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## **(Re)Discovering Johann Gottfried Herder**

### **A personal memoir**

Johann Gottfried Herder (1744-1803) heeft lange tijd ten onrechte in de schaduw van Immanuel Kant gestaan, aldus de Amerikaanse historicus John Zammito. In deze persoonlijkheden spreekt hij over zijn fascinatie voor Herder. Herders idee dat het historisme en het naturalisme elkaar aanvullen in plaats van uitsluiten, kan volgens Zammito het huidige debat over de wetenschap verhelderen.

I hardly meant to take up Johann Gottfried Herder. He is an absolute coincidence in my life. Thirty years ago and more, I began my studies in the history of philosophy with the ambition to redress the contempt with which American philosophy of the 'analytic' school treated Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel. I took up a philosopher these philosophers admired – Immanuel Kant – and explored the internal difficulties of his system in order to make Hegel's development comprehensible. That led me to Kant's *Critique of judgment* (1790), the key Kantian text for the emergence of German Idealism and thus Hegel. But, as I investigated the composition of Kant's third *Critique* and the ambitions of his whole critical philosophy, I found myself time and again drawn to his preoccupation with Herder. The nastiness of his reviews of Herder's initial volumes of *Ideen zur Philosophie der Geschichte der Menschheit* in 1784 seemed so out of character as to demand a far more careful contextualization than it had received in the Kant scholarship. Considering that there had been a time when Herder was Kant's favorite student, a personal drama in Kant's development piqued my interest. Considering still further the oblivion into which Kant personally – and the Kantian tradition in his name – endeavored to cast Herder, an issue of historical inequity called for revision. Thus, inadvertently, I found myself involved in the enterprise of restoring Herder's stature as Kant's

key rival of the late German Enlightenment. Still, my primary concern was with Kant, not Herder, as the title of my monograph, *The genesis of Kant's critique of judgment* (1992), attests.<sup>1</sup>

Coincidence persisted. Several years after my work on Kant's third *Critique* appeared, I participated in an intensive summer workshop on strategies for salvaging sagging interest in German language and literature in American universities. There I met a scholar who happened to be the Secretary-Treasurer of an organization called the International Herder Society. Aware of my engagement with and for Herder, he invited me to submit a paper for the next conference of the society, to be held in the idyllic setting of Monterey, California. This I did, taking the opportunity to advance my argument for the importance of Kant's rivalry with Herder to German natural science at the end of the eighteenth century, especially in response to a number of reviews by orthodox Kantians who disputed my account of Kant's less-than-civil conduct *vis à vis* Herder.<sup>2</sup> The meeting in Monterey brought me for the first time into contact with the leading figures in Herder scholarship from around the world. Our affinity proved very strong, and as I turned in my own scholarship to the early years of the Kant-Herder relationship, my involvement with the Herder Society advanced apace. Soon I was the Vice-President, then the President of this small society. Eventually, my second monograph on the Kant-Herder relationship appeared in print, cementing my scholarly profile as a Herder specialist.

What that second study taught me was to see Herder not only as Kant's key rival of the later Enlightenment but at the same time as a figure seeking to carry forward an agenda that ironically Kant himself had articulated, only to abandon after his 'critical' turn of 1770, namely 'popular philosophy' – or 'philosophy for the world', as Kant called it. In carrying forward this Kantian commitment to *Popularphilosophie* Herder played a decisive role in the emergence of anthropology in Germany. At the same time, from a presentist vantage, Herder can be mined for insights into the relationship between historicism and naturalism: a relationship which I believe to be critical for our own epoch of thought.

1 J. Zammito, *The genesis of Kant's critique of judgment* (Chicago and London 1992).

2 J. Zammito, "Method' versus 'manner'? Kant's critique of Herder's *Ideen* in the light of the epoch of science, 1790-1820" in: Hans Adler and Wulf Köpke ed., *Herder Jahrbuch* 1998 (Stuttgart 1998) 1-26.

## Going back to the beginning

Long after their relationship had become publicly acrimonious, Herder penned one of the most generous descriptions of Immanuel Kant by any contemporary. He wrote:

'Playfulness, wit, and humor were at [Kant's] command. His lectures were the most entertaining talks. His mind, which examined Leibniz, Wolff, Baumgarten, Crusius, and Hume, and investigated the laws of Newton, Kepler, and the physicists, comprehended equally the newest works of Rousseau (...) and the latest discoveries of science. He weighed them all, and always came back to the unbiased knowledge of nature and to the moral worth of man. The history of men and people, natural history and science, mathematics and observation, were the sources from which he enlivened his lectures and conversations. He was indifferent to nothing worth knowing. No cabal, no sect, no prejudice, no desire for fame, could ever tempt him in the slightest from broadening and illuminating the truth. He incited and gently forced others to think for themselves; despotism was foreign to his nature.'<sup>3</sup>

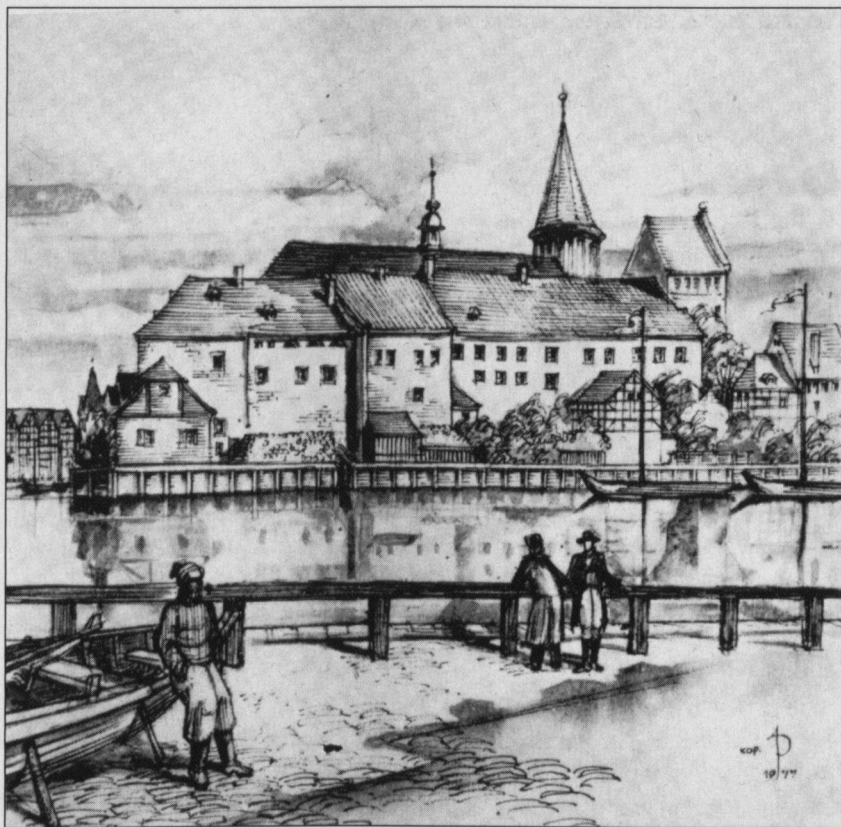
In what is still the greatest work on Herder, Rudolf Haym made the crucial point: Herder never ceased to be a Kantian – but *of the year 1765*.<sup>4</sup> Kant – and Haym after him – could never forgive Herder for failing to follow the master through the 'critical' turn. What was the 'pre-critical' Kant like, that Herder should so have idolized him, and what was Herder like, that Kant should have marked him out as his favorite student? What intellectual mission did Kant articulate to inspire Herder for a lifetime, even if he himself would abjure it with time? These were the questions that preoccupied me in my second monograph, *Kant, Herder, and the birth of anthropology*.<sup>5</sup> In my view, they set not only the parameters of the lives of these two extraordinary figures but also, through them, the parameters of the balance of the German Enlightenment.

Herder came from a straitened background. Born 1744 in the small village of Mohrungen in East Prussia, he demonstrated sufficient intellec-

3 J.G. Herder, 'Briefe zu Beförderung der Humanität' in: Bernhard Suphan ed., *Herders Sämtliche Werke* 17 (Berlin 1893 ff) 404 (hereafter, *Herders Sämtliche Werke*, volume: page).

4 Rudolf Haym, *Herder, nach seinem Leben und seinem Werk* (Berlin 1954) vol. I, 55.

5 Zammito, *Kant, Herder, and the birth of anthropology* (Chicago en London 2002).



Königsberg University. Walter Dietze, *Johann Gottfried Herder. Weltbild, Menschbild, Wirkung* (Weimar 1978) 8.

tual merit to catch the notice of a Russian medical officer stationed there in the occupation during the Seven Years War. This officer took Herder to Königsberg with the intention of sponsoring his study of medicine, but when Herder fainted the first time he set foot in a operating theater, the physician abandoned him. Fortunately for Herder, local acquaintances brought him to the attention of Immanuel Kant, who saw to it that Herder was admitted to the University. More, Kant allowed Herder to attend all his classes for free (no small matter for a *Magister* who earned his meager salary strictly from student tuition). Herder took every class Kant offered during the years (1762-64) he attended Königsberg University. Kant privileged him as a student of extraordinary potential. He made his personal library available to Herder, helped him find a teaching position at the Gymnasium



he had attended himself, and spent many hours in conversation with the young man. While he insisted that Herder should think for himself, Kant unmistakably came to view Herder as something of a disciple. Clearly Herder took himself for one. But, just as Kant's pedagogy demanded, such discipleship entailed first and foremost intellectual independence: the will and the strength to challenge even one's mentor.

Herder found another great mentor and friend in these same years in Königsberg, of course: Kant's eccentric acquaintance Johann Georg Hamann, the so-called 'Magus of the North', a figure of starkly different intellectual orientation from Kant. Herder's path to intellectual maturity coursed through the force fields of these two guiding stars. It is striking that each of them appears to have composed his key work of that time envisioning Herder as a kind of ideal reader. Hamann's *Aesthetica in nuce* (1762), which many regard as his most coherent and powerful statement, was written explicitly with Herder in mind, and it would exert a lifelong influence on Herder's thought and style.<sup>6</sup> But so too Kant wrote his most peculiar book, *Träume eines Geistersehers, erläutert durch Träume der Metaphysik* (1766), with Herder in mind, rushing him each segment as it emerged from the print shop.<sup>7</sup> One of Herder's first publications was a review of this work in the Königsberg newspaper that Hamann edited.<sup>8</sup> An enormous controversy has raged ever since those days over whether Hamann or Kant proved the most important influence over Herder. For the German Romantic and for the German nationalist traditions (they are *not* identical!) – to say nothing of the Kantians – a strong bias linked Herder with the anti-Enlightenment impulses of the *Sturm und Drang* movement, and thus Hamann was taken to be his key mentor.<sup>9</sup> Even the figure who revived Anglo-American interest in Herder scholarship, Isaiah Berlin, could only understand Herder in this light, as a proponent of 'Counter-Enlightenment', with the sad result of blurring the Romantic with the nationalist receptions, and even more of obscuring Herder's authentic commitment to Enlightenment – and thus to (the pre-critical) Kant.<sup>10</sup> It has been the endeavor of modern Herder

6 J.G. Hamann, *Aesthetica in nuce* (Tübingen 1970).

7 I. Kant, *Träume eines Geistersehers in Kant, Werke: Akademie-Textausgabe* (Berlin 1968) vol. 2, 315–384.

8 On this review see Marion Heinz, *Sensualistischer Idealismus: Untersuchungen zur Erkenntnistheorie des jungen Herder* (Hamburg 1994) 42.

9 Rudolf Unger, *Hamann und die Aufklärung* (Jena 1911).

10 Isaiah Berlin, 'Herder and the Enlightenment' in: Idem, *The proper study of mankind* (New York 1997) 359–435.

scholarship and especially of the International Herder Society to rectify this misinterpretation and to restore Herder to Kantianism and the Enlightenment. Two brief but compelling accounts in English which uphold this revisionist view are Frederick Beiser's chapter on Herder in *Enlightenment, Revolution, and Romanticism*, and Robert Norton's entry on Herder in the *Encyclopedia of the Enlightenment*.<sup>11</sup>

Herder was a 'Kantian of the year 1765', as Rudolf Haym long ago proclaimed. But what, exactly, was *that*? And how did Herder carve out – as he indubitably did – his own intellectual identity from that affiliation? These questions are hopelessly obscured if we read the history of their relationship retrospectively from the vantage of Kant's critical system, but this has, alas, been almost universally the case in the Kant scholarship and even in a good part of the older Herder scholarship – including Haym himself. I have tried to suggest a more historically grounded sense of the intellectual possibilities of the 1760s in Germany – for both Kant and his new student – and how each of them seized upon these possibilities to shape his own course of thought. Herder found his path early and never strayed. In an essay he drafted in 1765, he put it succinctly: 'What fruitful new developments would not arise if only our whole philosophy would become anthropology.'<sup>12</sup>

To grasp what he meant, we must recognize what 'philosophy' signified at that moment: the *Schulphilosophie* of Wolffianism, which dominated the universities. And we must recognize the gathering of energies throughout Germany aiming at a quite different sense of the mission of philosophy, namely the pursuit of Enlightenment among the literate public, which went by the name of *Popularphilosophie*. Traditionally, viewed through Kantian lenses, this movement has been identified with Johann Feder of Göttingen and consigned, after Kant's withering rebukes in the Appendix to his *Prolegomena* (1783), to historical and philosophical limbo.<sup>13</sup> But *Popularphilosophie* inspired the entire high German Enlightenment from the 1750s until Kant's attack in 1783, and Kant *himself* played a substantial

11 F. Beiser, *Enlightenment, revolution, and Romanticism* (Cambridge 1992); R. Norton, 'Johann Gottfried Herder' in: A. Kors ed., *Encyclopedia of the Enlightenment* (New York 2003) vol. 2, 205–208.

12 Herder, 'Problem: wie die Philosophie zum Besten des Volkes allgemeiner und nützlicher werden kann' in: Suphan ed., *Herders Sämtliche Werke*, 32–33, 31–61.

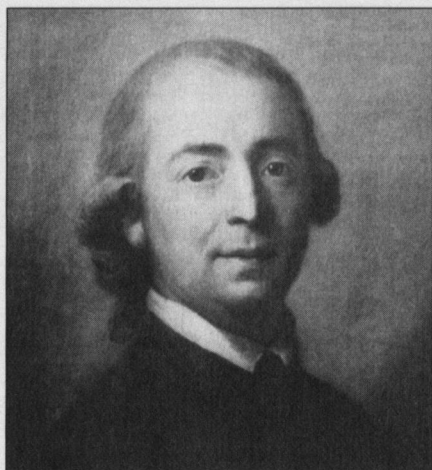
13 See Kant, *Prolegomena zu einer jeden künftigen Metaphysik, die als Wissenschaft wird auftreten können* in Kant, *Werke: Akademie-Textausgabe*, vol 4, 253–384, especially 371–384.

role in it! Only in that light can we appreciate what was so appealing about the Kantianism of 1765 and what Herder meant by calling it 'anthropology'. It was a matter of both program and method. Programmatically, it entailed propagating Enlightenment and its core principle of 'thinking-for-oneself' to a newly emergent literate public. Methodologically, it entailed abandoning speculative metaphysics for empirical observation - for the study of man along the lines that David Hume articulated so memorably in the first pages of his *Treatise of human nature* (1739). And, as Hume exemplified, it constituted a *stylistic* impetus. To write for the wider literate public, to compose *Philosophie für die Welt*, entailed finding a new, more literary approach. It entailed not only making the 'science of man' an empirical science, but making it at the same time a 'schöne Wissenschaft', a charming and engaging form of writing. Kant himself exemplified all these impulses in what proved the most popular work of his entire career, *Beobachtungen über das Gefühl des Schönen und Erhabenen* (1764).<sup>14</sup> This was what 'anthropology' meant to Herder in 1765. It was the mission he took up and carried forward for the balance of his life, even after his mentor abandoned it.

Building a German *Publicum* or *Öffentlichkeit*, recent scholarship has made eminently clear, constituted the decisive ambition of the generation of German authors associated with Enlightenment, figures like Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, Moses Mendelssohn, Thomas Abbt, and, of course, Herder.<sup>15</sup> He grasped profoundly what Lessing, Mendelssohn and their publishing ally, Friedrich Nicolai, were undertaking with their pathbreaking publication, *Briefe, die neueste Literatur betreffend*, and he began his own literary career (anonymously) as their most astute critic and interpreter in his *Über die neuere Deutsche Literatur – Fragmente*. Herder saw himself as part of a movement identified with 'patriotism', i.e. with the constitution of cultural community in the Germanies, analogous to what 'Patriotic Societies' had achieved more locally in the Swiss cities and in Hamburg. Constituting a national literary culture became Herder's grand ambition:

14 Kant, *Beobachtungen über das Gefühl des Schönen und Erhabenen*, in Kant, *Werke: Akademie-Textausgabe*, vol. 2, 205-256.

15 A. LaVopa, 'Herder's Publikum: language, print, and sociability in eighteenth century Germany', *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 29 (1995) 5-24; Benjamin Redekop, *Enlightenment and community: Lessing, Abbt, Herder, and the quest for a German public* (Montreal, etc. 2000); James Van Horn Melton, *The rise of the public in Enlightenment Europe* (Cambridge 2001).



Johann Gottfried Herder. A painting of Anton Graff (1785). Hans Dietrich Irmscher, *Johann Gottfried Herder* (Stuttgart 2001) 10.

'We are laboring in Germany as in the days of the confusion of Babel; divided by sects of taste, partisans of poetic art, schools of philosophy contesting one another: no capital and no common interest, no great and universal reformer and lawgiving genius.'<sup>16</sup>

Herder did not aspire to *be* this lawgiving genius, but he did seek to 'awaken geniuses.'<sup>17</sup> He set about the study of language as the basis of literary and cultural life generally, and, more specifically, the study of German in its relation with other national languages and literatures.

To do so, he believed he needed to

bring together 'four provinces of literature, which reinforce each other mutually, and which are all but inseparable', namely: language, aesthetics, history, and philosophy.<sup>18</sup> Far from seeking an *exclusively* German ('nationalist') culture, he proposed 'to join the thorough English temperament, the wit of the French, and the resplendence of Italy with German diligence.'<sup>19</sup> Thus, he endeavored to add 'to our Leibnizes the Shaftesburys and Lockes, to our Spaldings the Sternes, Fosters, and Richardsons, to our Moses [Mendelssohn] the Browns and Montesquieus.'<sup>20</sup>

Above all, Herder set himself to master the relation between history, philosophy and poetry. The key was the emergent new field of aesthetics. Indeed, the entire German *Hochaufklärung*, in my view, revolves round this link between aesthetics and anthropology – the incorporation of feeling and form into the interpretation of human experience, a psychology which was not only empirical but embodied (physiological). What

16 Herder, 'Fragments: first collection' translated in: E. Menze and K. Menges ed., *Johann Gottfried Herder: selected early works, 1764-1767* (University Park PA 1992) 95.

17 Herder, 'Über Thomas Abbt's Schriften', *Deutscher Klassiker Verlag* (DKV) 2:594.

18 Herder, 'Fragments', 95.

19 Herder, 'On diligence in the study of several learned languages' in: Menze and Menges ed., *Selected early works*, 32.

20 Herder, 'Journal meiner Reise im Jahre 1769', DKV, 9:33.



Herder discerned was that this 'physiological psychology' could only be the ontogenetic complement of a far vaster phylogenetic development of the species, the 'natural history of mankind' or of human consciousness. As he undertook the transformative journey from Riga to France in 1769, his journal entries documented the grandest scope of Herder's sense of intellectual mission. He wrote:

'(...) what my book would be is a book about the human soul, full of observations and experiences! I would like to write it as a human for humans: it should instruct and cultivate! The foundations of psychology, and after the development of the soul as well ontology, cosmology, theology and physics! It should offer a living logic, aesthetic, historical science and theory of art! [It should show] how from every sense a fine art develops. And from every power of the soul a science arises. And from all this a history of scholarship and science in general! And a history of the human soul in general, by ages and peoples! What a book!'<sup>21</sup>

When Herder came back to Germany in 1770, this was his agenda. The remarkable thing is how faithful to it he remained and, indeed, how much he actually accomplished.

## Historicism and naturalism

Historicism and naturalism have been taken as deeply opposed ways of knowing, but that is certainly not a necessity. Indeed, their mutuality may well provide a key to the resolution of many of our essential conundra in epistemology and science generally. I acknowledge frankly my personal investment in this research program, but that is not my point here. I propose simply to do justice to the little phrase 'natural history' in the context of the Enlightenment generally and therewith to shed light on Herder's *magnum opus*, the *Ideen zur Philosophie der Geschichte der Menschheit*.<sup>22</sup> Herder keyed his own sense of the viability of a philosophical history of mankind to his sense of the advancement of the natural sciences of his day. As Elias Palti has noted:

21 Ibidem, 34.

22 Herder, 'Ideen zur Philosophie der Geschichte der Menschheit' in: Suphan ed., *Herders Sämtliche Werke*, 13:1-439, 14:3-493; English translation: *Outlines of a philosophy of the history of man* (New York 1966) (cited hereafter as *Ideen*, book, chapter, English translation, page.)

'(...) the study of the natural sciences of his time clarifies fundamental aspects of Herder's historical view, and, conversely, the analysis of Herder's philosophy allows us to better understand [the developments in natural science].'<sup>23</sup>

I agree entirely with his view that this is the proper vantage on Herder. He was a pioneer in the endeavor to weave together naturalism and historicism, and his very inadequacies are instructive for continued endeavors along such lines.<sup>24</sup>

Let us begin with the quite common association of Herder with historicism. After the rise of historicism in the nineteenth-century school of Ranke and Droysen, Herder was retrospectively celebrated as the 'father of historicism' and credited with pioneering the stress on individuality, development, and the 'historical sense' of *Einführung* (or *Verstehen*) that became the core disciplinary matrix of history. For these interpreters, Herder liberated (German) historical practice from the 'ahistorical' Enlightenment philosophy of history by achieving an authentically historical stance.<sup>25</sup> How did Herder's philosophy of history relate to the others that proliferated in the second half of the eighteenth century? The term 'philosophy of history' was coined by Voltaire in the years 1756-1765, between his *Essay on customs* and his *Philosophy of history*, and explicitly identified with overcoming despair over the irrationality of history. Voltaire's complacent Eurocentric presentism, the beginning of what we know as 'Whig history', practiced in significant measure as well by Montesquieu and even Hume, provoked Herder's intervention.<sup>26</sup> Already in 1769 Herder could write: 'Our century is too refined, too political, and too philosophical' to appreciate earlier epochs.<sup>27</sup> By 1774 his outrage with smug presentism, with European despotism and imperialism cloaked in glorious 'philosophical' rationalizations, erupted into the scathing ironies of *Another philosophy of history for the education of mankind* (1774).

23 Elias Palti, 'The "metaphor of life": Herder's philosophy of history and uneven developments in late eighteenth-century natural science', *History and Theory* 38 (1999) 322-347, citing 323n.

24 See my programmatic argument: 'Reconstructing German Idealism and Romanticism: historicism and presentism', *Modern Intellectual History* 1 (2004) 427-38.

25 Rudolf Stadelmann, *Der historische Sinn bei Herder* (Halle 1928); Friedrich Meinecke, *Historism. The rise of a new historical outlook* (London 1972).

26 Herder, *Another philosophy of history for the education of mankind* (Indianapolis 2004) 54-68. See also Herder's Review of Beattie (1772) in: Suphan ed., *Herders Gesämtliche Werke*, 5:457.

Yet Herder did not reject all Western philosophy of history. The Scottish Enlightenment proved a major stimulus for his view of historical development. Herder read avidly Ferguson's *Essay on the history of civil society* (1767), translated into German only a year after its English publication, and it proved decisive for his reception of the wider Scottish Enlightenment theory of history and culture.<sup>28</sup> In a very important review in 1772 of a work by Millar (*Observations on the differences in rank in civil society*), Herder clearly identified what held the Scottish Enlightenment together: 'philosophy of the forms and alterations of the human race according to the measure of history and experience – a great, great field!'<sup>29</sup> The specific thrust of the Scottish school was to develop the 'four stages' theory of historical development, which put primary stress on the economic institutions of each stage of society and on the laws of property.<sup>30</sup> Far from subscribing to this Scottish theory of human 'improvement' culminating in contemporary European social order, however, Herder had reservations about the commercialization of modern society strongly resembling Rousseau's.<sup>31</sup> In Letter 122 of his *Letters for the advancement of humanity* (1792), Herder put it succinctly: 'A history of our species calls for mercantile-political considerations only in small part; its spirit is the *sensus humanitatis*, sensibility and empathy for all humankind.'<sup>32</sup> Thus in his

27 Herder, 'On the earliest documents of mankind' (1769) in: Hans Adler and Ernest Menze, ed., *On world history: Johann Gottfried Herder. An anthology* (New York and London 1997) 86.

28 Adam Ferguson, *Essay on the history of civil society* (Cambridge 1996). See my essay, 'Die Rezeption der schottischen Aufklärung in Deutschland: Herders entscheidende Einsicht' in: Schmidt-Haberkamp, U. Steiner and B. Wehinger ed., *Europäischer Kulturtransfer im 18. Jahrhundert* (Berlin 2003) 113-138.

29 Herder, 'Review of Millar', *Frankfurter Zeitung*, September 25, 1772 in: Suphan ed., *Herders Gesämmtliche Werke*, 5:452.

30 See Adam Smith, 'The four stages of society' in: Alexander Broadie ed., *The Scottish Enlightenment: an anthology* (Edinburgh 1997) 475-487. See also: John Brewer, 'Conjectural history, sociology and social change in eighteenth-century Scotland: Adam Ferguson and the division of labour' in: David McCrone, Stephen Kendrick and Pat Straw ed., *The making of modern Scotland: nation, culture and social change* (Edinburgh 1989) 13-30; H.M. Höpfl, 'From savage to Scotsman: conjectural history in the Scottish Enlightenment', *Journal of British Studies* 17 (1978) 19-40; Roger Emerson, 'American Indians, Frenchmen, and Scots philosophers', *Studies in Eighteenth-Century Culture* 9 (1979) 211-236.

31 He criticized it in *Another philosophy of history* as well as in his *Ideas*, Book VII, ch. III, Eng. tr., 202ff.

32 Cited in Adler and Menze ed., *On world history*, 48.

1772 review he faulted Millar for offering 'a one-sided history of the human race' which failed to recognize that every epoch was an end in itself – the only view, he asserted, that would befit 'the true dignity of philosophy'.<sup>33</sup> On the other hand, Herder was profoundly influenced by the historical bent in the development of aesthetic theory among the Scots – the dissertations of Hugh Blair revolving around 'Ossian' but devolving decisively on Shakespeare and folk-poetry, the whole linguistic-literary evocation of 'primitive' cultures when 'poetry was the mother-tongue of peoples.'

These 'philosophers of history' in the eighteenth century aimed to articulate the significance of the whole sweep of the past most pointedly *for the sake of the future*. That is, they were committed to a notion of *progress*. Its signal warrant appeared to be the advance of knowledge through the critical application of reason, whereby the moderns could at long last affirm their superiority over the ancients. And, finally, they conceived history in a eudaimonistic frame; happiness, they were sure, was the purpose of (individual) human life, and humans as a species were happier than they had been in the past. Moreover, since humanity now understood the principle whereby to secure it, the prospect of an even better future seemed assured.

Herder, too, wanted a sense of the whole, but he resisted identifying the whole with the end or *telos*. Rather, he argued both for theoretical and for ethical reasons that each historical formation had its own intrinsic perfection, and thus each human culture had its own internal principle of happiness. Herder saw as the real project of a 'history of mankind' not to trace the trajectory of 'progress' but to discriminate the varieties of human excellence. Totality, for Herder, could only signify a historical ensemble: all the distinctive actualizations of the multifarious possibilities of humanity which the course of human history set out, not in hermetic isolation, not without partial cumulation and mutual influence, but emphatically without a singular, linear, progressive *telos*.<sup>34</sup>

33 Herder, 'Review of Millar' in: Suphan ed., *Herders Gesämmtliche Werke*, 5:455.

34 This is the essential feature of his concept of Humanität. In *Ideas*, Herder tried to express the centrality of this concept for his thought: 'I wish I could extend the signification of the word humanity, so as to comprise in it everything I have thus far said on the noble conformation of man to reason and liberty, to finer senses and appetites (...) for man has not a more dignified word for his destination than what expresses himself (...)' (Herder, *Ideas*, Book IV, ch. VI, Eng. tr., 98, amended). In his 'Letters for the advancement of humanity', he elaborated: 'The word humanity stands for the character of our kind, but we are born with this character only in terms of disposition, and, to become actual, it must be developed.' (Herder, 'Letters for the Advancement of Humanity', 27-28 (1794) in: Adler and Menze, ed., *On world history*, 106.)



In *Another philosophy of history* Herder put it in its most memorable form: 'every nation has its own center of well-being within itself, just as every globe has its center of gravity.'<sup>35</sup> He held that 'the uniqueness of each people is more striking in its spiritual form than in its material', and accordingly he sought to 'conjure up before our eyes the spirit of a people.'<sup>36</sup> It was this uniqueness above all that Herder believed history should capture. 'Let each moment speak for itself, and explicate itself, where possible, in its location, without our dragging in an explanation from a favorite region.'<sup>37</sup>

Herder sought to bring a richer sense of situatedness to philosophy of history itself. 'Every philosopher sees things from his own point of view. How depressing to have to demonstrate that historical knowledge does not bring shame upon a philosopher.'<sup>38</sup> The crucial innovation in Herder's hermeneutics was recognizing the problem of the subject, not simply of the object, of interpretation.<sup>39</sup> He insisted upon the situatedness of the historian as subject and yet remained intensely committed to the possibility of transcending this situation:

('...') to liberate oneself from this innate and enculturated idiosyncrasy, to develop distance from the irregularities of a too singular situation and ultimately to be able to relish without [the intervention of] national, temporal and personal taste, the beautiful as it presents itself in all times and all peoples and all arts and all forms of taste (...) to taste it purely and to be sensitive to it. Happy he who can so relish! He is the initiated into the mysteries of all the muses and all the times and all the mementos and all the works: the sphere of his taste is infinite as the history of mankind.<sup>40</sup>

35 Herder, *Another philosophy of history*, 29, translation amended.

36 'Herder is especially concerned with the world views and values of native peoples as expressed in language, mythology, folk-song, and 'national character.' (...) In contrast, he shows little interest in native institutions – in economic and social organization, trade, legal customs, and so forth (...)' Gerald Broce, 'Herder and ethnography', *Journal of the History of the Behavioral Sciences* 22 (1986) 150-170.

37 Herder, 'Zerstreute Blätter' (1792) cited in Adler and Menze, ed., *On world history*, 65.

38 Herder, 'On Christian Wolff's Writings', Suphan ed., *Herders Gesämliche Werke*, 32:158. Herder here explored the crucial contrast between *cognitio historica* and *cognitio mathematica*, between empirical, acquired knowledge and knowledge a priori, out of which arose his fundamental commitment to displace philosophy (as a priori discourse) with anthropology.

39 That is, Herder was a theorist of *Standortsgebundenheit*, which would of course be taken up by Karl Mannheim and by Hans-Georg Gadamer.

40 Herder, 'Viertes Kritische Wäldchen', *DKV*, 2:287.

His issue was not the 'incommensurability' of other cultures, that is, their hermetically sealed uniqueness, but rather the empirical problem of reaching across historical distance to a 'fusion of horizons', in the language of Gadamer's contemporary hermeneutics.<sup>41</sup>

In *Another philosophy of history* Herder extended his approach from texts to general objects of culture. He observed, 'what an *inexpressible thing* the *peculiarity* of one human being is', only to make all the more vivid the problem of grasping the whole of an epoch or an event.<sup>42</sup>

'No one in the world feels the weakness of general characterization more than I.'<sup>43</sup> A historian seeking to grasp this whole had to 'impose order' in a *creative coordination*.<sup>44</sup> Yet Herder insisted that insight and understanding *were* attainable, and particularity itself – understood contextually – gave the historian purchase: nothing emerged in history 'but that *for which time, climate, need, world, fortune* gives occasion'<sup>45</sup>

Thus:

'(...) to empathize with the *entire nature* of a soul, which *rules* through everything, which *molds* all other inclinations and forces of the soul *after its own model*, coloring even the most indifferent actions, do not answer with words, but enter into the age itself, follow the compass, enter into all history, feel your way into everything – only then will you be on your way to understanding the world.'<sup>46</sup>

To embrace concrete individual forms as the proper object of historical inquiry meant for Herder that they could not be read off simply as stages on the way to some later, higher order. Yet this did not mean that he abandoned any endeavor to integrate accounts across cultures and times, to achieve a 'metanarrative.'

'If I could succeed in *binding* together the most disparate scenes without *entangling* them, to show how they are mutually related, growing out of one another, losing themselves in each other, all of them taken individually only moments, only through the progression means to purposes – what a view!

41 Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and method* (New York 1996).

42 Herder, *Another philosophy of history*, 23.

43 Idem.

44 Ibidem, 26.

45 Idem.

46 Ibidem, 24.

What a noble *application of human history*! What encouragement to *hope*, to *action*, to *belief*, even where one sees *nothing* or does *not* see *everything*.<sup>47</sup>

Herder had a conviction: 'Mankind always remains only mankind – and yet a *plan of striving onward* becomes visible. My great subject.'<sup>48</sup> He proposed to find 'in all mankind, in *all the world* and *all the ages*, an *invisible germ of receptiveness to happiness and virtue* that, developed in *different* ways, must appear in different forms, but [that would remain] one and the same *measure and mixture of forces* on the inside.'<sup>50</sup> Humanity, for Herder, was so plastic, its potential actualizations so multifarious, that not only every individual but every community instantiated this human potential in a distinct manner: 'Because one shape of mankind and one corner of the earth could not contain it, it was distributed among a thousand shapes.'<sup>50</sup> Thus, 'the sensibilities, activities, and competences of the human species have been *spread around*.'<sup>51</sup> Herder's principle of historical understanding was to grasp *particularity*, but to understand it always as *situated*:

'Each event, each fact in the world in its way is a *whole*... Each event, each fact in the world has its reasons to be and its causes that somehow brought it into being ... it also has consequences... Each event, finally, is nothing but a link in a chain, it is woven into connection with other events by means of attraction and repulsion...'<sup>52</sup>

In believing 'laws' along these lines informed all of human history, Herder sought to compose a philosophy of history starkly different from the others. For Herder the 'science of man', anthropology, was not simply a historical science, it was also a *natural* science: the division between the humanities and the natural sciences that has been such a hallmark of the age from Kant until very recently did not exist for him. His tendency to take up questions of natural science with a poet's sensibility has drawn scorn from Kant's own blistering reviews of the 1780s to the greatest recent work on Herder's relationship to the natural sciences, H. B. Nisbet's *Herder and the philosophy and history of*

47 Ibidem, 32. Translation amended following *Herder's philosophical writings* (Cambridge 2002) 299.

48 Ibidem, 30.

49 Ibidem, 71-72.

50 Ibidem, 30.

51 Ibidem, 72.

52 Herder, 'Early leaves of critical groves' in Adler and Menze ed., *On world history*, 24.

53 H. B. Nisbet, *Herder and the philosophy and history of science* (Cambridge 1970).

science.<sup>53</sup> To be sure, Herder was not a natural scientist, and *a fortiori* not one who could satisfy a positivistic critic. But we have stepped away from our positivist past and are seeking new ways to understand not only natural science but human knowledge comprehensively.<sup>54</sup> If we are perhaps less 'rhapsodic' in this quest than Herder, we are not all that far from the questions and the hopes that inspired him, and he is a figure worthy of retrieval for *philosophy* of science – in particular over against the total repression of his approach which Kantianism has sought to enforce since the 1780s.

For us it is crucial to recover Herder's effort to apply a consistent *naturalism* to the origins of mankind: to practice precisely the 'natural history' whose cosmological dimension he had learned from Immanuel Kant and whose biological idea he took from the Comte de Buffon and Caspar Friedrich Wolff as well as Kant.<sup>55</sup> Herder adopted Buffon's strategy of a 'natural history of man.'<sup>56</sup> He envisioned a kind of history which would combine 'cultural history with geography and natural history' to create a 'natural history of peoples.'<sup>57</sup> As Herder put it in a fragmentary essay from 1769:

'(...)laws of human and animal nature, I wish to call upon you for succor in the darkness of my labyrinth, [to show me] how the laws of nations are to be formed so that they, like you, will be valid and effectual, make people happy, reach their goal!'<sup>58</sup>

Already in the *Essay on the origins of language*, Herder adopted a theory of language which was, as Hans-Dietrich Irmscher noted, at once *genetic* and *organic*.<sup>59</sup> This combined notion is extended to the history of peoples in the

54 See my *A nice derangement of epistemes. Post-positivism in the study of science from Quine to Latour* (Chicago en London 2004).

55 Kant, 'Allgemeine Naturgeschichte und Theorie des Himmels' in: Kant, *Werke: Akademie-Textausgabe*, vol. 1, 215-368; Comte de Buffon, *Histoire naturelle, générale et particulière* (Paris 1812); Caspar Friedrich Wolff, *Theorie von der Generation* (Stuttgart 1966).

56 'Buffon's *Histoire Naturelle* influenced essentially Herder's conception of natural history and his way of thinking in general.' Reiner Wisbert, 'Commentary on Journal meiner Reise im Jahre 1769', *DKV*, 9:898

57 Reiner Wisbert, 'Commentary on Journal meiner Reise im Jahre 1769', *DKV*, 9:879.

58 Herder, 'Gesetze der Welt: Gesetze der Körper', *DKV*, 9:222.

59 'Language is "genetic" because historical connections constitute themselves in it and thus it keeps the past present. Language is "organic" because in every speech-act what has been received transforms itself into a form of its own.' Hans-Dietrich Irmscher, 'Grundfragen der Geschichtsphilosophie Herders bis 1774' in: Brigitte Porschman ed., *Bückerburger Gespräche über Johann Gottfried Herder 1783* (Rinteln 1984) 10-32.



*Ideas*.<sup>60</sup> Herder elaborated into a general interpretive principle the embryological idea of *epigenesis*.<sup>61</sup> He asserted the emergence of increasing complexity and differentiation as an immanent principle of natural development, as an intrinsically *historical* character/tendency of the entire physical world.<sup>62</sup> 'Everything

- 60 'The education of a generation is therefore in a twofold sense genetic and organic: genetic in view of the manner of the transmission, organic in view of the nature of the assimilation and application of what is being transmitted' Herder, *Ideas*, Book IX, ch. I, 227-228.
- 61 'How must the man have been astonished, who first saw the wonders of the creation of a living being! Globules, with fluids shooting between them, become a living point; and from this point an animal forms itself. The heart soon becomes visible, and, weak and imperfect as it is, begins to beat (...) What would he who saw this wonder for the first time call it? There, he would say, is a living organic power: I know not whence it came, or what it intrinsically is, but that it is there, that it lives, that it has acquired itself organic parts out of the chaos of homogeneous matter, I see; this is incontestible.' Herder refers explicitly to the work of Harvey and of Caspar Friedrich Wolff. Ibidem, Book VII, ch. IV, 177. 'If we contemplate these changes, these living operations, as well in the egg of the bird as in the womb of the viviparous quadruped, I think it is speaking improperly to talk of germs that are merely evolved, or of an epigenesis according to which the limbs are superadded from without. It is formation (genesis), an effect of internal powers, for which Nature has prepared a mass, which they are to fashion, and in which they are to display themselves.' Ibidem, Book V, ch. II, 111. 'The invisible power did not fashion arbitrarily, but only reveal itself as it were according to its internal nature[.] It becomes visible in a mass appertaining to it, and must have the prototype of its appearance in itself, whence or wherever it may be.' Ibidem, Book VII, ch. IV, 178. H. D. Irmscher notes Herder's early and distinctive embrace of the idea of epigenesis in 'Grundfragen der Geschichtsphilosophie,' Palti suggests a more ambivalent relationship, offering a number of distinctions and tensions in the biological theories and in Herder's reception of them, which he conceives as 'uneven developments.' Palti, 'The "metaphor of life", passim. For more on this, see my 'Epigenesis: concept and metaphor in Herder's Ideen' in: Regine Otto and John H. Zammito ed., *Vom Selbstdenken: Aufklärung und Aufklärungskritik in Herders 'Ideen zur Philosophie der Geschichte der Menschheit'* (Heidelberg 2001) 129-144.
- 62 Already in his *Essay on the Origin of Language*, Herder asserted the key idea of emergence: 'The genesis of language is as much an inner imperative as is the impulse of the embryo to be born (...) To be sure, creating Providence must have presided over the first moment of coming to conscious control – but it is not the job of philosophy to explain the miraculous aspect in these moments, as little as philosophy can explain the human being's creation. Philosophy takes up the human being in his first condition of free activity, in his first full feeling of his sound existence, and hence explains these moments only in human terms.' Herder, 'Essay on the origin of language' in: M. Forster ed., *Herder's philosophical writings*, 129.

in nature is connected: one state pushes forward and prepares another.<sup>63</sup> 'Nothing in nature stands still.'<sup>64</sup> 'Organic powers expand themselves in the greatest activity, and strive to put on new forms.'<sup>65</sup> 'Inferior powers ascend to the more subtle forms of vitality.'<sup>66</sup> That is, central to Herder was the conviction that there could be no categorical divide between nature and (human) history. Man was, to be sure, a *unique emergence*, but *within* nature.<sup>67</sup>

Herder's grand project in the *Ideas* was to find how man as a creature of nature figured in man as an artifice of culture, to read these two dimensions of man in continuity.<sup>68</sup> He wished to integrate into his *Ideas* what we would call the biology and archaeology of the human species. Hence the first volume of the *Ideas* was an effort to harvest from the natural sciences of the day all they could provide of insight into the formation of mankind. Herder systematically tried to bring comparative anatomy and comparative

63 Herder, *Ideas*, Book VI, ch. VI, 27.

64 Ibidem., Book VI, ch. III, 114.

65 Ibidem., 115.

66 Idem.

67 'Who would not rejoice, if some philosophical anatomist should undertake to give a comparative physiology of several animals, particularly of those that approach nearest to man, examining these powers, discriminated and established by experiment, in relation to the whole organization of the creature?' Herder, *Ideas*, Book III, ch. II, 54.

68 'It is striking that Herder makes absolutely no effort to bridge [the] gaps [between nature and culture] with reference to the freedom of God and those made in his image. Instead, he calls for a continuous, purely immanent historical transition and coherence.' Hans-Dietrich Irmscher, 'Grundfragen der Geschichtsphilosophie,' 27. Kant, by contrast, wished to dissociate nature and culture to the highest degree possible without contradiction. As Reinhard Brandt aptly notes, 'Kant all through his life rejected the effort in the sphere of natural history to discern a natural transition from merely mechanical to organic nature.' Brandt, 'Kant - Herder - Kuhn,' *Allgemeine Zeitschrift für Philosophie* 5 (1980) 27-36. As Martin Bollacher has noted, 'the main thrust of Kant's critique of the *Ideas* was not aimed at Herder's argument from concepts that were no longer drawn from sensible experience, but at the pantheistically grounded perspective or a genetic relation and natural-historical development of the "species"...' Bollacher, 'Natur' und 'Vernunft' in Herders Entwurf einer Philosophie der Geschichte der Menschheit' in: Gerhard Sauder ed., *Johann Gottfried Herder 1744-1803* (Hamburg 1987) 123. For a thorough consideration of the tension between Kant and Herder over history, see Hans-Dietrich Irmscher, 'Die geschichtsphilosophische Kontroverse zwischen Kant und Herder' in: Bernhard Gajek ed., *Hamann--Kant--Herder: Acta des 4. Internationalen Hamann-Kolloquiums im Herder-Institut zu Marburg/Lahn 1985* (Frankfurt 1987) 111-192.

physiology to bear, working from the speculations of Rousseau and others on the orangutan, to identify the morphological differences of whole embodied humans, especially in communities, which distinguished humankind from all other animal forms.<sup>69</sup>

Herder seemed prepared not only to see man in continuity with organic form, but also to see organic form itself in continuity with the inorganic, i.e., in his own words, 'perhaps even in so-called *dead* things one and the same endowment [*Anlage*] for organization, only infinitely cruder and more muddled, might preside.' Indeed, this idea of one all-pervasive force [*Kraft*] was the essential idea which Herder entertained in his work. The result was a theory of the world as composed primarily of forces organized hierarchically. 'Nature, amid the infinite variety she loves, seems to have fashioned all the living creatures on our Earth after one grand model of organization.'<sup>70</sup> Thus Herder proposed to discern morphological universals: 'The one organic principle of nature (...) we here term *plastic*, there *impulsive*, here *sensitive*, there *artful* (...) is at bottom but one and the same organic power.'<sup>71</sup> The continuity from inorganic to organic was explicit: '[I]n marine life, plants, and even inanimate things, as they are called, one and the same groundwork may prevail, though infinitely more rude and confused (...)'<sup>72</sup>

'The active powers of Nature are all living, each in its kind; they must possess a something within, answerable to their effects without, as Leibniz advanced, and as all analogy seems to inform us.'<sup>73</sup>

One had to work with *analogy*, because direct cognition of inner forces or

69 See Wolfgang Heise, 'Der Entwicklungsgedanke als geschichtsphilosophische Programmatik,' *Goethe Jahrbuch* 93 (1976) 116-138.

70 Herder, *Ideas*, Book II, ch. IV, 39.

71 Ibidem, Book III, ch. IV, 62. 'In every living creature the circle of organic powers seems to be whole and complete; only differently modified and distributed in each.' (Ibidem, Book III, ch. II, 53). 'A certain uniformity of structure, and as it were a *standard form* (...) convertible into the most abundant variety (...)' 'One single principle of life seems to prevail throughout all nature: this the *ethereal* or *electric stream* (...) more and more finely elaborated, till it produces all those wonderful instincts and mental faculties.' (Ibidem, Book III, ch. I, 45). 'Thus it is anatomically and physiologically true, that the analogy of *one organization* prevails through the whole animated creation of our Globe.' (Ibidem, Book II, ch. IV, 41).

72 Ibidem, Book II, ch. IV, 39.

73 Ibidem, Book III, ch. 2, 53.

real causes was beyond human ken.<sup>74</sup>

'Laws and forms we observe, but their intrinsic powers we know not, and what we express by certain general terms, as cohesion, extension, affinity, and gravitation, for instance, convey to us ideas of external relations only, without carrying us one step nearer the internal essence of things.'<sup>75</sup>

The essential problem, then, was one of a *natural history* – literally, an account of the *immanent changes in physical nature* as we can discern them from the *empirical record*:

'From rocks to crystals, from crystals to metals, from metals to the world of plants, from plants to animals and finally to man, we saw the form of organisation ascend and the powers and instincts of creatures simultaneously become more diverse and finally come together in the human figure (in so far as this could encompass them).'<sup>76</sup>

Drawing extensively from the exploration of the analogy of botanical and zoological forms with those of humanity, Herder worked toward the concep-

74 For a rich consideration of the role of analogy in Herder's thought, see Hans-Dietrich Irmscher, 'Beobachtungen zur Funktion der Analogie im Denken Herders' *Deutsche Vierteljahrsschrift für Literaturwissenschaft und Geistesgeschichte* 55 (1981) 64-97.

75 Herder, *Ideas*, Book II, ch. I, 26. 'We must begin deeper, take in a wider sphere, and observe the general *analogy of Nature*. We cannot penetrate the inmost recesses of her powers... But the modes and effect of her powers lie before us (...)' (Ibidem, Book IV, ch. VII, 106). Herder judges that the analogy of nature allows us to infer 'a kingdom of invisible powers, standing in the same close connection, and blending by such imperceptible transitions, as we perceive in the external appearances of things. The more we learn of Nature, the more we observe these indwelling powers, even in the lowest orders of creatures, as mosses, funguses, and the like (...) And thus all things are full of organically operating omnipotence. We know not where this begins, or where it ends; for, throughout the creation, wherever effect is, there is power, wherever life displays itself, there is internal vitality. Thus there prevails in the invisible realm of creation, not only a connected chain, but an ascending series of powers; as we perceive these acting before us, in organized forms, in its visible kingdom.' Ibidem, Book V, ch I, 108.

76 Ibidem, Book V.,ch I, 107. 'Before our air, our water, our earth could be produced, various reciprocally dissolving and precipitating forces were necessary (...) How many solutions and conversions of one into another do the multifarious species of earths, stones and crystallizations, and of organization in shells, plants, animals, and, lastly, in man, presuppose! (...) Various combinations of water, air, and light, must have taken place, before the seeds of the first vegetable organization, of moss, perhaps, would have appeared. Many plants must have sprung up and died, before organized animals were produced.' Ibidem, Book I, ch. II, 8.





A silhouette of Herder (1785). Dietze, *Johann Gottfried Herder*, 44.

tion of man as a 'middling creature among animals' in the sense of the instance in which all their properties found the consummate integration and expression.<sup>77</sup> From this physical character of man as the 'concrete universal' (to borrow a Hegelianism) of the animal world, Herder then moved on to man's decisive physiological difference from the rest: erect posture. In what was the most imaginative segment of the work, Herder sought to correlate all man's distinctive cultural attributes with this essential physical attribute of erect posture.<sup>78</sup> Turning at last to those aspects of humanity which were most authentically spiritual, Herder continued to uphold immanence of transition. Thus, Herder proposed to read even *reason* as a natural emergent:

'Reason is not innate, but acquired (...) Theoretically and practically, reason is nothing but something *received*, an acquired proportionality and direction of ideas and faculties, to which the human being is formed by its organization and way of life (...) He acquires reason from infancy, being formed to it, to freedom, and to human speech through art, as he is to his ingenious mode of movement.'<sup>79</sup>

Herder, though not himself a scientist, did have a sharp sense for the crucial concerns of the sciences of his day, in particular for the emergence of a new paradigm for scientific study which came to grips with the problem of force and which sought a synthesis which could integrate problems of organic life with problems of active principles in the physical sciences. This naturalism, the need to see matter and spirit in continuity, carried Herder

77 Ibidem, Book II, ch. IV, 40.

78 Ibidem, Book III, ch. VI, 69ff; Book IV, *passim*.

79 Herder, *Ideas*, in: Adler and Menze ed., *On world history*, 133-134.

decisively to 'Spinozism.' Herder believed the innovations in the theory of the physical sciences illuminated the thorniest metaphysical issues, claiming that his reworking of Spinozism along these lines provided a coherent interpretation which would bring:

'(...) an end to all the objectionable expressions of how God, according to this or that system, may work on and through dead matter. It is not dead but lives. For in it and conforming to its outer and inner organs, a thousand living, manifold forces are at work. The more we learn about matter, the more forces we discover in it, so that the empty conception of a dead extension completely disappears. Just in recent times, what numerous and different forces have been discovered in the atmosphere! How many different forces of attraction, union, dissolution and repulsion, has not modern chemistry already found in bodies?'<sup>80</sup>

Herder's vitalist materialism thus invoked the most important recent innovations in the theories of the natural sciences, especially in the fields of electricity, chemistry and biology:

'The new discoveries that have been made respecting heat, light, fire, and their various effects on the composition, dissolution, and constituent parts of terrestrial substances, the simpler principles to which the electric matter, and in some measure the magnetic, are reduced, appear to me (...) at least considerable advances which will in time enable some happy genius (...) to explain our geogony on principles as simple as those to which Kepler and Newton have reduced the solar system.'<sup>81</sup>

Herder's reading (along with that of others, especially Diderot) made 'Spinozism' a key resource for the articulation of a more subtle and dynamic materialism. He reinterpreted Spinoza in order to move eighteenth-century thought in a direction which could at once inform and interpret the emergent sciences of the day and elude the gray reductionism of a mechanistic determinism along the lines made famous by the Baron d'Holbach. This earns Herder a significant place in the emergence of natural philosophy in Germany. He has long enough been seen merely as a rhapsodizer, a poet, or a mystic. He deserves recognition as a philosopher of the emergent natural sciences of the late eighteenth century, especially the life sciences.

The issue of the continuity of man with nature was the touchstone of that epoch.<sup>82</sup> This was Herder's salience for late eighteenth-century German

80 Herder, *God: some conversations* (New York 1943) 105.

81 Herder, *Ideas*, Book I, ch. III, 8.

82 'The central issue in anthropological theory of the period concerned the status of

science: no one articulated with the same breadth and vivacity as Herder the prospect of confirming that continuity. For Goethe, enthusiastically following Herder's composition of the *Ideas*, this was Herder's whole point: in Goethe's words, 'nothing specific could be found to differentiate between man and animals.'<sup>83</sup> Already Linnaeus had admitted, both implicitly by categorizing man among the primates and also in so many words, that there could be no *physiological* basis for discriminating man from the rest of the animal kingdom.<sup>84</sup> Considerations of the orangutan and the chimpanzee as cousins to man already circulated in the popular literature.<sup>85</sup> That was the milieu for which Herder composed *Ideas*.

When he took up that project Herder was at the prime of his powers, and in it he addressed his most important concern, so that the result, without question, was his greatest work.<sup>86</sup> It remains one of the greatest works of the German 1780s. Yet it is also, significantly, unfinished, a 'monumental fragment.'<sup>87</sup> Immanuel Kant's devastating reviews, intervening in the middle of his great synthesis, adversely affected the balance of Herder's composition.<sup>88</sup> Rudolf Haym clearly established Kant's immediate and destructive impact on

man in the growing taxonomic systematization of nature (...) Linnaeus had triggered the problem by his inclusion of man among the Quadrupeda in the order Anthropomorpha, along with the apes and sloths.' Phillip Sloan, 'Buffon, German biology, and the historical interpretation of biological species', *British Journal for the History of Science* 12 (1979) 109-153.

83 'Goethe to Knebel, 17 November 1784', in: Irmscher, *Die geschichtsphilosophische Kontroverse*, 70.

84 On Linnaeus and the indistinguishability of man from animals, see Heinz Stolpe, who cites a reference in Blumenbach's dissertation to Linnaeus' Preface to his Swedish Fauna as follows: 'that it had been impossible to discern a single mark by which one could distinguish between man and the apes [Affen].' Stolpe, 'Herder und die Ansätze einer naturgeschichtlichen Entwicklungslehre im 18. Jahrhundert', *Neue Beiträge zur Literatur der Aufklärung* (Berlin 1964) 289-316, 454-468.

85 On the comparison of man with the primates in the eighteenth century, see the essays of Robert Wokler, e.g. 'Tyson, Buffon, and the Orangutan', *Studies on Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century* 155 (1976) 2301-2319; 'Apes and races in the Scottish Enlightenment: Mondboddo and Kames on the nature of man' in: Peter Jones, ed., *Philosophy and science in the Scottish Enlightenment* (Edinburgh 1988) 145-168.

86 Haym, *Herder*, vol. II, 193.

87 Adler and Menze, 'Introduction to Herder' in: *On world history*, 13.

88 Kant, 'Recensionen von I.G. Herders Ideen zur Philosophie der Geschichte der Menschheit. Theil 1.2' in: Kant, *Werke Akademie-Textausgabe*, vol. 8, 43-66.

89 Haym, *Herder*, vol II., 251.

the *Ideas*.<sup>89</sup> Of course, other factors contributed to Herder's abandonment of the project. It is unclear how the sort of brachiating history Herder ultimately conceived for humankind could be 'completed', either as actuality or as account. And one should not minimize the epochal intervention of the French Revolution of 1789, which diverted the thought of all its contemporaries. Still, there is no denying the increasingly bitter isolation of Herder from the German intellectual life of the 1790s he had done so much to instigate. Despised by the Kantians, gradually estranged from his great friend Goethe as the latter found his most memorable friendship of all (with the Kantian Friedrich Schiller), Herder's bitterness became patent in his last, ineffectual tirades against a seemingly all-conquering Kant.<sup>90</sup> Now, two hundred years after their deaths, perhaps we can achieve a more just balance of these extraordinary figures in their time and in their legacies.

90 Herder, *Metakritik der Kritik der reinen Vernunft* and *Kalligone* reprinted in Herder, *Werke in zehn Bänden* (Frankfurt 1985) 9.1.