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A Companion to the Works of Johann Gottfried Herder

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2: Herder's Epistemology

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I.

IN 1763, HERDER ATTENDED Immanuel Kant's lectures on metaphysics, which consisted of a critical commentary on Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten's *Metaphysica*. Baumgarten's book represented the most advanced position of rationalistic gnoseology, where the marginal area of "confused cognition" is circumscribed as an independent complex that was later developed by Baumgarten in his *Aesthetica* into a systematic complement of distinct cognition. Kant's lectures inspired Herder to write his first philosophical text, *Versuch über das Sein* (Essay on Being, 1763), dedicated to Kant. This essay, a critical discussion of the then-current theories of ontology and epistemology, an analysis from which Herder developed the nucleus of his own approach, was not published during Herder's lifetime.¹ But since the *Versuch über das Sein* is foundational for Herder's thought in this area, and since essential elements of it — especially the doctrines of being and of space, time, and force as the basic concepts of human cognition — remain constant throughout the metamorphoses of his epistemological conception, it is important to trace the essay's lines of argumentation.

Herder clears the path to a foundation of his own position by delineating critical boundaries with respect to empiricism, on the one hand, and idealism on the other. Herder agrees with Hume's insight that empiricism fails in the attempt to prove its own foundations. However, while it is impossible to demonstrate that perceptions are caused by external objects resembling them, this does not justify the opposing idealistic view. That view posits that the representations of the "inner sense" originate in the ego itself. It is true that the idea of a knowing subject that possesses a creative inner sense such that all its contents are emphatically its *own* representations, produced by itself, is by no means absurd; for this reason, idealism cannot be theoretically refuted. But the human being is not God, that is, he does not possess a creative inner sense or — as Herder also calls it — a consciousness that creates out of itself. Human beings need to become conscious of representations, a process realized through reflection and abstraction, which has

as its basis the presence of representations to an external sense. For Herder, human beings are hybrid beings: in contrast to animals, they possess not only external senses, but also an inner sense, so that they are able to speak of the representations they possess as their own. The contents of their consciousness, however, are not produced by this consciousness; this is what differentiates the finite human subject from the infinite, divine knowing subject.

The premises of this epistemological psychology, together with the recognition that empiricism cannot be proven, led Herder to the conclusion that only one promising option is left for philosophy: to pursue further the program of a subjective philosophy first outlined by Hume, and in fact, to radicalize it. One has to describe the human mind without prejudice with respect to its powers and the laws of their operation, as Herder wrote in a kind of shorthand in 1764:

Erst muß m[an] z[er]stör[en], denn [au]fbauen, m[an] z[er]störe alle Systeme d[urch] ei[ne] negat[ive] W[issenschaft] u[nd] führe alsdenn [au]s dem subjekt[iven] Princip[ium] e[ine]s [au]f, w[a]z ganz wenig behauptet, d[ie] Grade d[er] Gewißh[eit] bei jedem Satz bestimt: d[ie] Art d[er] Demonstrat[ion], und ihre mögl[iche] und wirk[liche] V[er]schied[en]h[eit] [au]s e[ine]r and[er] setze: — unt[er]suche, w[ie] d[ie] Wissenschaft[en] alle V[er]sch[ie]d[ene]s s[in]d nach Ihrer Entsteh[un]gsart: — subjekt[ive] Art des Denkens; — objekt[ive]. Besch[affenheit] u[nd] Methode.²

[One must first destroy, then construct. One may destroy all systems through a negative science and then one may build one up from the subjective principle which claims very little, which determines the degrees of knowledge in every statement: one may analyze the manner of demonstration and its possible and real diversity, investigate how sciences all differ according to their origins: the subjective nature of thinking, objective condition and method.]

It is thus Herder's intention to establish the finite human subject as the origin of a type of concept befitting only it, or, in other words, to derive such concepts from the unity of finite consciousness. In accordance with their hybrid nature — and in this Herder follows the traditional rationalistic model, as he learned it from Baumgarten³ — the human being is first capable of two kinds of representations: sensuous, obscure representations that cannot be further analytically reduced, and representations that can be analytically reduced to their individual distinguishing marks and thus made structurally distinct. These two classes of representations, defined according to Leibniz-Wolffian philosophy, correspond to two kinds of certainty. Sensuous representations are immediately convincing and therefore possess only subjective certainty, while objective certainty is defined by rationalists with demonstrative certainty. Analytic concepts, in contrast, are capable of objective certain-

ty; for it is possible to derive distinguishing marks from other distinguishing marks, and thus to demonstrate that they belong to one concept; and it is possible to demonstrate the non-contradictory connection of distinguishing marks and thus to prove the truth of a complex representation. Herder's position follows that of Kant, who, in this case, argued along the lines of Christian August Crusius's *Vernunftlehre* (Doctrine of Reason) against Wolff's uncompromising rationalism, according to which philosophical knowledge had to be based on the principle of non-contradiction. Human knowledge, which is dependent on given content, cannot be fully analyzed rationally. With representations received from outside, the essence of things is not fully analyzable, and this means that human beings with their finite understanding cannot do without unanalyzable concepts.

Hume's program of an unbiased description and analysis of the nature of the human mind — analogous in the psychological sphere to what Newton did for the physical sphere — is now put in action by Herder through his return to the doctrine of unanalyzable concepts. The fundamental idea can be explicated as follows: if the human subject, with its finite consciousness, is the basis for this type of concept, then it must be possible to establish an order among such concepts through this basis. Being, space, time, and force are the basic concepts necessary for finite, knowing subjects. They represent concepts of non-logical connections of representations, analogous to Hume's principles of association. This can at least be hinted at with respect to the concept of being (*Sein*), which is the highest of unanalyzable concepts. The non-productivity of consciousness implies, together with the sensuousness of human representations, the thought of being, that is, the idea that all our given representations are and must be related to being (*Seiendes*). Either they exist in the inner sense as given and are related to the self as its determinations (ideal being) or they are given in the external sense and are related to a being (*Seiendes*) outside consciousness (existential being).

Standing above the two concepts of ideal and existential being, the concept of real being — whose copy Herder represents as logical being, using Hume's terminology — lies at the basis of the three other sensuous connecting concepts of space, time, and force, and is itself the most sensuous concept. The objection that being, as the most abstract concept, could not at the same time be the most sensuous concept does not hold water. Sensuousness for Herder is synonymous with unanalyzability, so that the concept of being is the most abstract concept insofar as it is arrived at through the analysis of complex representations, and at the same time the most sensuous insofar as it delineates, as the last unanalyzable element, the limit of all analyzability and is considered to be, as the "erste, sinnliche Begriff, dessen Gewißheit allem zu Grunde liegt," "fast ein theoretischer Instinkt" (first, sensuous concept, whose certainty is the basis of everything; almost a theoretical instinct).⁴ Whereas the laws of analysis, the principle of contradiction,

and the principle of identity are, for a productive understanding, laws of the real connection of the things produced by it, a finite understanding must consider things as standing in non-logical relations. Herder follows Kant: "alle Verbindung (im realverstande): Raum, Zeit und Kraft."⁵ All that exists is in space, in time, and is caused by something else, thereby presupposing the force for this causation in something else.

With the reflections presented in the *Versuch über das Sein*, Herder takes a stand against the hybrid claim of philosophy to be a demonstrative science. The subject of his condemnation is, of all things, a treatise by his teacher — Kant's proud attempt to supply the only possible reason advanced in proof for a demonstration of God's existence: *Der einzig mögliche Beweisgrund zu einer Demonstration des Daseyns Gottes* (The Only Possible Foundation of Proof for the Demonstration of God's Existence, 1763).⁶ Herder follows Hume's example in demanding that the limits of human cognition and their skeptical consequences — however mitigated by a kind mother nature — be faced up with disappointment, to be sure, but also with composure. Herder develops Hume's subjective philosophy toward a view of the natural human being as the counter-image to the "überstudierte Philosophen" (over-educated philosopher). Once the ideals of knowledge adopted from false, non-human examples are dismissed, insights into the limits of human knowledge, which according to Hume agree with the facts, are no longer considered to be scandalous:

Hume, der Pyrrho unserer Zeit, hat in seinem Metaphysischen Versuch den Hauptzweifel von unserer Schlußart a posteriori eingenommen, daß sie nicht a priori gewiß sein könnte: Um ihn zu widerlegen wird man also die subjektive Gewißheit bestimmen, und, die möglichen Schlußarten in Absicht des Raums, der Zeit und der Kraft bevestigen müssen; alsdenn hat man ihn ganz widerlegt, da alles übrige bloß eine Bekleidung dieses Skelets ist.⁷

[Hume, the Pyrrho of our time, in his metaphysical experiment, took the standpoint that the principal doubt of our way of reaching conclusions is a posteriori, that it cannot be certain a priori: in order to refute him one will have to therefore determine the subjective certainty and consolidate the possible ways of concluding in regard to space, time, and force; then one has refuted him, since all else is merely a dressing-up of this skeleton.]

The claim and the task of epistemology are now themselves to be revised: instead of hyperbolic attempts to achieve a certainty reserved for God and the skepticism that arises from their failure, Herder pleads for a self-restraint based on sober enlightenment about the human condition. For the natural human being, in contrast to the exaggerated philosopher, the sensuous certainty made possible by human nature is perfectly sufficient. Pointless attempts to solve the problem of truth as the central task of classical

epistemology are to be renounced in favor of meta-reflection on which kind of certainty is possible and necessary for which kind of subject. This position differs from Hume's skepticism in its perspective but not in its results: even if Herder shares the view that objective knowledge of matters of fact is impossible, he is not primarily concerned with the proof of this impossibility, but rather with reconciling the theorizing human being with the natural human being. The insight into the specific nature of the knowing human subject should entail consequences for the theory that treats it: Herder offers primarily — and as a kind of Wittgenstein *avant la lettre* — a remedy for an arrogant, misguided, and self-deluded philosophy.

This anthropocentric turn, however, which Herder rightfully compares to the turn in the "Kopernikanische System,"⁸ has far-reaching consequences: "Sein" (being), the immediate certainty experienced as the epistemological point zero, "daß ich bin, daß ich mich fühle" (that I am, that I feel myself),⁹ forms the starting point for Herder's revision of the traditional hierarchy of the "upper" — intellectual — and "lower" — sensuously preformed — forces of the soul. The restructuring of the powers of knowledge implied by the basis of the "obscure," "unanalyzable being" transforms the traditional organon of logic into an "Experimental-Seelenlehre der obern Kräfte" (experimental psychology of the higher faculties).¹⁰ Logic is thus returned from being an autonomous "Instrumental-Wissenschaft" (instrumental science) of nominal definitions to its original status as, according to Herder, "Theil der Psychologie" (a part of psychology).¹¹ Integrated in this manner into a continuum of forms of knowledge, abstract statements must be analyzable in such a way that the psychic processes they are based on can be reconstructed: according to Herder each "Analyse des Begriffs [soll] gleichsam den Ursprung aller Wahrheit in meiner Seele aufsuchen" (analysis of a concept should, as it were, seek the origin of all truth in my soul).¹² Here Herder implies that from the gnoseological foundation of *being* a concentration on "die weite Region der Empfindungen, Triebe, Affecten" (the broad region of perceptions, drives, affects) must follow in order to develop for this area — and therefore for the "Herz des Daseyns" (heart of being)¹³ — functional determinations in the sense of a "Logik, die nie in Regeln besteht" (logic that never consists in rules).¹⁴ This logic cannot be formalized, yet it would describe individual perceptivities on the basis of the premises of aesthetics — aesthetics meaning for Herder a theory of perception explaining the "Disposition unserer Leibes- und Seelenkräfte" (the disposition of our corporeal and spiritual powers).¹⁵ Herder consistently developed this foundational part of the "nötigste Anthropologie" (most necessary anthropology)¹⁶ in a critical confrontation with the *Aesthetica* of Baumgarten. His first objection to Baumgarten's systematic model of an "analogon rationis," which was conceived as a structurally similar complement to logic, is that it is hampered, just as logic itself is, by the definitional

formalism. Furthermore, Baumgarten confuses "subjective" aesthetics — which is in Herder's words a "Fertigkeit, meine sinnliche Erkenntnis zu brauchen" (skill of using my sensuous perceptions) — with the scientific, "objective" one, in whose domain he had achieved such decisive advances in the analysis of sensuous cognition.¹⁷ To be sure, both forms of lower gnoseology deal with the same region; methodologically, however, the analytical, reductionist, objective aesthetics together with its goal, the "Deutlichmachung" (clarification) of the beautiful as a "Phaenomenon der Wahrheit" (phenomenon of truth)¹⁸ have to be strictly distinguished from habit based subjective aesthetics. The latter has to be looked upon and investigated as "ein eignes und wichtiges Naturphänomenon" (an important natural phenomenon in its own right); it has to grasp descriptively — "unmittelbar Psychologie und Physiologie" (directly as psychology and physiology) — the regularities resulting from the individual specifics of sense perceptions and their transposition into sensations.¹⁹ The data of the "Physiologie der Sinne und sinnlichen Begriffe" (physiology of the senses and sensuous concepts) remain therefore the basis for all statements of this undertaking, which is no less than the establishment of a new epistemology. They supply the material for the project of an *aesthetica naturalis* that is to be considered as a corrective to the traditional telos of "sinnlich vollkommenen Erkenntnis" (perfect sensuous cognition) for which Herder wanted to see "aus jedem Sinn eine schöne Kunst entwickelt" (a beautiful art form developed from every sense).²⁰ He tried to realize this plan, his methodology guided in each case by an "Untersuchungslogik" (logic of investigation)²¹ determined by the object of that investigation in various ways: the *Journal meiner Reise im Jahr 1769* (Journal of My Voyage in the Year 1769), the fourth of the *Kritische Wälder* (Critical Forests), and most concisely the *Plastik* — which was conceived with clear affinity for the guidelines of the *Versuch über das Sein* and whose theory of sculpture was developed in relation to the sense of touch — can be considered attempts to formulate a physiological aesthetics whose object as the aesthetic nature of human beings forms the base of Herder's faculty of reason.²²

This is because sense perceptions, determined and selected by the specific manner of functioning of the sense organs, are already subjected during the process of perception — as Herder argues on the basis of contemporary physiological knowledge — to mental operations that are to be understood as habitualized enthymematic reasoning processes with a "verschattete Zwischenreihe" (overshadowed intermediate series) and thus are to be already regarded as a "reflectirte Wirkung der Seele" (reflected effect of the soul).²³ Given this, not only is the traditional intellectualistic dichotomy of "upper" and "lower" powers of knowledge superseded by a continuum of mutual conditionality of "knowing" and "feeling"; the assumption of immediately evident intuitive knowledge from a canon of irreducible "basic sensations" can

also be considered ruled out, as Herder argues against Friedrich Justus Riedel's theory of art, which refers to Crusius.²⁴ Herder's position is, therefore, thoroughly original; it proceeds from the assumption that human perception supplies organically determined "schemata," a "sinnliche Formel" (sensory formula) that can in turn be "auf die möglich leichteste Art entziefert" (deciphered in the easiest possible way)²⁵ and in such a way that through the distinction and combination of distinguishing marks apperception can be seen as the "deutliches Resultat" (clear result) of these "Empfindungszustände" (sensory conditions). Conversely, each process of cognition is to be regarded as a result of bodily organization.

The essay *Plato sagte* (Plato Said, ca. 1767) connects for the first time, as moments of a human-centered epistemology, two spheres that were completely separated in Herder's *Versuch über das Sein*: first a divine idealism, according to which all being (*Seiende*) is for God a thought of his being (*Sein*) in an emphatic sense, and second a human sensualism, according to which human beings must appropriate as their own representations given elsewhere by means of the tetractys of basic sensory concepts, which means to conceive of these representations as a form of being (*Seiendes*) in space, time, and causality.²⁶ This integrative conception is rendered possible through a critical engagement with the philosophy of Leibniz, which in this very manuscript follows the presentation of his doctrines by Mendelssohn. With this, the monistic idealism of the *Versuch über das Sein*, the *one* egoistic divine thought world as a kind of Spinozism *avant la lettre*,²⁷ becomes transformable into a plural idealism that concedes to each individual human being the inclusion of representations in their innate concept of being. The specific nature of human knowledge is now characterized to be such that this obscure total representation of the universe can only be developed by means of the senses. The connection between idealism and sensualism conceived by Herder can more precisely be presented as follows: the sensuousness of representations necessary to finite-human subjects is not to be thought of, as in *Schulphilosophie*, as of a lower degree of distinctness; but rather the soul as a finite force is dependent on the enlightening of its representation of being, "in der alles liegt" (in which everything lies), by means of a specifically organized body-soul constitution produced by itself. The four basic concepts from the *Versuch über das Sein* now serve the differentiated description of the mental and the physical contribution to the acquisition of knowledge: while the concept of being grasps the obscure representation of the universe innate to the soul, the concepts of space, time, and force are, starting with this manuscript, assigned to the bodily sphere; they designate the *modi recipientis* specific to the senses of seeing, hearing, and feeling: "Wenn das Seyn unsre Welt ist: so ist Raum, Zeit, Kraft (die Grenze) das Feld unserer Sinne," and as a modification of a representation "das Nebeneinander" gives "den Sinn des Gesichts[,] das Nacheinander [...] den Sinn des Gehörs [und] das Ineinander

[. . .] den Sinn des Gefühls" (*Plato sagte*, 177; If being is our world: thus are space, time, force (the limits) the field of our senses, [. . .] juxtaposition [. . .] the sense of sight[,], succession [. . .] the sense of hearing [and] the into-one-another [. . .] the sense of touch).

The approach in the *Versuch über das Sein* is thus further developed — and this is the epistemologically decisive step that moves beyond the psychological concept — in such a way that the making do with a merely subjectively valid, finite human representational world is abandoned in favor of an endeavor to ground the objectivity of human knowledge. Because the world is not a product of the human mind, it cannot be known directly through the analysis of the concepts of the inner sense in accordance with the laws of logic, but only by means of external sensuousness in its external relations. Herder wants to reconcile empiricism with Leibnizian idealism: representations mediated through external sensory perception are considered as consequences of inner thought occasioned by the perception of objects. In this way — in the manner of Berkeleyan idealism — the representations of external sensory perception are subordinate to the representations of the inner sense which validate and modify them.

II.

Herder's first figuration of sensualistic idealism, however, did not solve the problem of the objective validity of human knowledge: the mere inner-subjective agreement between representations arising from sensory perceptions and those already contained in the experience of being does not guarantee objectivity. A first attempt at resolving this issue is discernible in the first version of the essay *Vom Erkennen und Empfinden der menschlichen Seele* (On the Cognition and Sensation of the Human Soul, 1774), conceived as a response to the essay-prize question posed in 1773 by the Berlin Académie Royale des Sciences et Belles Lettres. This question on the relation of the two forces of the soul, feeling and thinking (which are assumed to be of the same origin), aimed at a reformulation of the traditional psychology of faculties of the soul in light of a new valuation of the "lower" sensuous forces of the soul. Herder combines here the subjective idealism of *Plato sagte* with an objective idealism that connects with the Spinozism of the *Versuch über das Sein*. The basic idea of this new conception of a system can be explained in simplified form as follows: being (*das Seiende*) is the objectively realized thought of God. This being first becomes accessible through a receptivity whose representations are defined as sensations. The human power of representation works on this given material of perceptions in order to gain knowledge of it. "Erkennen ist also nicht ohne Empfindung; Empfindung nicht ohne ein gewisses erkennen" (*EE*, 1774, SWS 8:237; Cognition is thus not without sensation: sensation not without a certain cognition).²⁸ This

working through — within the limits of the body *a priori* of every single human cognition — is an elevation and sublimation of indistinct sensations to clear and distinct thoughts, which makes it possible, first, for the force of the soul, already on a higher level in comparison to sensuality, to recognize itself in the sensuous, and second, for the soul to recognize, by identifying its own image in the sensuous, that the sensuous is an image of God just like itself.

This provides the metaphysical foundation for the inner-subjective agreement of the sensuous and the spiritual, so that the being-in-themselves (*Ansichsein*) even of sensuously experienced objects is guaranteed. By means of the understanding of itself in the sensuous, the soul recognizes the divine foundation of the sensuously given being (*Seienden*) and of itself. The ontological sameness of subject and object, based in God, permits the solution of the problem of truth: the objectively existing agreement of object and understanding becomes a certainty for the subject in the act of cognition. The skeptical attitude of the *Versuch über das Sein* is therefore revised in favor of a metaphysically based epistemology, which distinguishes itself from classical positions insofar as the knowledge of the being-in-themselves of objects can be arrived at only through sensuous cognition. It is not the laws of reason, which are in agreement with divine thinking and which, detached from sensuous knowledge, allow understanding of the true essence of beings as necessary truths of reason, but rather

das Hauptgesetz, wornach die Natur beide Kräfte geordnet [hat]: nemlich, daß Empfindung wirke, wo noch kein Erkennen seyn kann: daß diese Vieles auf Einmal dunkel in die Seele bringe, damit diese es sich bis zu Einem Grad aufkläre und ein Resultat ihres Wesens darin finde [. . .] in jedem Erkenntniß, wie in jeder Empfindung spiegelt sich das Bild Gottes (*EE*, 1774, SWS 8:246).

[the principal law according to which nature orders both forces: namely, that sensation operates where there can as yet be no cognition: that this obscurely brings all at once a multiplicity into the soul in order that the latter may enlighten it to a degree and find in it a result of its essence: [. . .] in every cognition, as in every sensation, the image of God is reflected.]

To this sensualistic idealism corresponds a philosophy of life, which Herder tried out repeatedly after his review of Kant's *Träume eines Geistersehers* (Dreams of a Ghost Seer) of 1766²⁹ and in which the living being, defined as the unity of body and soul, figures as a paradigmatic being (*Seiendes*). Only with the second version of *Vom Erkennen und Empfinden*, however, did Herder succeed in bringing together and reconciling epistemology and ontology. Cognition is now generally understood as a phenomenon of life. Not only are certain lower operations of cognition tied to physiological substrata and processes;³⁰ the process of cognition is also generally interpreted in

analogy to the dynamics of the process of life, which is characterized by need and the drive to self-preservation: driven by a longing in the direction of a missing "other" needed for self-preservation, the efforts to satisfy this need lead to a unification with the object, an assimilation of the foreign other.

From this perspective, the human being can be regarded as a microcosm that contains in itself the hierarchy of lower and higher forces characteristic of life as a whole. Even in the structure of the process of cognition, this order presents itself as an unfolding living whole. Therefore, in an ontological adaptation of Albrecht von Haller's doctrine of irritability as the lowest level of cognition, Herder posits the phenomenon of irritation as characteristic for vegetative life, followed by the phenomenon of sensation that characterizes the sensitive animal soul. The sensations are finally transformed into thoughts by means of perceptions synthesized in the imagination, and these thoughts are in turn transformed through language into communicable units. These vital processes have a regularity that can be characterized by the key terms polarity and gradation (*Polarität* and *Steigerung*).³¹ Life moves forward in the tension between attraction of what is helpful to it and repulsion of what is inimical to it, in order to bring forth the true spiritual nature of lower phenomena through assimilation and thus generally to effect a progression in the sense of an increasing spiritualization.

Herder's philosophy of life thus also takes aim at the basic position of modern epistemology, namely, at the starting point of analysis of the subject as a means to grounding objectivity through the subject's achievements. "*Erkennen* ist Seyn in der Wahrheit, sie als Theil von sich erfassen und [. . .] mit Eiseszacken an sich reissen; bin ich nicht in ihr, so habe ich sie nie erkannt" (*EE*, 1775, *SWS* 8:294; *Cognition* is being in the truth, to grasp truth as a part of oneself and [. . .] to pull at oneself with iron teeth; if I am not in it, then I have not recognized it). Subject and object have to be understood positively as parts of an organism in living interaction with each other, sharing the nature of the whole and thus of the same kind.

This interpretation of the subject-object relation in terms of a philosophy of life can be described as a two-sided metamorphosis: the object becomes part of the soul, the soul assimilates the object; but the soul also feels itself in the object, transforms itself into the object. If the first relation renders plausible Herder's understanding of the process of cognition as spiritualization — with regard to both its internal gradation (*Steigerung*) as well as the realization of the spiritual essence of external objects — then the second relation makes it clear that to this spiritualization of nature corresponds a naturalization of spirit. Since the mind is irrevocably tied to the body and conditioned by the perceptions received at the lower levels of the vital process, bodily and environmental conditions become factors that mold the soul to each specific shape. This imprint manifests itself in the appropriation of the world, that is, in the way in which representations, concepts, languages are formed. Herder's

stress on the plurality and individuality of knowing subjects (which have been echoed by postmodern trends) as well as their participation in the world thus turn out to be consequences of sensualistic idealism or of a unified philosophy of life that combines metaphysics and epistemology.

Herder's innovative conception — consistent in itself and rich in prospects — of an epistemology underpinned by a philosophy of life could, however, not escape the suspicion that it was nothing but an anachronistic attempt to ground the objectivity of cognition through a dogmatically assumed ontology, a suspicion made especially real after the publication of Kant's *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*. Herder's *Metakritik* in particular, seen even by contemporary thinkers³² as remaining behind the critical revolution in a hopelessly anachronistic position, turns out on closer inspection to be Herder's response to this reproach. He tries to take into account such criticism through a modification of the original conception. The next generation of German Idealist philosophy, incidentally, made as much use of these innovations from a philosophy of identity as of Kant's critical philosophy.

III.

Tracing the basic lines of Herder's auto-critical revision also makes it possible to demonstrate the continuity in his thinking. The *Metakritik's* point of departure is the arsenal of basic concepts introduced in the *Versuch über das Sein*: being, space, time, and force. Two interwoven lines of thinking are characteristic of the further development of Herder's position in the *Metakritik*:

1. The conception of a living subject-object unity is further advanced in two respects. Being as a living entity is an activity that realizes and preserves itself in space and time and which is given, as such, as constituting a space and a time through its own force (*Kraft*).³³ According to Herder's concept of living being (*Dasein*), each being (*Seiendes*) is an essence that realizes itself through force (*Kraft*) in space and time, reveals itself in that realization, and is conscious of itself as such. Being is always conscious, and consciousness is always knowledge of being — this is a formula that captures the combination of idealism and realism in Herder's position. This relation of being and consciousness is true not only for each being in relation to itself, but also universally for all parts of the living whole in relation to each other. To each being corresponds a homologous organ (as Herder argues, drawing on the idea of the homology of objects and senses developed by Frans Hemsterhuis), which means: for each being (*Seiende*) there is a corresponding manner of reception, or each *modus recipientis* finds an objectively analogous being.³⁴

Seen in this manner, the whole is thought of as a living entity assimilating (*geniessen*) to itself multiple self-representations. Already in his contribution to the debate on Spinoza, Herder had consistently developed these outlines of a philosophy of life into an ontotheology of life. The whole is a

living individual that is defined as an organic force just like its parts. And this means that God is the original force (*Urkraft*) which, on the one hand, manifests itself in the subordinate forces as their effects and assimilates them to itself, yet on the other hand, itself only lives through these forces. In Herder's interpretation, God is therefore *causa sui*, creating forces through which he exists.³⁵

2. The relationship between sensuousness and understanding in the psychology of knowledge is further developed. Herder tries to establish a monistic version in opposition to Kant's doctrine of the specific difference between the cognitive faculties of perception and understanding or receptivity and spontaneity. For Herder, the understanding and the senses form the living but functionally differentiated unity: if "die *Function* des Verstandes ist: *anerkennen, was da ist*" (*Metakritik*, SWS 21:91; the function of reason is: *recognize what is there*), then the activity of understanding is essentially dependent on the givenness of the object. Herder assigns to the senses the function of supplying something understandable to the understanding (cf. *ibid.*), already entrusting to the senses a preparation of the object for its comprehension through the understanding. The senses isolate from the material that they register distinguishing marks that become the basis for the cognition of objects, and sensory perceptions ordered according to space and time provide laws of connection of the manifold in the juxtaposition of space and the succession of time.

The senses and the understanding are also understood in terms of organic unity to represent different cognition-enabling functions; as laws of the activity of different forces which together make up a living whole. On the one hand, the understanding is the higher force, corresponding to the soul in the organism, which is served by the senses, which correspond to its organs. On the other hand, the senses are also the analogue of the understanding, in which the latter recognizes itself and which we apply to everything outside of us, "weil wir nur *durch und mit uns selbst* sehen, hören, verstehen, handeln" (*Metakritik*, SWS 21:100; because we only *through and with ourselves* see, hear, understand, act). Taken genetically, the senses are the basis for the understanding's self-development: the understanding, in recognizing itself as force and higher unity in the diversity of the senses belonging to it as its organs, comes to itself, that is, it achieves what it can achieve: knowledge of things in their inner principle of activity (*Wirksamkeit*), as forces therefore, whereas the senses make things accessible in their external determinations or attributes. Put differently, only when it reaches self-cognition can the understanding continue its task of unifying the manifold impressions, a task that began at the level of sensuousness, in its own manner of logical acts of understanding. Herder describes this as a quadripartite act of understanding, a permanent "Actus der Seele" (act of the soul) with the goal of an "Anerkennung des Erkennbaren" (recognition of the knowable):

Ein Verständliches muß dem Verstande gegeben seyn, und er verstehtet es nur durch *Unterscheidung*. Das unterschiedene aber muß er verbinden, sonst kam er nicht zum Verstande des Ganzen. Ein *Datum* also (Thesis), und in ihm *Disjunction* (Analyse) und *Comprehension* (Synthesis) ordnen sich selbst in vier Glieder, deren letztes, indem es zum ersten zurückkehrt, zugleich zu einer neuen Kategorie weiter schreitet. (*Metakritik*, SWS 21:111–12)

[Something understandable must be given to the understanding, which understands it only through *differentiation*. It must, however, connect the differentiated; otherwise it will not arrive at the understanding of the whole. A *datum* therefore (thesis), and the *disjunction* (analysis) and *comprehension* (synthesis) in it, order themselves in four parts, of which the last, in returning to the first, at the same time advances to a new category.]

The quadripartite structure of the process of understanding becomes comprehensible against the background of Herder's concept of the living being (*Dasein*) as a force that recognizes itself as determined by its effects and knows itself as a totality of cause and effect. The objection mentioned above to Herder's uncritical insistence on a dogmatic metaphysics as the basis for epistemology can now be confronted. It is not sufficient to point out that Herder proceeds from an immediate indisputable certainty of being that is given to the human being through the self-experience of his soul-body existence.³⁶ What are the grounds, it must be more precisely asked, for attributing objective validity at all to the specific accomplishments of the understanding, which do not, like the senses, receptively and transformatively produce representations of objects' attributes, but rather are supposed to enable the representation of its own inner essence as force?

In a negative sense this is clear: the claim of an agreement of structures of subjective reason and objects cannot prove that the understanding is a cognitive faculty; for this would render virulent the problem of what Kant called the "Dialele": that is, when the knowledge of objects that is supposed to be the foundation of cognition is already assumed to be possible.

That the achievements of the understanding arrive at a knowledge of objects and how they in fact do so, can according to Herder only be demonstrated on the basis of inner-subjective conditions. He thus avoids the problem of the Dialele, and the key to his solution lies in the determination of the relationship of sensuousness and understanding analyzed above: as the understanding recognizes itself in the senses, it exercises its innate function of recognition, as it were, for the first time, performing the first act of a self-constitution whose specificity consists precisely in grasping itself as inescapably dependent on others, and this confirms on a higher level the initially posited primitive certainty of the subject-object unity in its feeling. Herder

thereby takes up an issue of modern epistemology, in order, however, in the end to describe a figure of self-validation by the subject (*Selbstvergewisserung*) which demonstrates the opposite of those conceptions of Cartesian provenience that are based on the separation of subject and object. If the understanding becomes transparent to itself only in an act of recognition, then this means that through this act the understanding must also recognize itself in the basic function of recognition. Otherwise there would be a kind of performative contradiction: if the cognitive function of the understanding — seen, incidentally, thoroughly in analogy to Kant — could only be guaranteed with recourse to its self-understanding, and if this occurs in an act of recognition, then the first item that is known, which is the understanding itself, owes this to this cognitive function. Through this first act the understanding identifies itself as that which it really is.

Herder's position in the *Metakritik* approaches in principle the postulate of modern epistemology of making certainty of being (*Seinsgewissheit*) attainable on the basis of self-certainty insofar as any form of self-reference is posited as foundational for the legitimation of the cognitive achievements of the understanding.³⁷ However, Herder avoids every attempt — criticized especially in Kantian philosophy — to guarantee objectivity one-sidedly starting from the achievements of the subject: this original act of self-validation (*Selbstvergewisserung*) occurs as a recognition. This confirms the final validity (*Unhintergebarkeit*) of the subject-object unity — the understanding (*Verstand*) is only understanding through the reference to something given to it. With this step of overcoming the separation of subject and object³⁸ is combined the anti-dualism, already sketched above, of the theory of the cognitive faculties of sensuousness and understanding. The certainty reached in the original act of the understanding of the latter's dependence on something previously given but not produced by it, in which it recognizes itself as analogous to this something, presents itself in terms of faculty psychology as an insight into the elementary unity of understanding and the organs assigned to it. From this relationship of the cognitive faculties to each other it follows for Herder, furthermore, that the representations attaching to these faculties, that is, the concepts of the understanding and of the sensory organs, have to be combined for cognition to be possible.³⁹ The thus-originating "Erste Reihe der Verständigungen" (first level of understandings) — replacing the transcendental schematism in Kant, which synthesizes the representations of the understanding and perception in a different manner — is rightfully characterized by Herder as an "*Analogie unsrer selbst*" (analogy of our self), whose suitability for the cognition of objects is maintained:

Diese *Analogie unsrer selbst* können wir nicht anders als auf Alles außer uns anwenden, weil wir nur *durch und mit uns selbst* sehen, hören, verstehen, handeln. Wir tragen sie aber nicht in die Objecte über: denn

wenn in diesen nichts *Verständliches*, Hör- und Sichtbares wäre; so existierte an ihnen keine Kategorie, d.i. kein Sinn und kein Verstand. [. . .] *Organisation* ist unsere Form, *Wesen des Verstandes und des Verstandenen*, ohne welche dieses ihm nichts, ohne welche er sich selbst aber auch nichts bedeutet. (*Metakritik*, SWS 21:100–101)

[This *analogy of our self* we cannot but apply to everything outside us because we see, hear, understand, act only *through and with our self*. We do not carry it over into objects, however; for if there were nothing *understandable*, audible, or visible in these, then there would exist in them no categories, that is, no sense and no understanding. [. . .] *Organization* is our form, *the essence of understanding and of the understood*, without which the understood means nothing to the understanding, without which the understanding also means nothing to itself.]

Herder is saying here that if the understanding recognizes itself in an original act as being able to find itself only in something given, then it recognizes that it is only understandable to itself at all through something previously given, and this means that it cannot even be asked how one can proceed from it, as something comprehensible in itself, to the object as something incomprehensible. From this it follows, subjectively, that for the understanding, which recognizes its dependence on something given, each attempt at a grounding of knowledge in autarkic reason is obsolete from the outset. It is replaced by the idea, which is aware of its own conditionality, of the need to mediate the achievements of the understanding with those of sensuousness. Only from such unities can knowledge of objects be expected.

It arises for the external relation of the understanding to objects of knowledge that the understanding, as a consequence of its original self-certainty, must presuppose that the objects are comprehensible, that is, that they offer something that the understanding *qua* understanding can recognize or in which the understanding can find itself. This certainty of the rationality of objects is also implied by the original self-knowledge: the condition for the understanding being able to find itself in the given is that the given be rational. The first successful act of knowledge by the understanding *qua* recognition of itself thus verifies, as it were, the conditionality of the understanding and the referentiality, posited with it, to something different from it, like the principal sameness of recognizer and recognized.

Herder refers to the concept of organization as key to understanding these connections between the internal relations: the subject is the unity of relations — unity and multiplicity, force and effects, understanding and senses. As an organism the subject structured in itself stands in an analogous relation to external objects of the same organic constitution. The subject is the organ of the objects, in it they become felt, experienced, conscious; but the objects are also organs of the subject, through which it comes to know

itself. The world thus represents itself as a living whole whose parts in manifold ways assimilate (*geniessen*), feel, and know themselves in the other.

Like each being (*Seiendes*), the whole is for Herder a unity of parts structured hierarchically. Characteristic for this philosophy of life embracing both ontology and epistemology is the view that the ontological hierarchy of forces corresponds to a scale of representations extending from sensualistic to rationalistic forms that can claim objectivity irrespective of their quantitative and qualitative differences. Like Plato, Herder has to insist, therefore, on the independence of the laws of logic as laws of a reason that “only” dwells in God, and at the same time has to declare pure reason independent of experience a chimera.

However, Herder’s philosophy of life — as already known from *Vom Erkennen und Empfinden* — is not about fixed, immutable, or even pre-established conditions of representation, but rather about the dynamic conditions of the expression of the self in an “other” and of the appropriation of that other to the self, in which the basic structure of a living unity of oneness and multiplicity, of force and organs, comes to the fore. Appropriation means the transformation of the given in accordance with the assimilating force, that is, spiritualization of the sensuous self-expression in another as self-representation of the force in its organic effects: sensualization of the spiritual. Since, however, in each case the entire organism is at work, there are mixtures of the spiritual and the sensuous in its product: form, shape, type, image, schema.⁴⁰

Arguing against Kant’s (thoroughly related) doctrine of schematism, Herder interprets in the *Metakritik* the unity of thinking and speaking, corresponding to these polar modes of operation (*Wirkungsweisen*) of all being, as moments of a two-sided meta-schematism. By meta-schematism Herder means the translation from an already produced schema or image into the shape (*Gestalt*) suitable to the organ dealing with it on another level — a metamorphosis, therefore, that transforms the object in accordance with the mode of operation of the organs dealing with it.

A meta-schematization from below, so to speak, departing from bodily impressions, is described by Herder as follows: “*Eindruck des Gegenstandes wird dem Organ, und dadurch dem anerkennenden Sinn sofort ein geistiger Typus. Durch eine Metastasis, die wir nicht begreifen, ist uns der Gegenstand ein Gedanke.*” (*Metakritik*, SWS 21:117; The *impression* of the object immediately becomes a *spiritual type* to the organ and in this way to the *recognizing* sense. Through a metastasis that we do not grasp, the object is a thought to us.)

Impressions (*Ektypen*) of these types of senses originate for the inner sense, that is, the empirical consciousness, as mental images, which are similar to bodily ones. Language is a product of typifying operations of the mind. These operations concern the relationship of seeing and hearing. Because of their media of space and time, these senses supply purer, that is, more spiri-

tual images of things; they also allow the emergence of a counter-striving in the knowing subject.

The understanding, which engages in recognition and at the same time expression of itself (that is, of its concepts), succeeds in combining the performances of both senses (seeing and hearing), in accordance with the law of its operation of extending the one (understanding) into two (schemata of seeing and hearing) for the purpose of a higher unity (language), in such a manner that one compensates for the deficits of the other in favor of a “hellere Ordnung” (clearer order) suitable for the understanding. More precisely, to the extent that the understanding expresses itself at all in the regularity of its operation in the senses of seeing and hearing, we are speaking creatures; and each concept as a product of the activity of the understanding expresses itself in its own manner in language. In Herder’s philosophy, language ability is an integral moment of cognition, and spiritualizing appropriation of the sensuous corresponds to sensualizing utterance, that is, turning a functionally equivalent moment of specifically human spiritual life into language.

Unser Verstand kann auch nicht anders als in beiderlei Kunstformen seine Begriffe unverrückt und zu gleicher Zeit *gestalten*. Durchs Nacheinander wird von ihm das Nebeneinander, dies durch Jenes zu einer helleren Ordnung bestimmt; entfernte Gegenstände drücken sich durch Töne successiv in uns; dunkle mit Augenblicken verschwundene Laute bleiben vor uns durch Gestalten. So typisiert der Verstand, und so ward [...] aus Verbindung zweier dem Schein nach einander entgegengesetzter, einander aber unentbehrlicher Sinne, unter Leitung des Verstandes — Sprache. (*Metakritik*, SWS 21:119)

[Our understanding also cannot but unwaveringly and simultaneously *produce* its concepts in two art forms. Through succession it makes juxtaposition, the latter through the former determined to a clearer order; distant objects leave their impressions in us through tones; obscure sounds that have disappeared in an instant remain before us through shapes. Thus does the understanding typify, and thus became [...] out of the joining of two apparently opposing but mutually indispensable senses, under the direction of the understanding, language.]

If the origin of the external shape of language, its forms of sounds, gestures, and writing, is the theme here, then another genesis is proclaimed for the “Wort als lautbares Merkmal” or “tönendes Gedankenbild” (word as articulable distinguishing mark or resounding thought-image) as the inner essence of language:

Articulationen der Sprache wurden dem Menschen, der sich mittelst Auge und Ohrs im Besitz so vieler innern *lebendigen Typen* fand, gleichsam Nothgedrungen ein *Abbild* derselben. Er mußte, er wollte *äußern*, was er in sich sah und fühlte; so ward, unterstützt von Stimme und

Gebehrden, den innern Abdrücken seiner Seele ein *lautbares Merkmal*, das *Wort*. Zwischen beiden Sinnen, dem Ohr und dem Auge und den verschiedenen Eindrücken, die beide gewährten, drängte es sich hervor; es ward der empfangenen Eindrücke *typisierender Ausdruck*. (*Metakritik*, SWS 21:119)

[The *articulations of language* became for the human being, who found himself via his eyes and ears in possession of so many inner *living types*, of necessity an image of these, as it were. He had to, he wanted to *express* what he saw and felt in himself; thus did the inner impression of the soul, supported by the voice and gestures, become an *articulable distinguishing mark*, the *word*. Between both senses, the ear and the eye and the various impressions, the two allowed, pushed it out; it became the *typifying expression* of the received impression.]

Interpreting the metaphors of conception and birth-giving in this description, the word is the articulating utterance of the typified sense impressions of the understanding available to man in the same media through which they were received. The products of this utterance bear not only the imprint of their origin, that is, the uttered, but equally that of the media of their utterance, that is to say, the soul expressing itself in gestures and sounds as an image of the impressions of the eyes and ears produces in a new meta-schematism a manifold amalgam whose complexity can only be hinted at with the title “*Metaschematismus tönender Gedankenbilder*” (Metaschematism of resounding thought-images, *Metakritik*, SWS 21:119).

The *Metakritik* is of philosophical interest insofar as Herder here — obviously challenged by Kant — is trying to ground the previously worked-out life-philosophical foundation of cognition and the doctrine of the specific unity of being and cognition that follows from it in a form of self-validation, not dissimilar to the basic figure of Kant, as a starting point for philosophy.

Herder's philosophy of life is a philosophy of identity that has its center in the concept of organic force or, put another way, in the concept of the living as a unity of a higher force of the soul and of lower forces appearing as bodies. The objectively existing spirit nature (*Geistnatur*) of things must be appropriated subjectively, starting from the lower levels of life such as stimulus and perception. This is possible because an analogous identity exists between understanding and sensuousness just as between the knowing subject and the known object: as the higher-level spiritual force recognizes itself in the representations of the senses it is working on, it recognizes their spiritual nature. In *Vom Erkennen und Empfinden*, Herder had arrived at this level of sensualistic idealism — that is, an ontological idealism à la Leibniz, allied to an epistemological sensualism — in order in this way to satisfy the desideratum of an exchange of spiritual forces that had forfeited their windowlessness (*Fensterlosigkeit*).

Ever since, epistemology and ontology have been inseparable: cognition has to be interpreted as a performance of the living according to the laws of its operation. Knowing is life, and life is knowing in the widest sense: a dynamic whole assimilating (*geniessend*) and representing itself in its parts and through its parts. But only Herder's transformation through his philosophy of life of Spinozistic ontotheology ensures the universal homology between the relations within a being (*Seienden*), the external relations between different beings (*Seienden*), and the relation of God and world: in each case it is the relation of a higher-level force that recognizes itself in the lower force assigned to it and assimilates it to itself. The specific nature of human cognition consists in its results being brought together into culturally and historically specific worlds, so that the human spirit turns out to be a second maker that produces itself in the further working-out of these secondary worlds — even in its respective identity.

In *Gott*, there is a decisive advance for the connection of ontology and epistemology grounded in a philosophy of life: here, neo-Spinozism with a philosophy of life superimposed onto it offers sensualistic idealism a sufficient ontotheological foundation for the first time. At the time of *Vom Erkennen und Empfinden*, however, the foundation for this philosophy of life — the ontological sameness of all finite being as God's realized thought — could only be postulated, but not justified.

Yet, the level of justification attained in *Gott* is insufficient as well: the attempt to give an ontological foundation for knowledge can justifiably be accused of a *petitio principii*: an ontology that is the foundation of knowledge already presupposes, *qua* object of knowledge, that which is to be proven in the first place.

Herder only confronts this deficit in his counter-treatise to Kant's *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, and in fact with a figure of thought similar to Kant's doctrine of the original synthetic unity of apperception as the climax: the manner in which the understanding thinks itself provides the most basic (*unhintergehbaren*) starting point for any foundation of knowledge. The result of this analysis of the first cognition of the understanding is, however, diametrically opposed to the Kantian approach: without a presupposed being, not even an understanding that recognizes itself, a communication of self with self, is possible. Rejecting the Kantian separation of thinking and perception, and with his insight into the functioning of the understanding, Herder arrives at the principle of the cognition of objects.

As much as the proof of the presupposition of being — a presupposition that seems to be subjectively necessary — seems to bring us back to the beginning, to the *Versuch über das Sein*, the fundamental difference consists in the fact that the first certainty of the understanding in the *Metakritik* is seen as an objective principle, so that this foundation can not only be said to provide a basis for a modest, subjective philosophy of the finite subject and the fundamental concepts grounded in it, a philosophy that is aware of its own

limits. On the contrary, this first *fundamentum inconcussum* is the foundation of a system combining ontology and epistemology through a philosophy of life. Human rationality in its finiteness is on this basis no longer set apart from the ideal of an infinite, divine thought-world; on the contrary, Herder achieves, on the basis of a process of “finitization” (*Verendlichung*) that also includes God and is achieved with the interpretation of being (*Seienden*) as something living, the foundation of a system of philosophy. Infinity manifests itself now in the fullness and the richness of general assimilation and representation of the living whole: this is Herder’s sensualistic reception of the Spinozist doctrine of *amor dei intellectualis*.

Translated by Wulf Koepke

Notes

¹ Cf. the transcription of Kant’s “Metaphysik Herder,” AA 28.1:1–53 and 153–66 and AA 28.2,1:839–931; on the dating of these lecture notes cf. Gerhard Lehmann in AA 28.2,2:1338–72. Cf. the edition of the drafts of the *VüS* from Herder’s “blue book of lecture notes” in AA 28.2,1:933–46.

² Johann Gottfried Herder, “Negative Philosophie” (ca. 1764), quoted from Ralph Häfner, *Johann Gottfried Herders Kulturentstehungslehre: Studien zu den Quellen und zur Methode seines Geschichtsdenkens* (Hamburg: Meiner, 1995), 267.

³ Cf. especially Hans Adler, *Die Prägnanz des Dunklen: Gnoseologie, Ästhetik, Geschichtsphilosophie bei J. G. Herder*. Hamburg: Meiner, 1990.

⁴ *VüS*, FA 1:19 and 12.

⁵ “all connection (in the real understanding): space, time, and force.” Immanuel Kant, *Reflexionen aus der Zeit zwischen 1753 und 1776*, AA 17:260, # 3717.

⁶ Kant, AA 2:3–205.

⁷ Johann Gottfried Herder, “Über David Hume,” HN 26:5, lecture notes A2, 73 (ca. 1762) in the transcription of Hans Dietrich Irmscher and with kind permission of the Staatsbibliothek Berlin-Preussischer Kulturbesitz.

⁸ *PhBV*, SWS 32:61.

⁹ KW 4, SWS 4:7.

¹⁰ Johann Gottfried Herder, *Journal*, SWS 4:384.

¹¹ *PhBV*, SWS 32:41.

¹² *PhBV*, SWS, 39.

¹³ EE 1775, SWS 8:265.

¹⁴ *PhBV*, SWS 32:41.

¹⁵ *BD*, FA 1:693 and the plan for an aesthetics connected by Ulrich Gaier to this text (*HN* 25:57), FA 1:661.

¹⁶ “Plan zu einer Ästhetik,” FA 1:665. In KW 4, the corresponding formulation “ein schwerer Theil der Anthropologie, der Menschenkenntniß”; SWS 4:25.

¹⁷ Herder, “Plan zu einer Ästhetik,” FA 1:659; cf. KW 4, SWS 4:12ff. and 21ff. This text also — conceived at the same time as the “Plan zu einer Ästhetik” — documents

the attempt to apply Baumgarten’s analytical techniques and concepts to the theory of the arts to supplement the “Evidenz in Sachen des Schönen” (Evidence in Matters of the Beautiful, SWS 4:24) that measures the *aesthetica naturalis* according to anthropological criteria individually and sense-specifically.

¹⁸ SWS 4:20.

¹⁹ “Plan zu einer Ästhetik,” FA 1:660 and 664.

²⁰ KW 4, SWS 4:56, and *Journal*, SWS 4:368.

²¹ “Plan zu einer Ästhetik,” FA 1:667.

²² KW 4, SWS 4:34.

²³ KW 4, SWS 4:8. Cf. also Kant’s notes on Baumgarten’s *Metaphysica*, in Kant, AA 28.2,1:929–30.

²⁴ KW 4, SWS 4:12. Herder’s argument against Crusius’s “Grundempfindungen,” derived “aus der inneren Empfindung” and used automatically is prefigured in Kant’s “Metaphysik Herder,” in Kant, AA 28.2,1:10–11.

²⁵ EE 1774, SWS 8:239. Ulrich Gaier has shown that this procedure of dialogizing the already verbalizing subject of cognition is developed in Herder’s theories of the origin of language; in this sense acts of cognition already have a semiotic character that must be described “in der Beziehung zwischen konstituierender Reflexion, anerkanntem Zeichen und dem durch es Repräsentierten” (in the connection between constituting reflection, recognized sign, and what is represented by it). Ulrich Gaier, *Herders Sprachphilosophie und Erkenntniskritik* (Stuttgart–Bad Cannstatt: Frommann-Holzboog, 1988), 106.

²⁶ Johann Gottfried Herder, “Plato sagte, daß unser Lernen bloß Erinnerung sei,” in Marion Heinz, *Sensualistischer Idealismus: Untersuchungen zur Erkenntnistheorie und Metaphysik des jungen Herder (1763–1778)* (Hamburg: Meiner, 1994), 175–82.

²⁷ Cf. Manfred Baum, “Herder’s Essay on Being,” in *Herder Today: Contributions from the International Herder Conference Nov. 5–8, 1987, Stanford, California*, ed. Kurt Mueller-Vollmer (New York/Berlin: de Gruyter, 1990), 126–37.

²⁸ This is more pointedly formulated in the second version of the prize essay: “*Erkennen und Empfinden* ist bei uns vermischten Geschöpfen in einander verschlungen; wir erkennen nur durch Empfindung, unsre Empfindung ist immer mit einer Art Erkenntnis begleitet.” (EE, 1775, SWS 8:263; *Cognition and sensation* are in us mixed creatures bound up with one another; we know only through sensation, our sensation is always accompanied by a kind of knowledge).

²⁹ Cf. John H. Zammito, *Kant, Herder, and the Birth of Anthropology* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2002).

³⁰ Cf. Hans Dietrich Irmscher, “Aneignung und Kritik naturwissenschaftlicher Vorstellungen bei Herder,” in *Texte, Motive und Gestalten der Goethezeit: Festschrift für Hans Reiss*, ed. John L. Hibberd and Hugh Barr Nisbet (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1989), 33–63.

³¹ Cf. *Über die dem Menschen angeborne Lüge*, SWS 9:536–40.

³² On the contemporary reception of Herder’s metacritical writings, cf. Heinrich Clairmont, “‘Metaphysik ist Metaphysik.’ Aspekte der Herderschen Kant-Kritik,” in *Idealismus und Aufklärung: Kontinuität und Kritik der Aufklärung in Philosophie*

und Poesie um 1800, ed. Christoph Jamme and Gerhard Kurz (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1988), 179–200.

³³ Cf. Marion Heinz, “Herders Metakritik,” in *Herder und die Philosophie des deutschen Idealismus*, ed. Marion Heinz (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1997), 89–106.

³⁴ On Herder’s reception of Hemsterhuis, cf. Marion Heinz, “Genuß, Liebe und Erkenntnis. Zur frühen Hemsterhuis-Rezeption Herders,” in *Frans Hemsterhuis (1721–1790): Quellen, Philosophie und Rezeption*, ed. Marcel F. Fresco et al. (Münster u. Hamburg: Lit, 1995), 433–44.

³⁵ Cf. Marion Heinz, “Existenz und Individualität. Untersuchungen zu Herders Gott,” in *Kategorien der Existenz: Festschrift für Wolfgang Janke*, ed. Klaus Held (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 1993), 159–78. Further, Myriam Bienenstock, “Herder und Spinoza. Einige Bemerkungen zum heutigen Herder-Bild,” in *Humanität in einer pluralistischen Welt? Themengeschichtliche und formanalytische Studien zur deutschsprachigen Literatur: Festschrift für Martin Bollacher*, ed. Christian Kluwe and Jost Schneider (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2000), 57–71. Heinrich Clairmont argues from the perspective of Herder’s epistemological psychology in his article, “‘Die Leute wollen keinen Gott, als in ihrer Uniform, ein menschliches Fabelthier.’ Herders anthropologisch fundierte Gnoseologie und seine Spinozadeutung in Gott,” in *Spinoza im Deutschland des achtzehnten Jahrhunderts: Zur Erinnerung an Hans-Christian Lucas*, ed. Eva Schürmann, Norbert Waszek, and Frank Weinreich (Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt: Frommann-Holzboog, 2002), 329–55.

³⁶ Gunter Scholz, “Herder und die Metaphysik,” in *Zwischen Wissenschaftsanspruch und Orientierungsbedürfnis: Zu Grundlage und Wandel der Geisteswissenschaften*, ed. Gunter Scholz (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1991), 87–101, esp. 94–95.

³⁷ In the course of the development of the *Metakritik* the necessity of this step of self-validation (*Selbstvergewisserung*) has to be explained more precisely: the senses supply only the attributes of things; the understanding, however, is supposed to recognize the essence of things, that is, the things as forces; this category comes only from itself. This means that, according to the *Metakritik*, one cannot refer to something given from the outside of the understanding for its (the understanding’s) legitimation, which proceeds genetically on every level as a mediation of the subjective and the objective.

³⁸ Cf. *Metakritik*, SWS 21:316: “Statt daß man die kritische Philosophie die *zermalmende* genannt hat (sie hat bisher nichts zermalmet), hätte man sie also eher die *zerspaltende* (philosophia schismatica) nennen sollen, denn wohin sie blickt werden Antinomien und Spalten.” (Instead of calling critical philosophy *the crushing one* [it has up til now not crushed anything], one should have rather called it the splitting one, since wherever it proceeds there are antinomies and fissures.)

³⁹ Cf. *Metakritik*, SWS 21:100. If the understanding can exercise its function only in connection with the senses, then its specific notions can also qualify as objective only in connection with the notions of the senses, which are directed to what is necessarily given to them. The Kantian attempt to deduce the objectivity of pure concepts of reason as such is for Herder wrongheaded from the outset.

⁴⁰ Cf. Hans Dietrich Irmscher, *Johann Gottfried Herder* (Stuttgart: Reclam, 2001), 34ff., and Johann Gottfried Herder, *Kalligone*, SWS 32:115ff.

3: Herder and Historical Metanarrative: What’s Philosophical about History?

John Zammito

THERE IS SOME TRUTH in Goethe’s pronouncement that Johann Gottfried Herder’s ideas had been both absorbed and forgotten by the conventional wisdom of German culture after 1800.¹ He was absorbed either into the project of the Jena *Romantiker* and their literary hermeneutics or into the project of Hegel and his philosophy of history. But after the rise of historicism in the school of Ranke and Droysen, a retrospective redemption seemed possible. Thus, in the classic formulations of Meinecke and Stadelmann, Herder was resurrected as the “father of historicism.”² He was credited with pioneering the stress on individuality, development, and the “historical sense” of *Einfihlung* (or *Verstehen* [empathy]) that became the core of the disciplinary matrix of history in the nineteenth century.

What are we to make of this claim? I propose to affirm and to reject it in equal measures. On the one hand, a case can be made that Herder was a pioneer of hermeneutic historicism, though he was a philologist and a philosopher of history more than he was a historian. There is a case to be made that everything Herder wrote expressed a historical point of view, whether he discussed philosophy, literature, or language. From a methodological vantage point, then, Herder was “historicist” in everything he did. On the other hand, he was not a member of the academic guild of historians; indeed, in his famous controversy with the eminent Göttingen professor of history August von Schlözer, he antagonized them irretrievably.³ Current historians of the rise of the discipline in the eighteenth century, accordingly, minimize his role.⁴ Yet there is merit to the retrospective acknowledgment by historical theorists, starting with Wilhelm Dilthey, that Herder was a progenitor of their practice.⁵ But, finally, the notion of “historicism” developed by Stadelmann and Meinecke is deeply flawed by a German nationalism, an “irrationalism,” and a radical relativism that must not be projected uncritically back onto Herder.⁶

In this essay I wish to explore what it means to call Herder a *philosopher* of history, and I shall accordingly focus on his two great works in that genre: *Auch eine Philosophie der Geschichte zur Bildung der Menschheit* (Another Philosophy of History for the Education of Humankind, 1774), and *Ideen zur*