). However, the insistence on 'reason being based on faith' must remain disturbing in any academic book. It would have been accurate and sufficient to say that for Hamann, language is bound with history and that he dissolves the pretensions of pure reason into language and tradition. This is what opposes Hamann to Enlightenment tendencies; but why is it necessary to replace 'tradition' with 'faith'? The passing over of differences that distinguish faith from tradition are thus a real shortcoming in this book. Betz writes that enlightenment held that 'rational persons (…) no longer need to be guided by the heteronomy of faith and tradition, but can be guided by – and place their trust in – reason alone' (p. 4). He also finds that 'postmodernists are missing Hamann's most fundamental point: that the transcendent God is kenotically hidden within language' (p. 338). Even *if* this is what Hamann thought at his time, I would still try *today* to redescribe God and religion in terms of history and tradition – be it only in order to save Hamann from irrationalism.

Of course, Betz's analysis follows a certain script. At the bottom of several of his conclusions is a misunderstanding of the phenomenon of 'postmodernity'. Again and again the 'de-centered postmodern

situation' is blamed for the present intolerance towards faith though the exact contrary is the case. Hamann is representative of a counter-enlightenment and therefore, as Betz himself confirms, an early initiator of postmodern thought: he is 'in many ways a Christian precursor of postmodern philosophy' (p. 19). Towards the end of the book, Betz reinstates that 'postmodernity begins with Hamann's assault upon the unmediated self-certainty of the modern subject' (p. 332). I could not agree more. However, from where does the curious expression 'secular postmodernity' originate (p. 19)? The postmodern option is that of the post-secular and this option did not exist in modernity. Postmodernity started in 1979 with the Iranian Revolution and is thus a gift from religious people to the world. It is therefore completely incomprehensible why so many religious people (in the West as well as in the Middle East) accuse postmodernity of *secularism* when it symbolizes precisely the *overcoming* of secularism and the establishment of a post-secular situation. Though Betz seems to grasp Hamann's premature role in this project, he equally holds that postmodernity is 'little more than the logical, nihilistic conclusion of secular modernity' (p. 1). This proposition obviously contradicts the preceding one on Hamann.

Postmodern authors like Lyotard are put upside down for this purpose. Betz quotes Lyotard's statement that 'modernity, in whatever age it appears, cannot exist without a shattering of belief and without discovery of the "lack of reality" of reality'. Lyotard says this very clearly about *modernity* and not about postmodernity because the latter is supposed to bring belief back into modernity. Betz acknowledges this when writing that 'the modern world, insofar as it is a secular world, having nothing greater worth living for, is not only mindless, heartless and gutless, but also – having denied any analogy to the Creator – impotent' (p. 338). Still he decides to act as if Lyotard is talking about postmodernity: 'And true enough, whether owing to the modern suspension of faith or the postmodern absence of faith (whether through Descartes's doubt, Kant's transcendental idealism, Husserl's phenomenological reduction, Heidegger's nihilistic ontology, or Derrida's *différance*), the spectral unreality of things is now what appears' (pp. 338-39). Betz's argumentation is self-contradictory: in an above mentioned passage he acknowledged Hamann's status as a precursor of postmodern thought only to present him in the remainder of the book as the opponent of this same kind of thinking.

Apart from that, Derrida's 'dark, spectral magic to relinquish any claims to reality and vanish like ghosts, torn from any embodiment, into an endless chain of signification, where nothing is ultimately significant' (p. 334) is a product of Betz's imagination (or perhaps an overstatement of one of Bennington's sentences but certainly not embedded in any genuine Derrida research). Would Betz not take the entirely unfounded equation 'spirituality = faith' for granted, he could avoid those misinterpretations that lead him to the conclusion that anything which contains no faith cannot contain truth. It is true that for Derrida, 'language is essentially, for all its non-finite supplementarity, a purely immanent construct that reveals nothing outside it' (p. 337) but this does not mean that *inside* the language game no truth is possible. Betz actually refers to Hamann's view of language as 'a playful response to the speaking of the Word in creation' (p. 162), which brings Hamann closer to Derrida than anything else. Play is transcendental and truth and spirituality can be found inside the play of language as it plays with traditions and history. Betz acknowledges even this appropriately when writing that for Hamann, 'language is essentially a dialogical religious phenomenon, and, especially in its poetic forms (which retain something of this original, creative 'playfulness') bears traces of the 'original supplement' of the Word. Indeed, for Hamann, when language is truly inspired, it is never merely human' (p. 333). Betz goes along with Derrida when detecting connections between postmodern thought and Hamann's 'suspicion of metaphysics and all allegedly "pure thought"' (p. 331). Why, after so much parallelism, this sudden U-turn towards Christ? As a matter of fact, in the *Aesthetica in Nuce* Hamann regrets what he sees as the main characteristic of Christian philosophy and metaphysics: 'Christianity therefore does not believe in the doctrine of philosophy, which is nothing but an alphabetical script of human speculation (...). It does not believe in (...) symbolic elements and password signs (...) not in pythagorean-platonic numbers.' (Johann Georg Hamann, *Writings on Philosophy and Language*, Cambridge University Press, 2007, p. 189). Christianity is against the 'theorist' (p. 278) whereas Hamann praises the rabbi of divine reason (Rabbiner göttlicher Vernunft) as the 'accomplished man of the letters' (vollkommenen Buchstabenmenschen) (p. 281). These represent clear affinities with Derrida.

I can follow Betz when he says that for Hamann 'language is essentially a prophetic revelation of transcendence, of the divine in and through the human, including all the contingency and indeterminacy, creativity

and eccentricity of human language that this implies' (p. 337). I am still on the same page with Betz when Hamann is shown to demonstrate that the 'history of philosophy – in its quixotic quest for transcendental purity, apodictic certainty, and epistemological mastery over what is, in Kant's phrase, "completely a priori in our power"' (p. 332). However, the simple equation of tradition with God negates a large part of this playful aspect; here Hamann becomes dogmatic and is linked to the above mentioned conclusions of reason based on faith as well as to an authoritarian tradition. It remains a truth that a reason based on faith *is not a reason*, which is probably exactly what Berlin had in mind when uttering his shattering statements about Hamann. However, Hamann was against the absolute status of reason and engaged in a brand of self-critical reasoning that might not be so different from Kant's. Sure, he had some supplementary spiritual and religious input. However, to trace his thought back to another absolute instance, to that of faith, and to cry out 'is it not time to heed the voice of this prophet?' (p. 348) does not bring us one step further.

There is a tortuous argument right on the book's first pages about an internal connection between reason and relativism, where Betz explains that the 'making absolute' of reason is 'hypocritical' because once it is absolute it will – since it is not supported through the 'higher ordination' of God – sink into cultural-linguistic dependence, prejudices and relativism (p. 7). The main purpose of the book is probably to make this claim more plausible and to show how Hamann found a way of reacting against this relativism. However, to me, the link between reason and relativism did not become more plausible nor am I convinced that Hamann looked for reason *beyond* language and culture; and when he looked for God he looked for Him *in* language and culture.