

**THE PHILOSOPHIES OF HISTORY OF  
HERDER AND HEGEL**

A Thesis Submitted to the College of  
Graduate Studies and Research  
in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements  
for the Degree of Master of Arts  
in the Department of Political Studies  
University of Saskatchewan  
Saskatoon

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## ABSTRACT

Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel and Johann Gottfried Herder unwittingly contributed to the political strands of Marxism and Fascism, respectively, but also to the gently progressing secularisation of Christian values that pervades the contemporary age. While Herder conceived of God traditionally, as a transcendent Being, he also sowed the seeds for Hegel's philosophy in which God is realised immanently through the development of man's full capacities for reason. Since Hegel also posits that the end is implicit in the beginning, his scheme cannot hold without the kind of necessity that comes from a Godly (transcendent) source. At the same time, Hegel's philosophy of history as revealed in *The Phenomenology of Spirit* and Herder's *Another Philosophy of History* contain remarkable similarities that show how Herder's and Hegel's quest to reconcile the earthly and the finite with the infinite and the eternal led to the secularisation of philosophy and the beginning of the modern cultural ethos. The reader should see how Herder struggled to reconcile the many competing viewpoints of his age with his awareness that these viewpoints were limited, and how Hegel subsequently attempted to address this conundrum, along with the fundamental philosophical and theological question (left unresolved by Herder) of how man can have free will under God. The reader should realise how God's immanence in man, partially accorded by Herder, and more substantially accorded by Hegel, leads eventually to the secular perspective of modern times, with both its negative, totalitarian and extreme manifestations, and its positive, pseudo-Christian and mildly socialist outcomes.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The author would like to thank Professors Allan MacLeod and Ria Jenkins of St. Thomas More College at the University of Saskatchewan for their guidance and inspiration.

Thank you to the other Advisory Committee members, Professors Bohdan Kordan and Michael Pomedli, for their helpful comments. The author would also like to thank her husband, Daniel Pellerin, for his encouragement and revisions, as well as her parents, Daniel and Dorothy Pellerin, and siblings, Joël, Nora, and Antoine, for their support.

Thank you to Grammie for her indispensable generosity and kindness. Thank you as well to the other grad students (Rachel, Gerelt-od, Sean, Niki, Bill, Stacey, and Jesse), to the secretary and potter, Lorrie, and to the incomparable Anna Hunter, all of whom made our time together in Saskatoon quite memorable.

*Let the other sciences try to argue as much as they like without philosophy – without it they can have in them neither life, Spirit, nor truth.*

G.W.F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Preface, §6

**TO DANIEL**

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## INTRODUCTION

*What if we were one day to arrive at a perspective that would allow us to survey the whole of our species? [To see] how far the chain will reach that was at first drawn so slowly between the peoples and continents, but that then wound its way through the nations with so much clanking, and that would finally, gently but firmly bind, draw together, and lead away these nations – whereto? Then we shall see the ripe harvest of the seeds that we dispersed among the peoples through a blind sieve and whose strange shoots, manifold blossoms, and ambiguous promises of fruit we once observed. Then we shall get to taste for ourselves what delicacies were finally brought forth for the universal education of mankind by the cloudy, unsavoury leaven that has been fermenting for so long.<sup>1</sup>*

Herder is a thinker known for his defence of nationalism and his concern for the cultural ethos of nations; Hegel is known for his holist and supposedly teleological interpretation of history. There is a basis for these interpretations, but close investigation of these thinkers' philosophies of history yields a deeper understanding of their role in the history of thought, and by extension, in history itself. Herder and Hegel stand opposed on one central question: the precise nature of the role of God in history. This question is the hinge for what has turned out to be the most defining feature of the modern age, the secularisation and politicisation of Christian values — political changes that on the

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<sup>1</sup> J.G. Herder, *Another Philosophy of History and Selected Political Writings*, trans. Ioannis Evrigenis and Daniel Pellerin (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2004), 97. Henceforth cited as Herder, AP.

surface oppose (orthodox) Christianity, but that in fact reflect some of the Gospel's messages into the political realm: moderate, non-coercive Socialism to complement the already prevalent right to property (the "greatest commandment," that "thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself" [Mark, 12:31<sup>2</sup>]); the abolition of capital punishment ("He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her" [John, 8:7]); tolerance, even love, for those who were previously considered "outsiders" ("a light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of thy people Israel" [Luke, 2:32]); and openness to those who were previously considered "sinners" ("I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance" [Luke, 5:32] — as long as their sin is not intolerance itself).

The Gospel contains messages that are paradoxical, which is why it has also historically been the basis for a hypothetical separation of Earth from Heaven, if not always a real separation between church and state. In the past, the values that best served the Church's political ends on Earth were promoted, while the aspects of the Gospel that did not do this were neglected ("call no man your father upon the earth: for one is your Father, which is in heaven" [Matthew, 23:9]). The modern age has rejected those values that maintained the political domination of the Christian churches and that kept society enthralled to certain notions of morality that had in fact been pilfered from the ancient Greeks and Romans (vestal virgins, sacrifice, valour of the soul in battle against the enemy — in the Christian case, against Satan), and adopted the other, more strictly Christian values that were sometimes promoted by figures such as St. Francis of Assisi.

This political manifestation of secularised Christian ideas is perhaps not quite what the Christ Himself had in mind ("render therefore unto Caesar the things which be Caesar's, and unto God the things which be God's" [Luke, 20:25]), but represents the natural evolution of ideas that were first revealed long ago, that have taken on many forms across history, and that invariably will shift again in ways that contemporary people would not understand.

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<sup>2</sup> *The Bible*, Authorised King James Version. This version will be cited henceforth.



Herder and Hegel are linked to the two trends that have most vociferously opposed this secularisation of Christian values: Fascism and coercive Socialism.<sup>3</sup> While the Communists took to heart the idea that all humans should be treated equally, they subjected every aspect of existence to this (excessive) rule, blinkered by utopian yearnings. This meant that political murders and executions became as common as bread was scarce, while the numbers of people killed directly under Communist governments in the twentieth century are estimated to approach a hundred million.

In the meantime, the Fascists killed millions as well, sometimes under the rubric of “racial superiority,” by making use of national aspirations for domination. The Fascists entertained both secular and pseudo-Christian values, depending on which were more useful to them, while the Communists were strictly anti-religious. It is curious that both groups made ample use of aesthetics, symbolism, and demand for dogmatic fealty in a manner obviously inspired by the most fanatical religious and imperialist regimes of the past. Furthermore, while at the surface level these two extremist groups were each other’s worst enemies (since they were invariably each other’s *most brutal* enemies), both of their forms of coercion really opposed the same thing: the gradual secularisation of Christianity that has become the new ethos of the Western world. Both Herder and Hegel can be linked tendentiously to the National Socialists and to the idea of coercive Socialism that emerged within Hegel’s lifetime.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> The opposition of the extremist doctrines of Fascism and Communism to the modern ethos is described succinctly by W.B. Yeats in the poem “The Second Coming,” where he writes: “The best lack all conviction, while the worst/ Are full of passionate intensity.” This poem also echoes the theme of Revelation so prevalent in Herder’s and Hegel’s work. (William Butler Yeats, “The Second Coming,” in *The Works of W.B. Yeats* (Ware, Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Editions Ltd., 1994), 158.)

<sup>4</sup> Marx was a disaffected student of Hegel. Barnard writes: “Herder’s interest in politics was but an aspect of a much wider interest which encompassed not only art and literature but also a distinct cosmology and philosophy of history. For it was this close association of political, historical, poetical, and religio-cosmological thinking that was to characterise the comprehensive, ‘ideological’ style of political thought from the Romanticists to the Marxists.” (F.M. Barnard, *Herder’s Social and Political Thought: From Enlightenment to Nationalism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965), 31)

At the same time, these two thinkers stand at the turning point of the question of the secularisation of Christianity.<sup>5</sup> They offer a unique view on the most important debate of the modern age by seeking to reconcile the concrete and the abstract, the subjective and the objective, the particular and the universal, the real and the projected.<sup>6</sup> They are equally concerned with exploring the role of each cultural ethos in history and finding a framework for explaining the development of humanity in time. Herder and Hegel show us what answers someone from their complex period in history might give to the fundamental questions of where we come from, what we should do, and where we are going.<sup>7</sup>

For both these thinkers, the Enlightenment represents a focus on universalism that is empty and disconnected from the real world. Instead, the course of history is to be seen as an organic whole that unfolds through a dialectical process, rather than a constant flux that must be reined in by an imposed universal. Herder and Hegel are sometimes viewed as heralds of the Romantic era that was to follow the Enlightenment in Germany. However, while both of these thinkers had a very specific perspective on God's role in human history that did not match orthodox views of God, neither did they espouse the subsequent pantheistic position that held that God is merely immanent in mankind and in the natural world, a position later popular with the Romantics.

The position both thinkers held of God as transcendent-immanent is important because it imbues human existence and history with divine meaning. To posit God as transcendent is not to acknowledge the human side of the responsibilities that come with the capacity to reason. To posit God as immanent is merely to embellish human existence and history with a flourish of "Spirit." To think of God as simultaneously transcendent and immanent is to take on a burden of responsibility that makes human

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<sup>5</sup> Barnard explains of Herder: "[F]ew of his predecessors went to such lengths as he did in bringing down the divine to the human level, or, more precisely, in denying the existence of any dualism or antithesis between the religious and the secular realms." (Barnard, 88)

<sup>6</sup> Barnard mentions that Herder advocated "a most subtle and careful synthesis between the 'objective' material and the 'subjective' ordering of it into a coherent and intelligible account." (Barnard, 111)

<sup>7</sup> Hegel's philosophy of history is often interpreted to be teleological, but for the purpose of this thesis, the less evidently teleological *Phenomenology of Spirit* will serve to demonstrate the links between Herder's and Hegel's thought, and to illustrate the more profound aspects of Hegel's philosophy.

action on Earth and throughout history much more important. It is to link human reason to a source that awaits our response, our use of the very gift that makes us so different from the other animals: it is to measure our ends against the possibility of a greater, invisible end, and thus to force adjustments and improvements in our ways and institutions according to what we gradually observe to be true about the world and about human beings within it.

This shift from a focus on the division between Heaven and Earth towards the significance of earthly achievement and improvement is one that is obviously connected to the process of secularisation that has occurred in the modern age. Herder and Hegel questioned the orthodoxies of their own time very consciously, but it is almost certain that they would have preferred for their philosophies to reinforce and strengthen Christianity and belief in God rather than erode them. Historically, Herder's influence on the Romantics and Hegel's influence on Marx and Engels meant that their philosophies would be instrumental in unleashing the forces of secularism and historicism in the world. Herder and Hegel are inextricably linked to the great competing philosophies of the modern age, but their holist perspective remains unique even among all the clashing ideas it has fathered.

The attempts Herder and Hegel made to reconcile free will to the notion of a traditional God in Herder's case, and to that of a guiding principle and Spirit in Hegel's case, introduced the immanent argument into philosophy in a way that made it historically and politically relevant. If the responsibility to bring about goodness and wisdom in the world lies somewhat in the hands of human beings, why could it not lie entirely in human hands? According to Herder, our earthly wanderings would culminate in the traditional second coming of the Christ. According to Hegel, the human trajectory would conclude with the same inevitability, although one derived more substantially from human action. From Hegel's inevitable end to the formation of the human Spirit, the transition to Marx's inevitable end of human history with its hostile exclusion of traditional religion is an easy one. It is a question of harnessing the philosophical and the

spiritual to the purposes of the practical; a question of dissolving the esoteric into mere earthly material and closing minds against the open possibilities that remain when any transcendent element is still taken seriously. It is also, in terms of politics, exceedingly dangerous.

What political theorists often overlook is that, although it is true that secularisation is a beneficial counterweight when balanced with fanatical religion, extreme secularisation is bound to leave the spiritual needs of populations unanswered. This creates powerful vacuums that can only be filled with political ideas and expectations even more intense and virulent than those introduced by religion — as the history of the past century has surely borne out. The religious horrors of the past, though gruesome, pale in comparison to the blood-spilling of twentieth-century philosophies, and to the indifference to human life that is bred by the notion that all earthly problems can be definitively resolved by human means.

Secularism in the political process is greatly to be desired, as it enables people of divergent faiths (and the non-faithful) to interact without any presumption of belief or creed. Secularism in juxtaposition to religion in the public realm is also to be respected, for it tempers the tendency of believers to seek to resolve questions haphazardly and without the humility wrought by the wonders of science and the incompleteness of human knowledge. It is when secularism itself becomes a creed and a boundary that no one dares to cross that it becomes dangerous; it is when secular existence is deemed to be the only valid form of existence that it makes itself oppressive to the human imagination and to the life of the Spirit. When secularism closes off more pathways than it opens, it has become too heavy for its own purpose, clogging the corridors through which the human Spirit breathes and inviting a sickness worse than the one it is meant to heal.

From this angle, Herder and Hegel are partly responsible for the cultural turnaround that would bring both moderation and excess to the fore; hope for a better way of life and abuse of life for the sake of ideology would proceed simultaneously from their philosophical influence. What was to come of the ideas they provoked they could never

have imagined, nor tolerated. Where Herder and Hegel were seeking the whole, Marxists and Fascists sought to cut the notion of “the whole” down to a size more easily governable on Earth: to break down what little knowledge we have into certainties and order life according to them. Although the intentions of these subsequent philosophers and politicians may well have been pure, they also stemmed from what Herder and Hegel would deem to be madness, as a will violently to reorder the universe must seem to philosophers whose life work consisted in observing life around them with care and wonder.

The first chapter explores Herder’s philosophy of history, demonstrating that the prevalent interpretation of Herder as a primarily relativist thinker is too one-sided. The aspects of Herder’s thought that link him most clearly to Hegel and to the fundamental undercurrents of the secularisation of Christian thought are far from relativist. The work of Max Rouché will be juxtaposed to Isaiah Berlin’s more standard interpretation of Herder as a thinker whose main contribution to modern thought is his relativism. In fact, Berlin himself acknowledges having read Rouché’s work, *La Philosophie de l’histoire de Herder*, calling it “[t]he best discussion of this topic known to me.”<sup>8</sup> Herder’s notion of “progression” rather than “progress” (*Fortgang* rather than *Fortschritt*) is also important for understanding his influence on Hegel, as well as his role in forming the German national consciousness. Herder and Hegel reject the idea that “progress” occurs historically in a visibly straight line,<sup>9</sup> choosing instead to build a more realistic basis for

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<sup>8</sup> Isaiah Berlin, “Herder and the Enlightenment,” in *The Proper Study of Mankind*, ed. Henry Hardy and Roger Hausheer (New York: Farrar, Strauss, and Giroux, 1997), 361.

<sup>9</sup> Herder writes in *Another Philosophy of History*: “That this *growing up*, this *progression* from one to the other is not ‘*perfection* in the narrow sense of the schoolhouse,’ this, I reckon, our whole examination has demonstrated.” (Herder, AP, 68). Daniel Pellerin also writes: “Herder’s overarching objective, in *Another Philosophy of History* especially, is to expose the childishness of believing in ‘beautiful progress’ along ‘a nice *straight line*’ defined by the chimerical ideals of the philosophers.” (Daniel Pellerin, “A Note on the Texts and the Translation,” in Herder, AP, xlv) Compare Herder: “[T]he philosopher is most like an *animal* when he wishes to be most like *God*” (Herder, AP, 70) and Hegel’s chapter entitled “The spiritual animal kingdom and deceit, or the ‘matter in hand’ itself” and sometimes referred to as “The spiritual animal and its humbug,” in which individuality, knowing itself to be all reality, will “begin with a *result*,” and in which the moments comprising the movement of this consciousness merely get “dissolved in the *universal ‘matter in hand.’*” (G.W.F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A.V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), §234-251. Henceforth cited as Hegel, PhG.)

their organic and holistic understanding of the development of history. This basis for understanding history is subtler than that of other philosophers and allows them to refrain from forcing events into an arbitrary, pre-conceived historical system.

The second chapter will discuss Hegel's philosophy of history as derived from the *Phenomenology of Spirit*,<sup>10</sup> emphasising the ways in which Hegel drew on Herder's work. The theme of Revelation<sup>11</sup> is vital for understanding both the development of Herder's thought and the inspiration for Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*. The foundation Herder and Hegel both seek for building their respective concepts of Revelation is that of reason. This is the new foundation introduced by the thinkers of the Enlightenment; one that will situate Herder and Hegel's philosophies on the outer boundaries of the realm of Christian thought, positioning Hegel's construction, in particular, where it can easily be claimed by either the orthodox Christians or the secularists. This is the last fortress of Christian thought before the landscape of existentialists and Marxists rolls out, interrupted only by the unusual outposts of thinkers like Kierkegaard. Herder and Hegel reject the views of orthodox Christianity but do not stray into the shoals of pantheism: they steer a careful course between the dangers and conceive an interpretation of God's relation to history that is at once non-dogmatic and optimistic.

In the third chapter, the question of God's role in history is discussed with an emphasis on the transcendent-immanent conception of God that Herder and Hegel champion. The renowned fog of opacity surrounding Hegel's religious position is dispersed somewhat when Herder's influence is considered: Hegel defines his position largely in relation to that of thinkers like Herder and Schleiermacher. Hegel's unusual notion of God merits investigation because, neither transcendentalist nor pantheistic, it is

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<sup>10</sup> Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* will be the primary source rather than his *Philosophy of History* because it is in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* that Hegel's philosophy of history is unveiled at its most profound level; the level at which the subject is no longer enslaved to the object, so to speak.

<sup>11</sup> The word "Apocalypse," derived from the Greek and used as a title for the New Testament book that records the revelation granted to St. John, means the same thing as the word "Revelation" itself, which is an unveiling, "[a] striking disclosure of something previously unknown or not realised." (*Oxford English Dictionary*, Second Edition)

easily misunderstood. The idea of the organic whole of human existence is emphasised by Herder in *Another Philosophy of History*. Although this idea has antecedent sources, it is Herder's version of organic wholeness that glimmers through the pages of Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*. Holism also leads to the notion of necessity that makes its appearance in Herder's later work, and that is so vital for Hegel's understanding of history.

Herder's philosophy is notoriously self-contradictory, perhaps because his enemies, the *Aufklärer*, had so many different positions themselves, all of which Herder intended to oppose at once.<sup>12</sup> This tension in Herder's thought was fertile ground for the ideas of Hegel,<sup>13</sup> who seems in his *Phenomenology of Spirit* to have answered the question Herder asked at the beginning of this introduction.

The significance of Herder's and Hegel's philosophies of history for the development of political thought is substantial. The mould for the political philosophies of Marxism, Existentialism, and secularism is already being forged when Herder tries to explain the reality of God's existence in conformity to, and simultaneously in violation of, the norms of Enlightenment thought. The unity that Hegel makes of all aspects of existence (political, historical, social, physical, and metaphysical) inadvertently becomes the original mould for the secular political philosophies that would soon adorn the gallery of nineteenth and twentieth century thought. At a more fundamental level, the development of humanist thought that defines the political boundaries of the modern era cannot be understood without the link to the Christian morality that preceded it and that constituted its genesis.

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<sup>12</sup> Max Rouché, *La philosophie de l'histoire de Herder* (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1940), 317.

<sup>13</sup> Beiser observes "that historicism was not born with Hegel. Indeed, from his early life and the writings we can now see how much he learned from the works of Montesquieu, Ferguson, Herder, and Spinoza." (Frederick C. Beiser, "Hegel's Historicism," in *The Cambridge Companion to Hegel*, ed. Frederick C. Beiser (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 272). Guy Planty-Bonjour argues that both Herder and Hegel elaborated Montesquieu's notion of the general spirit of a nation (Guy Planty-Bonjour, "L'esprit général d'une nation selon Montesquieu et le 'Volkgeist' Hegelien," in *Hegel et le siècle des lumières*, ed. Jacques d'Hondt (Vendôme: Presses Universitaires de France, 1974), 7), while Ioannis Evrigenis points out how Herder's philosophy of history "set the stage for subsequent historical thinking, and [how] its influence on Hegel, Marx, and Nietzsche is only the most noticeable evidence of its broad effect." (Ioannis Evrigenis, Introduction to Herder, AP, xxxix)

## CHAPTER I

### HERDER'S PHILOSOPHY OF HISTORY: REVELATION BY *FORTGANG* RATHER THAN *FORTSCHRITT*

Herder's *Another Philosophy of History* can easily be interpreted as a relativist work insofar as it argues for tolerance of different cultures and against cultural hegemony and conquest. But it is important to recall that Herder based his interpretation of history on a specific viewpoint that is more fundamentally responsible for the ideas behind intercultural tolerance than mere relativism, namely that of Christianity. While some strong historical strands of Christianity have long advocated (and sometimes continue to advocate) an attitude of superiority and staunch, unthinking certainty, other strands have long been the source for ideas of tolerance and large-scale ecumenism. It is necessary to distinguish between the idea that all tolerance stems from complete relativism, and the one that tolerance can go hand-in-hand with committed beliefs, and in fact can originate with them. Although many would like to think that the modern Occidental world exists despite Christianity, it in fact exists *because of* Christianity: many of the secular, relativist values that are taken for granted today represent the tail end of a seldom conscious struggle to distil the ethos of Christianity. Herder's *Another Philosophy of History* is an interesting study in this vein, one that emphasises the very concern Herder had with preserving the Christian ethos. *Another Philosophy of History* could be said to



contradict some of Herder's later works, such as the *Letters towards the Advancement of Humanity* and the *Ideas on the Philosophy of the History of Mankind*, which are positioned in favour of the values of the Enlightenment. These values are expressed in the two later works as a movement towards "humanity," as in "humaneness" or *Humanität*. In reality, though, *Another Philosophy of History* precedes Herder's other works quite naturally: within it, Herder's commitment to *Humanität* is forged at the spiritual level, just as the values of the Enlightenment themselves evolved from within the Christian ethos.

During the Enlightenment, many philosophers believed that a linear "Progress" (referred to by Herder as *Fortschritt*) was occurring in history, leading, of course, to their own illuminated era.<sup>1</sup> But in Herder's understanding of *Fortgang*, virtue never increases from nation to nation, nor do passions wane: they only change shape. Where other philosophers, including Hegel, deem their own context the most propitious for the proper understanding of history, Herder doubts that any nation or epoch can have access to the "full view" of the meaning of history.<sup>2</sup>

Rather than obvious Progress throughout history, Herder sees a slow and quiet progression, "in a higher sense than one has been imagining;" one in which each of "life's different ages" contains "the *centre* of its happiness *within itself*. The young man is not *happier* than the innocent, contented child, nor the calm old man *unhappier* than the vigorously striving man."<sup>3</sup> Herder disagrees that Progress brings about the greater happiness of human beings, but also condemns the alternate view in which there is "[n]o plan! No progression! Eternal revolution – weaving and tearing up! Penelopean

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<sup>1</sup> Herder is especially uncomfortable with the pride and self-righteousness shown by those thinkers living in his age. He writes: "These people are like the Chinese, who, because they knew no one else, considered their country the square of the world, and who painted the corners of this square with hideous grimaces and monsters that were supposed to portray us, the pitiful inhabitants of the rest of the world. We laugh at the Chinese, and yet how often does it seem like one were [living] in China when one hears the opinions of persons who know the world only by the corner in which they are stuck and by the *Hamburg Correspondent*." (Herder, AP, 103)

<sup>2</sup> Herder, AP, 72.

<sup>3</sup> Herder, AP, 31.

*labours!*”<sup>4</sup> Instead, “true progression” is Herder’s *Fortgang*, a walking forward that contrasts with the hurried “Progress” or *Fortschritt* discerned by Enlightenment thinkers: a measured stride that continues “for [*God’s*] satisfaction, perhaps for [*God’s*] enjoyment, *not* for *yours*.” Herder suspects that the meaning of history, its *full view*, “must lie outside the reach of *mere human beings*.”<sup>5</sup> It could be said of Herder’s scheme of progression that it occurs “behind the back” of human consciousness.

In *Another Philosophy of History*, Herder uses the image of the tree to depict the evolution of nations. This image is used alongside the allegory of the ages of man. Herder links the simple, faithful existence of the “patriarchs” to the childhood of man, and compares it also to the first growth of the great tree of humanity, the “old cedar” whose roots sustain “the whole young forest with their sap and their strength.”<sup>6</sup> As the tree grows, the Egyptian boy begins his schooling, and his civilisation abandons the nomadic life for one of “fixed abodes” and “*property in land*.” The Egyptian schoolboy learns “*diligence*” and “*civil loyalty*,” while “*paternal oracles of the deity*” are replaced with “*laws*” and “*political rules of security*.”<sup>7</sup> The Phoenicians form the link between Ancient Egypt and Greece, a link enabling the world to become “wider, the *human* races, more *connected* and *closer*.” It was “*Phoenician liveliness* and intelligence, a new kind of *comfort* and *commodious living*, the transition to Greek *taste*, and a kind of *study of peoples*” that led to “Greek *freedom*.”<sup>8</sup>

Herder recognises that his own age was beholden to the Ancient Greeks<sup>9</sup> who, nonetheless, even to Herder, represent beauty and youth. Greece, for Herder too, is “the cradle of *humaneness*, of *friendship between peoples*, of *fine legislation*, of all that is *most agreeable*, in *religion*, *customs*, *prose*, *poetry*, *common practices*, and *arts*. All this:

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<sup>4</sup> Herder, AP, 30.

<sup>5</sup> Herder, AP, 72-73.

<sup>6</sup> Herder, AP, 5-11.

<sup>7</sup> Herder, AP, 11-16.

<sup>8</sup> Herder, AP, 16-18.

<sup>9</sup> Herder writes to this effect, “[W]e will know and appraise you [properly], you *Greeks* and *Romans*, only after the spirit of excessive adoration has been dampened and the bias sufficiently tempered that leads everyone to *caress* [his] favourite people like a Pandora.” (Herder, AP, 79)

the *joy of youth*, grace, play and love!”<sup>10</sup> This blossoming of the tree is followed by the expansion of its branches under the direction of the Romans. This development represents the “*manhood of human strength and striving*.” The divisions between nations were eroded as Romans “trode” through the provinces, imposing their “*laws, ideals of propriety, virtues and vices*.” It was at this stage that the “trunk of the tree, having grown to its greater height, strove to take the peoples and nations under its shadow, to turn them into branches.”<sup>11</sup>

The next historical development of note is the conquest of the Romans by the Barbarians, which is for Herder a fresh beginning: the tree under which “[p]eoples and continents” had lived was condemned by “the voice of the holy watcher,” who cried “Hew it down!” For Herder, “Nothing less than a *new world* was needed to *heal the* [resulting] *tear*.” This section of *Another Philosophy of History* is more elaborate than the previous ones, depicting a simultaneous fermentation and growth, for the new world of Christianity will be “mixed up with the dough of peculiar, utterly diverse, and often the most odious ways of thinking.”<sup>12</sup> Although Herder’s organic images might be taken exclusively as symbols of the unity of the whole picture, Max Rouché cautions that they are in truth “meant to underline the equal necessity of all civilisations, not the progress of the whole.”<sup>13</sup>

The question arises whether Herder intends to portray his own era of the Enlightenment as the epoch of world history corresponding to senility. This is what is implied when Herder writes that in his own age, “one thing chases after another like one water bubble racing to destroy another,” while “*relations* are so often *unbalanced* between *power* and *prudence, competence* and *cleverness, disposition* and a *good heart*

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<sup>10</sup> Herder, AP, 18-21.

<sup>11</sup> Herder, AP, 21-23.

<sup>12</sup> Herder, AP, 32-45.

<sup>13</sup> Rouché, 107. Compare Herder: “That human being striving upward! He has to pass through life’s different *ages*, all evidently in *progression*; one *striving* after another, continuously; between each of them are apparent *resting* places, *revolutions! Changes!* And yet each has the *centre* of its happiness *within itself!*” (Herder, AP, 31)

— all of which invariably characterises an age of decay.”<sup>14</sup> Later, he intimates that the prophecies of the Biblical Revelation will soon come to pass when he writes:

“Philosopher: if you wish to honour and put to use the height attained by your age, the *book of [its] prehistory* lies before you! *Secured* with seven seals, it is a *wondrous book of prophecy*: the *end of days* awaits you! Read!”<sup>15</sup>

It could be argued that Herder’s relativism threatens to unravel his whole philosophy of history, which is mainly stitched together by his belief in progressive Revelation. Where Herder sees various nations and periods in history as “both *means* and *end*,”<sup>16</sup> as each having the “*centre of its happiness within itself*,” he can be taken to mean that morality and “the good” is relative, when in fact he only means that happiness is relative. Herder is trying to deflate the self-centred philosophy of the Enlightenment, and in his enthusiasm, he seems to tip the balance in favour of relativism. Herder writes for instance in sarcastic imitation of Enlightenment thinkers:

How wretched [the time] when there were still nations and national characters: what mutual hatred, aversion to foreigners, fixation upon one’s centre, ancestral prejudices, clinging to a scrap of land upon which we are born and upon which we are to rot away. [...] Thank God that all our national characters have been erased! We all love each other, or rather, none of us needs to love any other. We interact with each other, completely indifferent to each other, mannered, courteous, blissful!<sup>17</sup>

Herder abhors the thought that Europeans would bestow upon other, more “childlike” nations their “*philosophical deism*, [their] *aesthetic virtue* and *honour*; [their] *universal love of all peoples* full of tolerant *subjugation*, *blood-sucking*, and *enlightenment* according to the high taste of [their] time.” According to Herder, this would be to “rob [a

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<sup>14</sup> Herder, AP, 4.

<sup>15</sup> Herder, AP, 74. Herder makes reference to Revelation, 5:3. Compare Herder: “Most of the driving forces behind our politics have already been made to *condemn* or *despise* even *calm wisdom*, and [we all know] how ancient are the reproaches and scruples to which the conflict between Christianity and the ways of the world has given rise on both sides! Since *weakness* cannot end but in *weakness*, then, and since the *excessive straining* and *ill use of the last reserves of waning strength* can hasten nothing but complete *collapse* – but it is not my place to *prophesy!*” (Herder, AP, 91)

<sup>16</sup> Herder, AP, 43.

<sup>17</sup> Herder, AP, 65.

child] of his *better* inclinations, of the *bliss* and *foundations* of his nature,” to turn him “into the most monstrous thing in the world: into an *old man of three years*.”<sup>18</sup>

Taken to the extreme, Herder’s argument that all nations are centred on themselves and cannot be judged by any independent standard means that there cannot really be a philosophy of history beyond the discovery *that there cannot be any philosophy of history*. History would simply be *described*, and no judgments over whether certain events in history were abhorrent would be permitted. This entangles Herder in the same web as Hegel, who has been accused of engaging in a mode of thinking that may well lead either to an outright rejection of history, or alternately, to a “passive acceptance of reality, to a consecration of all injustices.”<sup>19</sup> But Herder also argues that these discrete ages of humanity are unified by “true *progression, progressing development*,” which “enters into the great,” becoming “something of which *the history of empty hulls* boasts so much and of which it shows so little: the *stage for a guiding intention on earth!*”<sup>20</sup> At the same time, Herder sees a broader picture than other philosophers of his age in that he questions the self-importance of any people, including that of Enlightenment Europe:

Is not everything a means towards a *million ends*, everything an end by a *million means*? The chain of omnipotent, omniscient Good contains thousands of entwined meshes: every link of this chain hangs in its proper place as a *link*, yet none can see *where the chain [as a whole] hangs in the end*. Each feels itself, in its delusion, to be the *centre point*; each feels the points that *surround* it only insofar as it directs its rays or waves upon them. Fine delusion! But the great line that encircles *all* these waves, rays, and seeming centres – *Where? – Who? – Why?*<sup>21</sup>

Isaiah Berlin’s interpretation of Herder is the one most accessible to the English-speaking world, and the one generally responsible for placing the emphasis on Herder’s relativism. Berlin discusses Herder in his essays “The Counter-Enlightenment” and “Herder and the Enlightenment,” both included in *The Proper Study of Mankind*. Berlin focuses on the antagonism Herder felt towards the Enlightenment thinkers and their

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<sup>18</sup> Herder, AP, 11.

<sup>19</sup> Rouché, 124.\* (References marked with an asterisk are translated by the author of this thesis.)

<sup>20</sup> Herder, AP, 31.

<sup>21</sup> Herder, AP, 72.

conception of universal values. For Berlin, what is most important in Herder's work and what greatly influenced the tone of European thought was Herder's relativist view of human culture, in which each cultural group has its "centre point" and can only flourish within its own gravitational sphere. This is doubtless one of the aspects of Herder's thought that is worth investigating, and one that will appeal the most to many contemporary thinkers. As F. M. Barnard points out, while Herder's theory of social development is teleological, its teleological elements are conceived in a strictly relativist sense: "The *telos* was not held to lie beyond human 'striving' but within it."<sup>22</sup> In the same way, Hegel, even more than Herder, will find meaning within the sphere of human actions.

So long as only the relativist aspect of Herder's and Hegel's thought is pursued, however, there is no way to determine what human beings should seek. If every culture stands on its own centre, warrior cultures are presumably just as valuable as peaceful ones, and members of cultures that condone human sacrifice in astonishing numbers (like the Aztec, for instance) are no more misguided than members of cultures in which killing is avoided in ritual proceedings. According to Berlin, one cannot determine conclusively what is a better way to live. Herder would argue there is no clear "best" way, but would he claim there is no "better" way? That is unlikely, and Berlin unfortunately avoids investigating this second, monist strain within Herder's thought.

Herder is not a relativist thinker who despairs of the search for truth, concluding that human beings cannot determine how to improve themselves, or how to uncover the good. To ignore the constructive portion of Herder's philosophy is to ignore the holist dimension of his thought that is crucial for understanding the depth of Herder's philosophy of history and for understanding the connections between Herder's and Hegel's thought. Although Berlin does not carry out this analysis, he does observe that Herder "attempted to construct a coherent system to explain the nature of man and his

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<sup>22</sup> Barnard, 150.

experience in history.”<sup>23</sup> Berlin hints that Herder’s pluralist thought is bound up with his whole view of history as a vessel for the variety found on earth, and yet mistakenly hails Herder as a supporter of his own scheme in which there is *only* “a plurality of incommensurable cultures.”<sup>24</sup>

In the end, Berlin attributes to Herder a “doctrine of the indivisibility of the human personality” and of “pluralism and the doctrine of the incompatibility of human ends.”<sup>25</sup> That Herder scorned the *lumières* of the Enlightenment, however, does not mean that he would tag along with the equally dogmatic pluralists of the modern age. Even Berlin recognises that Herder by no means rejects the “universally valid goals” of “reason, freedom, toleration, mutual love and respect between individuals and societies, as well as physical and spiritual health” and “finer perceptions” — all ideals contained in Herder’s notion of “*Humanität*.” But where Berlin claims that Herder does not use these ideals as “universal criterion either of explanation or of value,”<sup>26</sup> and that for Herder different types of “human essence” are “unbridgeable,”<sup>27</sup> he is avoiding the question of Herder’s faith. Berlin concedes with Max Rouché that Herder’s works “bristle with contradictions,”<sup>28</sup> but it is Rouché who fleshes out these contradictions with the most care: Berlin is limited by his insistence on Herder’s fundamental pluralism.

To his credit, Berlin acknowledges that he is passing over the facet of Herder’s thought that relates to Hegel’s philosophy most clearly: “I shall necessarily have to omit much else that is relevant and interesting [in Herder’s thought],” including “the use made of his imprecise, often inconsistent, but always many-faceted and stimulating thought by such writers as [...] Hegel (whose concepts of becoming and of the growth and personality of impersonal institutions begin their lives in Herder’s pages).”<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Berlin, “The Counter-Enlightenment,” in *The Proper Study of Mankind*, 253.

<sup>24</sup> Berlin, “The Counter-Enlightenment,” in *The Proper Study of Mankind*, 255.

<sup>25</sup> Berlin, “Herder and the Enlightenment,” in *The Proper Study of Mankind*, 417.

<sup>26</sup> Berlin, “Herder and the Enlightenment,” in *The Proper Study of Mankind*, 411.

<sup>27</sup> Berlin, “Herder and the Enlightenment,” in *The Proper Study of Mankind*, 432.

<sup>28</sup> Berlin, “Herder and the Enlightenment,” in *The Proper Study of Mankind*, 432.

<sup>29</sup> Berlin, “Herder and the Enlightenment,” in *The Proper Study of Mankind*, 361, footnote 2.

Since Berlin wishes to highlight what he finds original in Herder, he chooses not to investigate Herder's use either of "[t]he ancient notion of a single great cosmic force of nature, embodied in finite, dynamic centres" or of "the idea of a divine plan realised in human history," which Berlin associates with the Old Testament and with many subsequent sources.<sup>30</sup> Berlin even comes close to finding the central link between Herder and Hegel when he acknowledges how Herder's *Fortgang* does imply "qualities that are universal in man," suggesting that "one culture can study, understand and admire another." Berlin admits that Herder conceives of God's role in destiny in a similar way to Bossuet, and also links Herder's historical "drama" to "the world spirit come to full self-consciousness of itself, in Hegel's famous image." Berlin contrasts Herder insight with Hegel's: "Life is not a jigsaw puzzle of which the fragments must fit into some single pattern in terms of which alone they are all intelligible, so that what seems, taken in isolation, irrational or ugly, is seen to be an indispensable ingredient in the great harmonious whole."<sup>31</sup> But Berlin does not see how the layers of Herder's "symphony," the movements of which develop each according to their own "ends" and "values,"<sup>32</sup> are reliant on the omniscience of God, who sees all that man cannot see; nor does he recognise how Herder's "enthusiastic acceptance of the findings of the natural sciences"<sup>33</sup> in fact complements his faith, since he regards reason as a special gift for man whose potentialities must be unfolded, and science as a demonstration of that reason. While it may be true that, for Herder, "[o]ne culture is never a mere means to another," Berlin extrapolates mistakenly from Herder the notion that "men are never means to ends beyond themselves."<sup>34</sup> Herder answers him:

You insect on the ground, take another look at heaven and earth: do you find *yourself* to be the exclusive centre and end of all the *simultaneous* motion in the universe, dead and alive; or are *you* not yourself contributing (*where, why, and when*

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<sup>30</sup> Berlin, "Herder and the Enlightenment," in *The Proper Study of Mankind*, 364. Berlin focuses on three aspects of Herder's thought: populism, expressionism, and pluralism. It is questionable whether these are in fact totally original in Herder's thought, as Berlin claims.

<sup>31</sup> Berlin, "Herder and the Enlightenment," in *The Proper Study of Mankind*, 410.

<sup>32</sup> Berlin, "Herder and the Enlightenment," in *The Proper Study of Mankind*, 410.

<sup>33</sup> Berlin, "Herder and the Enlightenment," in *The Proper Study of Mankind*, 432.

<sup>34</sup> Berlin, "Herder and the Enlightenment," in *The Proper Study of Mankind*, 407.



– who ever asked you this?) to *higher ends* that remain unknown to you – ends to which the morning-star and the little cloud by his side are contributing, as are you and the worm that you are just stepping on? All this is undeniable and inscrutable in the great, all-encompassing, *all-uniting* world of a moment: in the great all-encompassing *world to come*, in all the *occurrences* and *further developments* of the human species, in that *drama* full of the *wisdom* and the *knots* of its creator – can you expect anything less or different?<sup>35</sup>

For Herder as well as for Hegel, the individual parts are made essential by the whole.

Berlin is right, however, to note that Herder’s nationalism never became virulent or political and that he kept “the peculiar brand of universalism with which he had begun” over the span of his intellectual career, whether or not these two strains in his thought were consistent with one another.<sup>36</sup> Berlin also remarks in this vein that Hegel never lost his “loathing for all forms of collective emotional afflatus,” which permitted him to avoid the irrational patriotism of some of his contemporaries.<sup>37</sup> Herder, who reviled rabid nationalism, nonetheless differed from Hegel in that he was keen not “to think, but to be, feel, live!”<sup>38</sup>

Herder and Hegel diverge considerably in their style. Herder, as Berlin points out, did not categorize and felt no urge to “reduce the heterogeneous flow of experience to homogeneous units, to label them and fit them into theoretical frameworks in order to be able to predict and control them.” Berlin observes that other thinkers might be “logically more gifted” than Herder,<sup>39</sup> and Hegel is an obvious example of such a case. What is less obvious in the light of their different styles is that Herder and Hegel have much the same philosophy of history and way of perceiving the world. This is well expressed by Herder when he muses: “I am not sure that I know what ‘material’ and ‘immaterial’ mean. I do not believe that nature erected iron walls between these terms... I cannot see them anywhere.”<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Herder, AP, 73.

<sup>36</sup> Berlin, “Herder and the Enlightenment,” in *The Proper Study of Mankind*, 371.

<sup>37</sup> Berlin, “Herder and the Enlightenment,” in *The Proper Study of Mankind*, 371.

<sup>38</sup> Berlin, “Herder and the Enlightenment,” in *The Proper Study of Mankind*, 258.

<sup>39</sup> Berlin, “Herder and the Enlightenment,” in *The Proper Study of Mankind*, 370.

<sup>40</sup> Berlin, “Herder and the Enlightenment,” in *The Proper Study of Mankind*, 370, 379.

Hegel echoes this disdain for the boundaries men perceive between the thing-for-us and the thing-in-itself, or between the real world and the inverted world.<sup>41</sup> This points to the core of Herder's and Hegel's philosophies of history: that no superficial structure imposed by man encapsulates the depth and breadth of life, or of actual history; and that the concrete, the manifold in history takes its course within the infinite possibility of human consciousness as it is defined by Spirit, or by consciousness. The philosopher's role is to assess history as reasonably as possible from the perspective of the spirit of his time, to be the owl that flies over the past ages and surveys them as well as he can from a dusk-obscured bird's-eye view. Herder doubts that a philosopher can see very far down the chain of life, as when he claims to be "barely a single letter" in the "*great book of God that extends over all the worlds and times*" and insists that, looking around, he "can scarcely see three more letters."<sup>42</sup> But in *Another Philosophy of History*, Herder arguably attempts to look down the chain in the very way that he considers impossible, and in a manner that Hegel later refines.

In contrast to Berlin's interpretation of Herder's philosophy of history stands that of Max Rouché, who took some twenty years to write a voluminous assessment of this aspect of Herder's thought. Rouché does not dwell on the relativist phenomenon within Herder's work, although he recognises it as one of the relevant strands for discussion. For Rouché, there are other important elements at work in Herder's scheme, and while Rouché points to the inconsistencies therein, he also acknowledges that said scheme is of one whole piece: Herder's Christianity offers a context in which to reconcile Enlightenment and relativism, reason and feeling, nationalism and the recognition of all peoples as human populations worthy of respect. It is the framework of gradually progressing Revelation that allows Herder to check the enthusiasm of his fellow Enlightenment thinkers while simultaneously presenting a subtle approach to the understanding of history's progression. What little man knows of his own past points, as

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<sup>41</sup> Hegel, PhG, §132-165 ("Force and the Understanding: Appearance and the Supersensible World").

<sup>42</sup> Herder, AP, 97. Herder asks: "[W]ho am I to judge, when I am just *crossing* the great ballroom and eyeing some far corner of the great concealed painting in the dimmest of lights?" (Herder, AP, 96)

far as Herder is concerned, to a meaningful process. Rouché's attack on Herder's sundry logical dilemmas is fierce, but allows him to depict Herder's thought with more breadth and less bias than Berlin. As far as Herder's nationalist relativism is concerned, Rouché insists that Herder was far from being the only philosopher of his time to question the ravages and abuses perpetrated by colonial powers. But there is a second impetus for Herder's relativism: his urge to defend German language and culture against the unrelenting flood of French culture.

Rouché, like Berlin, points out that within *Another Philosophy of History*, Herder contradicts himself continuously, as when he begins by execrating the thinkers of the (early) Enlightenment<sup>43</sup> and arguing that 18th century Europe is in a state of decline, and ends by claiming that European culture is superior to others in its science, art, and morals. Herder mocks for several pages the notion that technical improvements have benefited Europeans or increased European virtue, only to argue in favour of these improvements a few pages later.<sup>44</sup>

It is also true that Herder never explains the details of his interpretation of history as a gradual Revelation, perhaps because that would involve admitting there is some truth to the philosophies of the Enlightenment. Herder ends up having equally to condemn and praise tradition, since he is arguing at once for Revelation and for the relative happiness of nations. Where Herder hesitates between the cult of nationalism and the ideal of "humanity" is precisely where he also admires the Romans for having united large swaths of people while simultaneously despising them for having built an Empire.<sup>45</sup>

As for Herder's important sources, Rouché suggests that Leibniz and Justus Möser both influenced Herder's understanding of history as a continuous unfolding that never

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<sup>43</sup> Herder makes very clear his intention to heap "burning coals [...] upon the heads of [his universalistic age]." (Daniel Pellerin, "A Note on the Texts and the Translation", in Herder, AP, xlix)

<sup>44</sup> Rouché, 118.

<sup>45</sup> Rouché, 118-119, 122.

moves in leaps or bounds.<sup>46</sup> Leibniz may also have inspired Herder's organic metaphor in his *Fragments*:

With the origin of a thing escapes a part of its history that must nevertheless explain so much about it, and usually its most important elements. As the tree begins from its roots, so art, language and science grow from their origins. The seedling encloses the plant with its parts; the spermatozoid the creature with all its members; and in the origin of a phenomenon is found the treasure of explanations that makes their commentary genetic.<sup>47</sup>

From here it is not a long way to Hegel's *Preface*, where he writes:

The bud disappears in the bursting-forth of the blossom, and one might say that the former is refuted by the latter; similarly, when the fruit appears, the blossom is shown up in its turn as a false manifestation of the plant, and the fruit now emerges as the truth of it instead. These forms are not just distinguished from one another, they also supplant one another as mutually incompatible. Yet at the same time their fluid nature makes them moments of an organic unity in which they not only do not conflict, but in which each is as necessary as the other; and this mutual necessity alone constitutes the life of the whole.<sup>48</sup>

Three of Leibniz' principles take centre place in Herder's philosophy of history: the principle of continuity, the principle of specificity, and Leibnizean optimism. The principle of continuity applies to Herder's dismissal of the notion of a hierarchy between different cultures and epochs. The principle of specificity applies to Herder's dismantling of theories of "Progress" and to the stress Herder places on recognising the originality of each culture and time. The principle of optimism applies to Herder's theory of a Revelation through which man comes to know God and reality, and comes to acquire reason through history, through time.<sup>49</sup>

Also, Herder owes partly to Montesquieu his portrayal of climate and geography as important factors for the formation of a people – an observation that originated with Aristotle. Although both Montesquieu and Herder condemn generalities, it is Herder who

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<sup>46</sup> Rouché, 22. F. M. Barnard comments that "[w]hilst the English and French brand of the Enlightenment inclined towards a more positivist, empirical and utilitarian attitude, the leaders of the German Enlightenment continued to build on the natural law tradition of Pufendorf and Thomasius and on the rationalist philosophy of Leibniz." (Barnard, 7) Herder resembles his Enlightenment peers in this respect.

<sup>47</sup> Rouché, 22.\*

<sup>48</sup> Hegel, PhG, §2.

<sup>49</sup> Rouché, 113.

purposefully tries to avoid using a system to explain historical development.<sup>50</sup> Of Montesquieu, Herder writes:

He has provided such a fine example of how to gauge everything with two or three words, how to *lead on* everything towards two or three *forms of government* whose origin and whose strictly limited *scope* and *timelines* are readily visible. How pleasant, nonetheless — and this, too, is fate — to be able to follow him, in the spirit of the laws of *all times and peoples*, as he moves beyond the confines of his own people! One often holds the *ball of threads* in one's hand for a long time, delighting in one's ability to *tug* here and there, and leaving everything even more *tangled*. Fortunate is the hand that might enjoy unravelling the tangle by gently and patiently pursuing a single thread — how widely and evenly the thread runs! *History of the world*: it is towards this that kingdoms and bird nests small and large are striving.<sup>51</sup>

Herder worried that Montesquieu had left “everything even more tangled,” but hoped that the skeins of history might be more meticulously unravelled in the future, presumably by philosophers like himself, or like Hegel.

Herder's contribution is to have reconciled the particular with the whole by portraying nations as centred on themselves while simultaneously seeing history as one unified stream. Where other philosophers (such as Iselin) would uphold a dogmatic notion of happiness, Herder promotes a relativist one.<sup>52</sup> This relativist notion of happiness enables Herder to argue simultaneously that Providence leads humans to divinity through history and that peoples on Earth cannot be judged by a universal standard. On the other hand, if Herder had argued from a merely relativist position, he would have lost one of his crucial arguments against the thinkers of the Enlightenment, namely that human rationality is impotent without the direction, or at least the impetus, that comes from its Godly source. Herder found that the disdain of Enlightenment thinkers for religion prevented them from being able to see that religion is the offspring “not of fear, but of astonishment and admiration; it is a first attempt to explain the world.”<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Rouché, 25.

<sup>51</sup> Herder, AP, 80.

<sup>52</sup> Rouché, 41.

<sup>53</sup> Rouché, 43.\*

Rather than suggest that the situation of humanity is improving all around the world, as Enlightenment thinkers did, Herder saw that growth and decline is inevitable within each nation, or within the lifespan of each people. Herder's critique of the thinkers of the Enlightenment includes derision over their belief that they can direct history through books and ideas. Herder considers this confidence in humanity impious and counters the Enlightenment thinkers with his belief that history is directed by Providence. Herder also rehabilitates the past from its status as a period of unenlightened existence and redoubles his attack on the Enlightenment with an argument that "enlightened" European civilization is in fact in decline.<sup>54</sup>

Rouché emphasises that contrary to what Herder's reputation would suggest, he is less accepting of non-European peoples than other philosophers of his time (including his French nemesis, Voltaire). Rouché suggests that the type of solidarity between human beings used as a basis for the philosophy of history has shifted over time. While the ancients considered political solidarity to be the pivotal factor, the historians of the Middle Ages favoured religious solidarity; but in the 18th century new geographic discoveries (facilitated by the use of the compass), paired with new methods of communication (such as the printing press),<sup>55</sup> and new levels of inter-cultural trade made it necessary for serious philosophers to acknowledge the peoples that had been neglected by traditional Occidental philosophies of history.

On his part, Herder later read Bartholome de Las Casas' work on the ravages of the Spaniards in Chiapas, along with other works written by various Europeans in the colonies, and shows what Isaiah Berlin calls a "sympathetic imagination"<sup>56</sup> towards subjected peoples. He denounces slavery and sees the revealed Word of God in the cultures of obscure peoples.<sup>57</sup> On the other hand, Herder looks no further than the

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<sup>54</sup> Rouché, 39, 46.

<sup>55</sup> Herder mentions the compass and the printing press, but connects them disparagingly to the "two or three mechanical thoughts" on which the enlightened world hangs. (Herder, AP, 48)

<sup>56</sup> Berlin, "Herder and the Enlightenment," in *The Proper Study of Mankind*, 430.

<sup>57</sup> Herder, "Letters for the Advancement of Humanity (1793-7)," tenth collection, in J.G. Herder, *Philosophical Writings*, trans. Michael N. Forster (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 394-395. Henceforth cited as Herder, PW. Compare: "Wherever you may travel among so-called savages,

Mediterranean for his philosophy of history, commenting himself that his metaphorical “chain” links only patriarchal Asia (Egypt) to Greece, Rome, and Europe, and leaves all other nations “in the shadows.”<sup>58</sup> (Hegel also stands accused of surveying other cultures from the “standpoint of modern Western individualism.”)<sup>59</sup>

Furthermore, there are remarkable inconsistencies in Herder’s assessment of European life, and specifically in his harsh judgment of Latinate cultures such as that of France. Herder visited France and Italy without making any effort to engage the people around him, for the most part writing while holed up in a room with his books, just as he habitually wrote at home. Herder is at bottom an “enthusiast in a room, a seated exultant.” He felt extraordinarily out of place within other cultures, partly because of a lack of will to become familiar with them.<sup>60</sup>

As a rule Herder does not, however, succumb to the idea that the values of the Enlightenment will cause a complete decline in humanity.<sup>61</sup> He stresses the possibility that a vague, but significant process of education is occurring on earth. That said, Herder sees not the narrow kind of “Progress” heralded by the thinkers of the Enlightenment and subject to the strictures of rationalist thought (progress he refers to as “*perfection* in the narrow sense of the schoolhouse”<sup>62</sup>) but a more rambling development defined by

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listen and you will hear the *sound of scriptural explanations – living commentaries on revelation blowing in the air.*” (Herder, AP, 79)

<sup>58</sup> Rouché, 102.\* (Herder, *Plan d’études pour le jeune Seschau 1772*, in J.G. Herder, *Herders sämtliche Werke*, 33 vols., ed. Bernhard Suphan (Berlin: Weidmannsche Buchhandlung, 1877-1913) vol. XXXII, 398. Henceforth cited as Suphan.)

<sup>59</sup> This accusation is levelled by Frederick C. Beiser, who adds: “When we consider factors like these it is difficult not to say of Hegel’s historical method what Kierkegaard said of his philosophy as a whole: ‘Hegel is to be honoured for having willed something great and having failed to accomplish it.’” (Beiser, “Hegel’s Historicism,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Hegel*, 287-288)

<sup>60</sup> Rouché, 75, 558.\*

<sup>61</sup> Rouché, 79. Herder is also careful to praise the improvements in medical science, for which he is grateful — in particular, for returning young European “gentlemen” to their parents after they had been treated for venereal disease (whether the “girls” who “infected” them were also being treated was another question, of course...). (Thus Herder: “Thus he might save a youth who, meaning to cut the first roses of life, may have been surprised by a fire-snake – perhaps single-handedly returning [this youth] to himself, to his parents, and to the future generations that live or die through us, to the world and virtue!” (Herder, AP, 82)) Rouché hints that Herder may be referring to a “misadventure” experienced by Goethe on a trip to Leipzig and expressed to Herder in confidence, although such rumours whispered through the mists of time are hardly definitive.

<sup>62</sup> Herder, AP, 68.

Rouché as a “progressive Education of humanity by God.”<sup>63</sup> Herder suspects God’s Education will favour some other culture after the decline of European civilization and insists that other cultures will “*triumph* in the end.”<sup>64</sup> If Herder is merely shaming Europe in order to shame the early French Enlightenment, it is also true that he does not take European dominance for granted. At the same time, he is limited by his belief that no culture can be revived. Herder, despite acknowledging the way in which Christianity, for instance, has always “been *mixed up* with the *dough* of *peculiar* [...] *ways of thinking*,”<sup>65</sup> sometimes interprets cultures as monolithic entities, failing to note how they change slowly and shift into fluid hybrids in which something entirely new is created, while defining features of the past are left behind or, alternately, retained. In short, Herder would like to see cultures as monolithic and insular, even as he argues at another level that history develops fluidly and that cultures are permeable.

Herder frequently measures the adult against the child, or the civilised man against the primitive man, and prefers the advice of the Bible to “rational demonstrations.”<sup>66</sup> For instance, in reference to the Bible’s exhortation to childlike faith, Herder writes to Enlightenment thinkers on the subject of earlier, simpler peoples: “How foolish [it would

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<sup>63</sup> Rouché, 79.\* Rouché refers to this “Education dispensed by God” throughout his book, mentioning it on many pages, including 95 and 104. Rouché attributes the expression “Education dispensed by God” to Meinecke. (Rouché, 58) Compare Herder: “The so-called *enlightenment* and *education of the world* only ever touched and kept its hold on a *narrow strip* of the *globe*. [...] We can also see why no nation *following upon another*, even if it had *all the same accessories*, ever *became* what the other had *been*. [...] Nor has this education ever *retraced its steps* into *any country*, so that it might, *for a second time*, become what it *had been earlier*. [...] When *God’s course among the nations* is advancing with giant strides, how would *human powers* be able to *beat back a childish path*? No *Ptolemy* could recreate *Egypt*; no *Hadrian*, *Greece*; nor *Julian*, *Jerusalem!* *Egypt*, *Greece*, and *Holy Land* – how miserably you lie there with your bare mountains, with no trace or voice of the *genius* who once walked upon you and spoke to all the world. And why? [Because] *he has finished speaking*; [because] *his imprint upon the ages is complete*; because *the sword is worn out* and the *empty scabbard lies broken on the ground*.” (Herder, AP, 76-77) Compare also AP, 53: “If [this book] has not been written altogether in vain, we see that the *formation and progressing education of a nation* is never anything other than a *work of Fortune*: the result of a thousand *coexisting causes*, the product, as it were, of the *entire element within which [a nation] lives*.”

<sup>64</sup> Herder writes to this effect: “The more *means* and *tools* we Europeans invent to enslave, cheat, and plunder you other continents, the more it may be left to you to *triumph* in the end. We forge the chains by which *you* will pull *us* [one day], and the *inverted pyramids* of our constitutions will be *righted* on your soil – *you with us*. But enough: it is evident how everything is moving *towards greatness!* We are encompassing the globe by any means, and whatever shall follow will probably never be able to *narrow* its *base* again. We are approaching something new, if only through *decomposition*.” (Herder, AP, 90-91)

<sup>65</sup> Herder, AP, 37.

<sup>66</sup> Rouché, 81.



be] for you to tarnish this ignorance and admiration, this imagination and reverence, this enthusiasm and child-sense with the *blackest devilry of your age*, with *fraud* and *stupidity*, *superstition* and *slavery* – to fabricate for yourself an army of *priest-devils* and *tyrant-ghosts* that exist only in your soul!”<sup>67</sup>

For Herder, faith and poetry are linked, as are faith and culture. The same phases determine the position of faith and poetry as men lose their sense of awe before the power of nature: “[T]he divine inspiration degenerates into idolatry, then into art, then into occupation, and finally, into pure formalism, represented in religious life by rituals.”<sup>68</sup> This development hints at the one Hegel will outline in his *Phenomenology of Spirit*.

One of the contradictions Rouché discovers in Herder’s thought is that although he believes (with Rousseau and Hamann) in the “superiority of the primitive nations” and “reserves the future for these nations,” this future “consists precisely in losing this primitiveness.”<sup>69</sup> These nations are considered even by Herder to be demonstrating potential, not to be fulfilling it.

Rouché disputes the notion that Herder introduced a “historical sense”<sup>70</sup> that was previously absent in Enlightenment thought. Rouché identifies those aspects of Herder’s thought that have earned him the title of an especially historical thinker, and finds these same ideas expressed variously in the works of others who preceded Herder (such as Montesquieu, St. Evremond, Du Bos, Bossuet, Helvétius, Hume, Wegelin, Iselin, Robertson, Adam Ferguson, Justus Möser, and even Voltaire). Herder’s originality in

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<sup>67</sup> Herder, AP, 11. Compare AP 10: “Have you ever taught a child a language by the *philosopher’s grammar* or taught him to walk by some abstract *theory of motion*? Was it ever necessary to explain a duty, whether the easiest or hardest, to him by a *demonstration of moral philosophy*?” And AP 86: “The child is cruelly weaned of every last bit of sensuality. But behold the *higher age* that *beckons*!” And AP 14-15: “Of course the boy’s coat is too short for the giant, and the youth with his bride by his side finds the school-prison distasteful! But look, your gown is, in turn, too long for the next person! Can you not see, if you are at all familiar with the Egyptian spirit, how your *bourgeois cleverness*, *philosophical deism*, *easy frivolousness*, *cosmopolitanism*, *tolerance*, *pleasantries*, *law of peoples*, and whatever other names you give to this stuff, would, once again, have made a miserable old man of the boy?”

<sup>68</sup> Rouché, 83.\* Herder specifies that only Hebrew poetry retains its original piety.

<sup>69</sup> Rouché, 85.\*

<sup>70</sup> Rouché, 135. Rouché defines such a “sense of history” as a sense of “continuity within diversity” (Rouché, 141)\*

this respect (despite his disdain for “system”) lies in the systematising of ideas he came across elsewhere and found convincing.<sup>71</sup>

In *Another Philosophy of History*, Herder commits the crime he condemns in others: he sums up whole eras and cultures by comparing them to the stages in the development of a single human being. Herder had accused Montesquieu of “gauging every thing with two or three words,” but arguably does so himself when he compares the Egyptian patriarchs to childhood, the Greeks to youth, and the Romans to manhood.<sup>72</sup> This feat is a rational one and belies the reputation Herder has acquired of being primarily an intuitive thinker. Regardless, Herder defines nations with more subtle words than the aforementioned Montesquieu, for example, who equates a people to its form of government, and reduces its form of government to a particular principle such as virtue or honour.<sup>73</sup>

There are other general themes that contradict each other in Herder’s thought. Herder is torn between the idea that nature is “always equally perfect” and the idea that nature’s perfection continually increases. Herder also wavers between viewing humanity as “an already given reality” and viewing it as an “ideal” that will eventually be realised, which he conceives as the aforementioned “humanity,” or *Humanität*. The first view favours relativism, while the second suggests a more dogmatic approach. For Herder, although history is a movement towards Revelation, the development of history is also an end in itself. Herder is not certain whether the last humans in history will benefit the most from progressive Education by God, or whether national diversity will continue to hold sway until the end of time and values will vary eternally around the world. He cannot decide whether values can perhaps become universal in the last phases of history’s progression, or whether they must remain in thrall to regional and cultural divisions.<sup>74</sup>

Furthermore, while *Another Philosophy of History* is written from an aesthetic, literary perspective and represents cultures as “untranslatable authors that the historian

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<sup>71</sup> Rouché, 135, 136, 150.

<sup>72</sup> Herder, AP, 12-23.

<sup>73</sup> Rouché, 156, 157.

<sup>74</sup> Rouché, 120, 234, 293, 335.

must taste ‘in the text’,<sup>75</sup> Herder’s *Ideas on the Philosophy of History of Mankind* judges cultures as moral individuals from an ethical perspective. In the *Ideas*, Herder points out the qualities and faults of nations, whereas in *Another Philosophy of History*, the flaws of a nation are only implied through the description of the succeeding peoples.

Herder, despite his faith in the divine nature of reason, also acknowledges the “terrestrial” quality of intelligence and how, along with our feelings and instincts, intelligence seems to be “formed through contact with concrete things that surround us.” Herder wonders what constitutes a soul “freed from material notions,” or “pure spiritual perfection in a human soul.” To think on these terms makes little sense to Herder. Herder holds the same disdain for “bookish and abstract erudition,” the same “avid respect for the concrete,” as Faust.<sup>76</sup> F. M. Barnard links Herder’s concept of Organism to Leibniz’ substitution of the monad for the atom — a substitution that “gave birth to an organic conception of the universe in which it is no longer regarded as the sum of its parts but as a whole unfolding its multiple aspects, where the parts are not merely constituent elements but individual entities existing in their own right.”<sup>77</sup>

Herder’s real originality consists in building a philosophy of history on the foundations of the natural sciences, including astronomy, geophysics, biology, anthropology, and ethnography. Herder comes close in some ways to suggesting the theories of Darwin, albeit from the historical side of things. In the manner of scientists, Herder does not think historians should be concerned about “final causes”; they should rather look for the chain of “efficient causes.”<sup>78</sup>

The world is not merely linked by time and space for Herder, but also by “its own essence, by the principle of its existence.” Herder discourages historians from seeking final causes not because he has no faith in a progression of some kind, but because to try to determine the intentions of Providence by projecting into the future is to seek those

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<sup>75</sup> Berlin observes as well that for Herder, “the critic must, so far as he is able, surrender to his author and seek to see with the author’s eyes.” (Berlin, “Herder and the Enlightenment,” in *The Proper Study of Mankind*, 406)

<sup>76</sup> Rouché, 162, 186, 188.\*

<sup>77</sup> Barnard, 11.

<sup>78</sup> Rouché, 368, 523, 524.\*

intentions on the basis of the ethos that reigns in one's own time (on the basis of "what is"). What we can know in a limited sense is "what was" — but "what is to come" cannot be deciphered. However, even when Herder renounces final causes, his recognition of a rationally developing history "proceeds from a teleological finality."<sup>79</sup>

Barnard explains Herder's understanding of causation as recognition that "an event is not an isolated occurrence in space or time." Herder's "principle of interaction bypasses, if it does not supersede, the law of causation as it is ordinarily understood." Since everything is connected in time, the distinctions between "cause" and "effect" are dissolved: they seem arbitrary in comparison to the flux of reality.<sup>80</sup>

The way in which Herder interprets nations sometimes belies his intentions. In *Another Philosophy of History*, Herder portrays a string of static nations that lack porosity and that do not demonstrate the very quality he wishes to see represented in history, namely that of fluidity. Herder's nations can be summed up with the very generalisations he accuses Enlightenment thinkers of making, and consequently lack the gradual movement shown by real nations — a movement that may not leave room for precise repetition, but one that is rife with unexpected revivals and cross-pollinations. Herder writes satirically: "And then – state of bliss! – the golden age shall be upon us again 'when *all the world* will have *one tongue* and *language* and there shall be *one flock* and *one shepherd*.'" He adds: "National characters, where have you gone?"<sup>81</sup> It would be difficult for Herder to fathom how in contemporary times several countries could similarly count English or German, for instance, as their official language and yet have entirely different national characters. Rouché suggests that Herder's scheme of monolithic nations is "creationist" since it characterises nations as "products of nature."<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> Rouché, 368, 379, 543.\*

<sup>80</sup> Barnard, 51.

<sup>81</sup> Herder, AP, 65. Genesis 11:1-9; John 10:16.

<sup>82</sup> Rouché, 88.\* In parts, Herder comes close to interpreting history in a Darwinian light. "[The philosopher who wishes to be like God] failed to consider that this concealed *dual creature* [Man – hieroglyph of good and evil] could be, and given the structure of our world, *almost had to be*, modified a *thousand times over*; that the *climate* and *circumstances of an age* will create *national* and *worldly virtues*, flowers that grow and flourish almost without effort under *one sky*, but elsewhere die out or *languish* miserably (thus the *physics of history*, *science of the soul* and *politics* about which our age has

The nation carries too much weight in Herder's scheme since it defines every aspect of a man's existence. Herder equates the man with his language, his culture, and his religion (which are all presumably tied to his nation) and with nothing else. The "Oriental" can be nothing but an "Oriental," while the Greek can be nothing but a Greek. This leads him to the idea, according to Rouché and Berlin, that men can only be genuinely creative authors if they write in their own mother tongue, or alternately, that they can only be fully themselves in their country of origin<sup>83</sup> — a questionable conclusion at best.<sup>84</sup> While it is true that language is both a substance in which man finds himself living, and the primary outlet for man's expression, it is unrealistic for Herder to limit a man's true expressiveness to his own original language. Herder's obsession with drawing national boundaries around all formative cultural factors is understandable considering his dismay over the popularity of the French language, customs, and fashions in Germany during the 18th century. However, this tendency obstructs Herder's view even as he perceives history with more nuance than other Enlightenment thinkers.

That the individual element is lacking in Herder's philosophy of history means it retains a mechanistic tone that hampers his attempt to be natural and spontaneous.

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already fantasised so much and over which it has been brooding!); that all of this not only *could*, but *had to* exist, but that on the inside, beneath the much-changed husk, the same *kernel of being* and *capacity for happiness* could be stored and can indeed be expected, based on all human experience, to be [preserved for the future]." (Herder, AP, 71)

<sup>83</sup> Rouché, 89. This is an idea attributed to Herder that he himself (according to Rouché) later acknowledged to be contestable. There is no source given for the idea in Rouché's work. Berlin develops this facet of Herder's thought even further, arguing that "Germans can be truly creative only among Germans; Jews only if they are restored to the ancient soil of Palestine. Those who are forcibly pulled up by the roots wither in a foreign environment, when they survive at all: Europeans lose their virtue in America, Icelanders decay in Denmark." (Berlin, "The Counter-Enlightenment," 255) Berlin's statement here, besides ending with what sounds like a William Carlos Williams phrase, is patently ridiculous. Berlin and Rouché are extrapolating from the distinction Herder makes between the Ancient periods when national cohesion was supposedly pervasive, and the period of the Enlightenment with its universalistic values. Herder berates Voltaire on these terms: "You, *Socrates* of our time, can no longer accomplish what Socrates did, for you lack the small, narrow, bustling, crowded *stage*, as well as the *simplicity, customs, and national character* of [his] times – his *fixed sphere!* As a *world citizen*, and no longer a citizen of *Athens*, you must naturally lack a *view* on what you ought to do in Athens, a *secure sense* of what you are doing, and a *feeling of joy* about what you have accomplished – [you lack] your *daimon!*" (Herder, AP, 80) In fact, Herder is merely pointing out the difference between the cohesive state of the Athenians and the lofty cosmopolitan values of his own age— he is not claiming that modern states must seek to recapture the "narrow stage" of the ancient Greek states.

<sup>84</sup> Here, one need only think of authors like Joseph Conrad or Vladimir Nabokov to cast doubt on Herder's extrapolation.

Herder avoids mentioning individuals in his philosophy of history, while “[e]ach people is defined less by its acts and institutions than by its [collective] psychology.” At the same time, Herder’s notion of “national spirit” is less irrational, vitalistic, and optimistic than it is “fatalistic and mechanical.” For Herder, the national spirit is predetermined since history is preformed and merely unfolds itself, while the geographical situation and climate in which a people thrives serve as a mould for its soul.<sup>85</sup> In the meantime, Herder is critical of “enlightened” thought precisely because it hangs on “[t]he *needle’s point of two or three mechanical thoughts.*” Herder mocks the “mechanical” and specialised systems of study:

Instead of hard-earned insights about the needs and genuine characteristics of the land, what an *eagle’s view*, what a *view of the whole*, laid out as if on a *map* or a *philosophical diagram*, has been brought to our *political economy* and *political science!* Principles have been taken from *Montesquieu’s* mouth by and with which a *hundred different peoples* and *corners of the earth* can be spontaneously tallied in two moments according to the *basic arithmetic* of *politics*. Likewise with all *fine arts* and *crafts*, almost down to the last *day labour*. Who needs to climb around, to *toil* strenuously in the depths, as in a vaulted cellar? One can *reason!* With *dictionaries* and *philosophies* that cover them all, without the need to understand a single one, *tool in hand*, they have all become mere abridgements of their prior pedantry – *abstracted spirit!* *Philosophy* out of two thoughts, the *most mechanical thing in the world.*<sup>86</sup>

But Herder’s criticism of things mechanical could be levelled at his own depiction of history to the degree that it remains stuck in the ruts of geographical influence and cultural isolationism.

Although Herder underlines the vitality and cohesion of earlier cultures (which were almost certainly less cohesive than he imagines), he also admits that his own Enlightenment period is like the “tree’s *highest branches*,” from which the most can be seen of “*God’s greatest works.*”<sup>87</sup> Herder does acknowledge: “If *enlightenment* does not always seem to benefit *us*, if we are losing the *depth* and *embeddedness of a river* as we are expanding our surface and breadth, then this is surely because we, already a small sea,

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<sup>85</sup> Rouché, 94, 109, 118.\*

<sup>86</sup> Herder, AP, 51.

<sup>87</sup> Herder, AP, 85.

are on our way [to becoming] a *great ocean*.”<sup>88</sup> While the Enlightenment is embodied by the “*thin, airy twigs*” of Herder’s tree, through which the “*rays of the sun*” play and which tremble and whisper “with every gust of wind,” and while it may represent excessive and “[r]elentless *sweetening*,” it is also the highest-reaching epoch, the most exalted point in the tree’s development thus far. Herder’s distaste arises from the triumphal tone of the Enlightenment and its attendant disregard for historical understanding rather than from its actual attainments.

In the spirit of irony, Rouché accuses Herder himself of prompting a de-vitalisation of European culture through his scheme of relativity: Herder failed to understand that by deflating the hopes of the Enlightenment thinkers, he was draining the vital fluid of confidence; he did not see that all great creative periods in history are bereft of “historical sense.”<sup>89</sup> (This last is perhaps also true of the particularly destructive periods in history).

The importance of the Germanic race for Herder draws predictable concern from Rouché, who wrote his book on Herder’s philosophy of history throughout the years leading up to World War II. The particular constellation of arguments that Herder uses as a basis for his philosophy of history strikes Rouché as dangerous in that it promotes race-derived views and reduces the ecumenical ideals of Christianity (as underlined in the parable of the Good Samaritan [Luke, 10:29-37]) to more malleable notions of gradual Revelation. For instance, the concept of Revelation might more easily be used to justify acts of national aggression if Herder’s arguments were interpreted merely as a glorification of the ancient nation-states and a call for the revival of the tribal mentality. But if Herder’s philosophy contributed to the political pressure that was growing in Germany at the time of the publication of Rouché’s book, Herder himself can hardly be held accountable for it. However, it is true that the implicit strains of support for Germanic fervour in Herder’s philosophy were later made explicit through the *Sturm und Drang* movement, from which they, even later, were shrewdly enlisted to the cause of the National Socialists.

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<sup>88</sup> Herder, AP, 85.

<sup>89</sup> Rouché, 574.\*

Furthermore, Herder's unorthodoxy stands alongside his conservatism: where he is destructive in politics and religion, he affirms an "imperialism of class, race, and nation" in his philosophy of history. Herder elevates "the people to the detriment of the learned and the governors" — an unsettling observation when contemplating the demise of the Weimar Republic during Germany's short-lived hiatus from war. Herder's arguments about racial superiority are mostly presented in the *Ideas*, while in *Another Philosophy of History*, although Herder sympathises in theory with other peoples, he limits his description of history to the traditionally accepted Egyptian, Mediterranean, and European nations.

In his defence, Herder asks of nationalism: "Who would go adopt without distinction this collection of stupidities and errors as well as excellent qualities and virtues, and ... break spears on other nations in the name of this Dulcinea?"<sup>90</sup> Ioannis Evrigenis cautions: "[A]daptable though they may be to a Christian humanist point of view, Herder's observations regarding nations and peoples might also open the door to a more aggressively nationalist outlook." Evrigenis rightly acknowledges, however, that Herder's nationalism "was never political, and his personal politics simply had no room for aggression, violence, and disrespect."<sup>91</sup>

At another level, Herder's Rousseauian sympathies translate into an observation of the loss of Germanic vigour that anticipates Nietzsche's *Will to Power* and connects Herder to what Rouché calls the "Titanism" of the *Sturm und Drang* movement. Herder distinguished himself from the *Sturm und Drang* thinkers by *implicitly* recognising the opposition between Titan vitality and Christian morality, and also by exploiting the unwitting boost Enlightenment thinkers gave to the more fundamental, charitable ideals of Christian morality. On the other hand, Herder underlines the revealed, scriptural, and

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<sup>90</sup> Rouché, 68, 246, 277.\* Rouché cites from Herder's "42<sup>nd</sup> Letter." (Suphan, vol. XVII, 211)

<sup>91</sup> Ioannis Evrigenis, Introduction to Herder, AP, xxxvi.



historical qualities of Christianity, and shows indignation that during the Enlightenment priests should have been made into “servants in livery.”<sup>92</sup>

Herder’s religious views and his belief in Providence form the backbone of his philosophy of history. Herder’s metaphor comparing people within history to links on a chain is inspired by Schlözer’s description of invisible Providence holding the destinies of humanity at the end of long chains. Rouché disagrees with claims that Herder was supportive of a kind of “pantheism in history.” In *Another Philosophy of History*, Herder gives an orthodox interpretation of a personal God. It is also true that for Herder, God does not “gain consciousness of Himself” through humanity as He does for Hegel, although humanity may very well “gain consciousness of God” through history.<sup>93</sup>

Herder cautions that the final goal of history, reason, cannot be used as a weapon against Revelation itself. Herder does not mean to refer to the attainment of reason as an end-point after which the curve of history dives into oblivion, but explains that “history is simply a meandering progression of reason,” a reason that must eventually come to know itself and to know reality. Until Revelation has been attained, reason is incomplete and therefore not competent to judge Revelation. As soon as reason (without its counterpart of a completed Revelation) claims to recognise the end-result, it has overstepped its bounds. Reason and Revelation are “identical; all conflict between them arises from where reason thinks it is completed.” Herder follows in the direction of Lessing, who argued that although religious truths were not made rational upon being revealed, they were revealed so that they might in time *become* rational.<sup>94</sup> Herder also seems to echo Gottsched, “who gave the German Enlightenment its eudaemonist character and its optimistic faith in human perfectibility.”<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>92</sup> Rouché, 63, 68.\* Compare Herder: “What little wreckage [of the Gothic edifice] remains is confined so strictly that *land, inhabitant, citizen, fatherland* may still mean something occasionally; but *master* and *slave, despot* and *liveried servants* of all offices, vocations, and estates, from the *peasant* up to the *cabinet minister*, and from the *minister* to the *priest* – that is now everything.” (Herder, AP, 49)

<sup>93</sup> Rouché, 99.\*

<sup>94</sup> Rouché, 99-100.

<sup>95</sup> Barnard, 12-13.

Herder eventually conceives of an opposition between the Christian religion and the “cult of Christ,” and rejects the notions of Incarnation and Redemption; changes leading Rouché to propose that Herder’s religious orthodoxy is in fact eroded by his belief in a progressive Revelation (as far from Herder’s intention as that may have been).<sup>96</sup> Although Herder’s philosophy of history shares elements of Lessing’s philosophy of history, including the progression overseen by Providence, Herder is more interested in the richness of the details within that progression than Lessing, whose style is more pedagogical and who delights more in the wisdom and order of the progression as a system.<sup>97</sup> The *Humanität* of Herder’s *Ideas* can also be related to Lessing’s notion of the divine Education of man, through which he fulfils the task of becoming human “by the conscious development of his potentialities.”<sup>98</sup>

Herder resembles Hamann in his belief that history unfolds as directed by God. The facet of Herder’s thought that reflects his belief in Revelation points to the historian as “a prophet turned towards the past, who decodes after the fact the intentions of God.” Herder sees no contradiction between his sympathy for human liberty, his belief in the potential of human reason, and his conviction that God is responsible for the progression of history. In the meantime, Herder states plainly that man is incapable of producing by himself such a work as his own history. In *Another Philosophy of History*, Providence intervenes directly in the development of humanity,<sup>99</sup> while in the fifteenth book of Herder’s *Ideas*, the laws of the universe unfold themselves as pre-planned. Each nation

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<sup>96</sup> Rouché, 100-101. Rouché notes the effect of the Revelation-based theology of Mirza Mohamed in 19th century Shiite Persia, a theology that was similar in nature to the theories of Lessing and Herder. Rouché suspects that the introduction of a scheme in which Revelation holds precedence, and in which no prophet or people holds the definitive religious position, leads in all faiths to a questioning of the orthodox views — whether intentionally or not. Rouché also adds that with Herder, “as with Lessing, the influence of Leibniz ends up harming the Christian philosophy of history it supposedly supports.” (Rouché, 112)

<sup>97</sup> Rouché, 107.

<sup>98</sup> Barnard, 16.

<sup>99</sup> Herder argues in this vein that “[i]t is only for God, or for the fools among men, to enter every moral or immoral effect of an action, be it ever so *distant* and contingent, into a calculation of the *merits* and the primary intentions *of the actor!* Otherwise, who would face more *accusers* throughout the world than the first and only *actor*, the Creator himself?” (Herder, AP, 95) Compare: “Everything is grand destiny, *not reflected over, not hoped for, not caused* by human beings. Can you not see, you ant, that you are merely *crawling* on the great wheel of doom? [...] Human being, you have always been just a small, *blind instrument*, [used] almost against your will.” (Herder, AP, 47)

lives and dies out according to the natural cycle that consists in flowering followed by decline.<sup>100</sup>

It must be understood that for Herder, religion was national, as nationalism was religious. What Luther had accomplished in faith, Herder wished to accomplish for German literature: to free it from external influences and revitalise it. In this light, it is easy to see why Herder's confusion over the tensions between faith (with all its attendant ambiguities including its occasional compatibility with the ecumenical *Humanität*, or "brotherhood" of the Enlightenment)<sup>101</sup> and nationalism (with its inherent connections both to the outrage of exploited peoples as well as to the imperialist aspirations of peoples like the Romans) persisted.<sup>102</sup>

Herder's belief that the lack of a past makes a nation more likely to have a future points to his faith in Providence: without the consideration of a divine plan, Herder could hardly be so convinced that an insignificant past bodes well for a nation's future. For his support of a progressive Revelation in history that encompasses a wealth of peoples, Herder enlists the words of the Christ: "In my Father's house are many mansions..." (John 14:2)<sup>103</sup> As Frederick M. Barnard explains, for Herder, "[d]iversity, not uniformity, is the design of the Almighty."<sup>104</sup>

Herder's God is both immanent and transcendent: He is a double-God. Herder's God is science as well, since what are the laws of the universe but those that apply to the creation and subsequent development and evolution of the universe? For Herder, "natural and historical laws are a Revelation; moral laws are that same Revelation perceived by human conscience; they are a Revelation of God to man by man and as such represent a Revelation squared." Herder also subscribes to the theological commonplace that God adapts the level of His language to the capacity for understanding of His

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<sup>100</sup> Rouché, 96, 98, 117.\*

<sup>101</sup> It is evident that the *Humanität* of which Herder speaks in his *Letters towards the Advancement of Humanity* conforms to the ideals of the Enlightenment insofar as it advocates "brotherhood" (a vague, pseudo-political term used to denote a feeling similar to the "agape" that is encouraged among Christians).

<sup>102</sup> Rouché, 133.

<sup>103</sup> Rouché, 108, 337.

<sup>104</sup> Barnard, 58.

audience, and that the uncovering of scientific truths occurs in tandem with man's capacity to understand them.<sup>105</sup> Hegel would take this a step further and say that the onus is on man to discover what he may: the truths of the universe are there to be uncovered, and man fulfils the destiny of Spirit in the world by uncovering them.

Of course, while Herder "affirms the absolute, ecumenical values of Christianity" through his vision of a gradual Education of humanity by God, he simultaneously proclaims "the absolute, but local" values of Germanism, as well as the "historical and ethnic relativity of all cultural values, sometimes up to and including Christianity itself." The juxtaposition of national relativism with morality hampers Herder's logic in an obvious way: to urge nations "jealously to guard their particular traditions and to close themselves to outside influences is to approve the right to deforming specialisation that the humanist admirers of the 'Greek totality,' and Herder first of all, condemn for individuals."<sup>106</sup>

Accordingly, the principal clashes within Herder's thought haunt his religious argument: his literary, or nationalist strain, through which he seeks to liberate Germany from French influence, is fundamentally pluralist and relativist, but his faith in Christianity leads him to expect a divine plan. Herder equivocates between these two commitments, denying "in literature the existence of eternal and international values in which he believes in religion." Insofar as Herder's nations relate to God's gradual Revelation, they are a means to an end; insofar as they relate to Herder's *Fortgang* and his relativist view of the happiness of nations, they "possess intrinsic value." Herder contradicts himself further by claiming that Christianity is the religion for all humanity while contending that it has no right to spread beyond Europe.<sup>107</sup> It is also unclear whether Herder at bottom rejoices over the Christianising of the Germanic peoples, or despairs of it.

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<sup>105</sup> Rouché, 323, 381, 382.\* Rouché recalls this argument Herder makes in his *Letters Regarding the Study of Theology*. (Suphan X., 147-148)

<sup>106</sup> Rouché, 114, 121.\*

<sup>107</sup> Rouché, 116, 117, 126.\*

In short, Herder does not arrive at a point where he can distinguish between “the two sources of morality and religion,” namely strictly ethnic values and universal values, the “closed morality” of the nation (or “civic devotion to a closed group”) and the “open morality” (Bergson) of humanity (or “love of the whole human species”).<sup>108</sup> Furthermore, in Herder’s relativist scheme, nations are encouraged to develop different religions, which would sooner deepen than help to overcome inter-national tensions.

Rousseau’s influence contributes to the wavering in Herder’s thought, including the fact that although Herder’s respect for the religious Patriarchs coincides with Rousseau’s admiration for primitive man, Rousseau’s pessimistic view of the present (although it matches Herder’s distaste for the Enlightenment) clashes with Herder’s belief in a progressive Revelation. The pessimism Rousseau spares nature but foists on history does not sit well with Herder: in the end, Herder’s optimism overcomes his attachment to Rousseau’s views.<sup>109</sup>

Unlike Rousseau, Herder thinks of human art and of the artificial in general as expressly given by God: He has given his creatures the right to modify His own Creation. Artifice (that is to say what has been contrived by man through reflection and activity) does not carry for Herder the same negative connotations it carries for Rousseau. When faced with the choice between “creating” and “understanding,” Herder equivocated. To describe history in a relativist manner was to understand best the reality of the past, but to frame history in Revelation, or in the cosmopolitan value of *Humanität* (which he had previously scorned), was to distil meaning from history and avoid the charge of empty relativism.<sup>110</sup>

Herder envisions two kinds of freedom: the true freedom of “acting according to reason and equity,” and the freedom of error; the latter, alas, is really “the faculty of not obeying our profound destination.”<sup>111</sup> Herder makes clear his belief that man lost his real

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<sup>108</sup> Rouché, 124.\*

<sup>109</sup> Rouché, 134.

<sup>110</sup> Rouché, 526, 590.\*

<sup>111</sup> Rouché, 397.\* Barnard provides a better understanding of Herder’s scheme in this respect. Barnard argues that Herder “carefully distinguishes [...] human and social development from other forms of

liberty when he first disobeyed God in the Garden of Eden.<sup>112</sup> Overall, it can be said that Herder has a “profound tendency” to “neglect the initiative of men in human history to the benefit of nature, the secret agent of God.” Rouché places Herder at the end of the tradition of Christian philosophers of history who over-identify history with the “will of God, at the expense of human liberty.” Herder is torn in this regard, writing *on the same page* that the seeds of the Reformation had been planted long before Luther came along, but required his personal intervention in order to flourish; and that man has always been, “despite [his] will, nothing but a small, blind instrument.”<sup>113</sup>

It can also be argued that Herder perceives consciousness as a way in which man can be aware “of an area of movement in which he can exercise the power of choice.” Herder recognises that “human freedom does not consist in the realisation of the existence of an area of choice as such, but rather in man’s awareness of its limits,” as will Hegel after him. Herder writes: “[I]t is the first germ of freedom to feel that one is *not* free, to recognise the fetters that restrain one. The strongest and the most free among men feel this most deeply and they strive on.” Here, Herder parts company with Rousseau, who argues that man begins free but civilises himself into captivity.<sup>114</sup> At the same time, for Herder as for Kant, man is obliged to do what is good<sup>115</sup> — a position that Hegel will question in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*.

In fact, Herder’s conception of Good and Evil shifts throughout *Another Philosophy of History* according to what strain of his thought is being emphasised. From the standpoint of Herder’s belief in gradual Revelation, Evil consists in the egocentrism of

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growth. Whereas the latter develop in an unconscious or instinctive manner, human beings, as creatures of *Besonnenheit*, [awareness] are capable of realising consciously the nature and direction of their development. The extent to which they do will differ, however, from individual to individual according to the degree to which *Besonnenheit* results in *Besinnung* or actual consciousness. The process of human development is envisaged, therefore, as the unfolding of *Besonnenheit* into *Besinnung*, by virtue of which it ceases to be a ‘blind force’ and becomes instead the expression of a conscious self-determining mind.” (Barnard, 47-48)

<sup>112</sup> Rouché reports that Herder writes in Suphan, VII, 126-127: “Freedom existed in God’s commandment; all the rest is the freedom of the serpent, the bestial servitude to the senses.” Compare Suphan VIII, 202: “Where there is the spirit of God, is also found freedom.”

<sup>113</sup> Rouché, 93, 103, 118.\*

<sup>114</sup> Barnard, 95.

<sup>115</sup> Barnard, 95.

“free thinkers” such as those of the Enlightenment, who assume they have discovered the ideals for all of humanity. From the standpoint of Herder’s theory of the relativity of the happiness of nations, Evil consists in the partiality of the historian, and in the delusion of Enlightenment thinkers that there is progress in history that can be objectively identified. From the literary and religious standpoint of Herder’s belief that nations flourish only once and subsequently face decline, Evil is the (irreversible) “loss of vitality.”<sup>116</sup>

But Herder’s optimism ultimately holds sway, since for Herder antagonism and conflict perform a “beneficial function in human and social development in that [they] help towards the release of constructive energies.”<sup>117</sup> Hegel arrives at the same conclusion as Herder where the “negative” is concerned. In Charles Taylor’s words, man for Hegel is “inescapably at odds with himself.” Man has been led, through reason, to experience constant tension: the “exigencies of thinking carry him into opposition to life, to the spontaneous and natural in him; so that he is led to divide himself, to create a distinction and a discord within himself where originally there was a unity.” Because of this, for Hegel, there is “a hierarchy of modes of thought” that expresses itself in the difference between art and religion, which involve “picture thinking,” and philosophy, which does not.<sup>118</sup>

If there are those who are primarily defenders of the collective and those who defend the individual from the collective, Herder was the former. Herder’s instinct suited the English meaning of his name, since he wrote to gather men in “morality, philosophy of history, [and] literary criticism,” but ultimately could not decide whether to shepherd the German flock or the Christian flock.<sup>119</sup>

Herder’s political peculiarity is that he can be counted a precursor both to the French Revolution and to the Counter-Revolution. While the revolutionary aspects of his thought are mostly typical for his period, it is remarkable that Herder — like Hamann — was attacking the Revolution before it occurred. His defence of tradition made Herder a

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<sup>116</sup> Rouché, 115.

<sup>117</sup> Barnard, 136.

<sup>118</sup> Charles Taylor, *Hegel and Modern Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 20.

<sup>119</sup> Rouché, 540.\*

precursor to Burke, to Savigny, and partly also to Hegel. Herder is at once the last representative of the “great Christian humanists,” and the “spiritual father of a younger generation,” including, of course, the young Hegel.<sup>120</sup>

The “rhythm” of Herder’s thought is peculiar to him: a slowly progressing Revelation, in which nations flower one by one and show their own characteristics, and in which the German culture, in particular, must defend itself from un-Germanic cultural infiltration and resulting debasement. On the other hand, because of his particular interpretation of history’s movements, “Herder possesses the originality of having, at the height of the 18th century, prophesied the decline of the Occident; and, full of humility, refused to consider this decline of the Occident to be the decline of humanity.”<sup>121</sup>

Herder’s philosophy challenges both the universal values of classicism and the dogmas of the Reformation. It has a touch of the struggle of the *gentes* against the *imperium* and the *ecclesia*. Rouché proposes that Herder’s work belonged to the “quest for frontiers” that characterises German literary, religious, and political history;<sup>122</sup> but this quest can be said to define the modern age itself in many respects.

Fundamentally, Rouché would say that despite his self-contradictions and through his scheme of nations developing according to “the principle of sufficient reason and of the realisation of all possibilities,” Herder writes both a synthetic and an analytical philosophy of history, never subjugating the historical element to the philosophical one. Herder’s philosophy of history offers as much consonance as it does dissonance; he resolves the tensions between Enlightenment theories such as that of Voltaire, who doubted the existence of Providence in the face of past historical declines, and that of Iselin, who touted the “progress” of European civilisation that would make future decline impossible. Herder manages to recognise the particular and the varied within history, frame the whole picture, and give meaning to the historical process, all the while refusing to suggest that his own era represents the grand finale of human development.

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<sup>120</sup> Rouché, 538, 541, 545.

<sup>121</sup> Rouché, 546, 573.\* Herder’s relativist theory of nationalities heralds the decline of the Christian Occident a whole century before Spengler. (Rouché, 560)

<sup>122</sup> Rouché, 556, 561.\*



For Herder, “The whole that appears *as a whole* in each of its particulars must be a great one!” But “in every particular, there is always an *indistinct oneness* that alone reveals itself and points towards the whole.”<sup>123</sup> That the Enlightenment could represent the end of history and the beginning of universal harmony seems as likely to Herder as though in humanity, perfection could “have *exhausted* all its *aspects*.”<sup>124</sup> But Herder, like Hegel after him, sees a purpose underlying history and simultaneously recognises the relativity of cultures as it was emphasised by Du Bos, Montesquieu, and Wegelin.<sup>125</sup> It is also true that Herder himself considered the nationalist and cosmopolitan aspects of his philosophy to be complementary rather than contradictory forces. After all, he insisted on “the natural harmony between the particular and the universal.” Likewise, Herder’s vision of *Humanität*, expounded in his *Letters* and in his *Ideas*, comes across as “an act of faith, a moral and religious conviction about man’s social destiny.”<sup>126</sup>

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<sup>123</sup> Herder, AP, 96.

<sup>124</sup> Herder, AP, 96.

<sup>125</sup> Rouché, 115, 548, 671.\*

<sup>126</sup> Barnard, 86-87. Barnard refers to *Humanität* as the “doctrinal and emotional source” of Herder’s “secular faith.”

## CHAPTER II

### HEGEL'S PHILOSOPHY OF HISTORY: REVELATION OF ABSOLUTE KNOWING, OR "COMPREHENDED HISTORY"

All civilisations are in theory essential for the progress of the *whole* according to Herder and Hegel, which is just what sets them apart from many other philosophers. Herder is known to have disliked systems since they impose universal values that he found empty.<sup>1</sup> While Hegel is often branded as an idealist who subjects reality to an overarching system, he in fact agrees with Herder that universal values are only imposed on the world arbitrarily. Hegel has been deemed a conservative because of his impression that "what is rational is actual, and what is actual is rational,"<sup>2</sup> but he knew that "what is actual" *changes*, evolves. He does not argue for acceptance of events without criticism, but rather for proper and careful understanding of what could be called the psychological undercurrents of human history. Nor is Hegel really an idealist, except insofar as the *Phenomenology of Spirit* is an allegory for the intellectual blossoming of the philosopher. He is certainly not the proto-Communist some commentators make him out to be: he refuses to look seriously beyond his own era into the future, an exercise he

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<sup>1</sup> That said, Herder also mocks the new "manner" of philosophy, practised "without *system* or *principles*, so that one might always remain free, at another time, to believe the opposite as well; without *demonstrations*; clothed in humour since 'dour philosophy has never improved the world.'" (Herder, AP, 67) Incidentally, Hegel, who was called "the old man" among friends when he was still a youth, might be considered the quintessential "dour philosopher."

<sup>2</sup> Hegel, Preface to the *Philosophy of Right*, trans. T.M. Knox (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1967), 10.

understands to be useless. It seems as though Hegel ends history with a kind of utopian state of “Absolute knowing,” but in fact, he demonstrates what “Comprehended History” looks like from the perspective of the “science” of philosophy.

In his *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Hegel takes Herder’s survey of human history into another, more complex dimension. Hegel does not proceed by assessing history chronologically, but rather by performing what could almost be called “psychoanalysis” of the human consciousness of history. Where history follows what is a conscious trajectory for human beings, it cannot be traced back to its beginnings. At what point exactly man became civilised, or when human groups began to interact in a way that contemporary man would say carried “historical” significance, it will perhaps never be possible to say. Perhaps there will never be a clear dividing line between anthropology and history. Hegel’s intention is to determine at a more philosophical, and simultaneously primal level how the beginnings of human consciousness lead into the conscious history of human beings, and how the development of that consciousness has always affected and continues to affect the direction of that history. He examines what could loosely be called the *subconscious* of the history of man. This endeavour he equates to a “Bacchanalian revel,” in which the student of philosophy will “taste” in every stage and cultural ethos as she would a wine: she will let it influence her mind. At the same time, she will retain her special view as a student of philosophy: she will observe from “behind the back” of consciousness, “recollecting” that consciousness itself.<sup>3</sup> Hegel leads the somewhat exacting “revel” as an uncharacteristically pedagogical Bacchus.

Max Rouché connects Herder and Hegel through their “Judeo-Christian optimism” — a characteristic that leads them to share an interpretation of history as a succession of progressive stages that gradually build the foundation for a kind of Revelation. Rouché simplifies Hegel’s scheme, calling it a “Hegelian succession of opposites,”<sup>4</sup> but

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<sup>3</sup> Hegel, Preface to PhG, §47. Compare Plato’s “Bacchic frenzy of philosophy.” (Symposium 218b)

<sup>4</sup> Barnard proposes something very similar: that Herder “significantly foreshadowed in his theory of opposites Hegel’s dialectic.” (Barnard, 161)

recognises how Herder's and Hegel's overall schemes reflect each other. Both Herder and Hegel manage to "reconcile the heterogeneity of civilisations to the unity of becoming." These thinkers see a process in which human beings continuously learn to respond to the excesses of the past; at the same time, the notion of "opposites" is not adequate to explaining the way in which cultural stages evolve for Herder, or for Hegel. Hegel will posit what is widely referred to as a "synthesis of opposites,"<sup>5</sup> but Hegel's dialectic in fact involves a "sublation"<sup>6</sup> from one stage to another in such a way that the first stage falls away and is lost, but its most truthful feature is carried over into the next stage and becomes the ground for the next debate. This can only be superficially called a "synthesis of opposites." It is more like a play in which each scene's tensions lead to the revelation of a new truth that will form the basis for the next scene's dilemma.

Herder's philosophy already contains many of the notions Hegel will eventually expound. Ioannis D. Evrigenis writes in his introduction to Herder's *Another Philosophy of History* that Herder urges us to "strike a balance between the particular, which in itself is a whole world, and the universal, in the context of which our overwhelming worlds are but fleeting moments. Only thus can we appreciate our significance, as well as that of others, in Providence's grand design."<sup>7</sup> The relationship of the particular to the universal is of course one of the driving elements behind Hegel's philosophy, and he seeks to reconcile these two elements in a way that preserves them both.

Herder cannot abide the kind of history that "calculates everything in the case of every land with a view to a utopian plan in accordance with unproved first principles." He calls this a "foreign varnish that robs the forms of our world and the preceding world of their true stance, even of their outlines."<sup>8</sup> While Hegel will develop a philosophy that some might call a "utopian plan," he is really trying to take into account everything as a

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<sup>5</sup> Rouché, 102.\*

<sup>6</sup> A word used by some commentators to denote Hegel's expression "*Aufhebung*." Taylor specifies as well that in the Hegelian solution, "the unity of man and world, of finite and infinite subject, does not abolish the difference. Not only is the unity hard-won out of difference, as man struggles to rise to the level where the unity can be grasped; but the ultimate unity retains the difference within it." (Taylor, *Hegel and Modern Society*, 48)

<sup>7</sup> Ioannis Evrigenis, Introduction to Herder, AP, xxxv.

<sup>8</sup> Herder, PW, 413.

whole while retaining the specific parts in their “true stance.” Hegel cannot be used in the defence of orthodoxy any more than he can be used as a prototype for Communism. Fundamentally, Hegel heeds Herder’s warning not to impose the universal on the various “forms of the world.” What has occurred was necessary to bring the world where it is now, but that does not mean that everything was pre-planned, only that the development of human consciousness brought them about necessarily. As Hegel writes:

As regards *historical* truths — to mention these briefly — it will be readily granted that so far as their purely historical aspect is considered, they are concerned with a particular existence, with the contingent and arbitrary aspects of a given content, which have no necessity. But even such plain truths [...] are not without the movement of self-consciousness.<sup>9</sup>

Hegel followed Herder’s lead in perceiving each cultural group within history as distinct and inimitable, exposing what he thought were defining phases in the unfolding of human consciousness and judging every standpoint of this kind according to its own standard.<sup>10</sup> This is the most obvious way in which Hegel has learned directly from Herder in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*.<sup>11</sup> Herder’s notion that civilisations follow each other successively, each “developing only certain aspects of humanity,” is taken up in a more refined way by Hegel when he drops the chronological succession and looks for the undercurrents of consciousness.<sup>12</sup> The standpoints, for Hegel, are not limited to cultural standpoints, nor are the phases of consciousness related to a specific culture in every case. Furthermore, Hegel is not interested in judging epochs and cultural values according to a contrived universal standard. For Hegel, there is no sense in which these ways of thinking are “good” or “bad”: they merely *are*, and they each have a role to play in the development of consciousness.

It is also clear that Herder’s description of nations as cohesive entities with peculiar psychological configurations is also carried over into Hegel’s *Phenomenology of Spirit*.

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<sup>9</sup> Hegel, Preface to PhG, §41.

<sup>10</sup> Taylor refers to this process in Hegel as a “dialectical movement as generated by a clash between a purpose or standard and its attempted fulfilment.” (Charles Taylor, *Hegel and Modern Society*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 59)

<sup>11</sup> Beiser, 281-282.

<sup>12</sup> Rouché, 548.\*

Some other similarities include generous use of the concept of “Geist,” or Spirit, which for Herder surfaces primarily in his idea of “national spirit,” but for Hegel extends from Herder’s more profound idea that it is reason that connects us, through language, to the creative Being, and that our consciousness, as it develops, becomes Spirit itself. Furthermore, Hegel makes constant use of the distinction Herder drew between keeping one’s “face close to the picture, fumbling with this splinter or groping at that speck of colour” without “seeing the entire image;” and, alternately, grasping “the *whole* of such *alternating ages*,” imposing “*order* on them, pursuing them *gently*.” Herder defines the ideal study of history: “To isolate only the *main causes* underlying each scene, to *follow* the *currents* quietly, and then – to name them [...]”<sup>13</sup> Here is Hegel’s distinction between “picture thinking,” which characterises every stage up until “Absolute knowing,” and that Absolute knowing itself.

Herder and Hegel think of cognition similarly. For Herder, reason cannot be distinguished from language, and both have a human, natural origin. Herder envisions that “[t]he human soul builds for itself this *sense of reason* as a creator, as an image of His nature. The origin of language hence only becomes divine in a worthy manner insofar as it is human.”<sup>14</sup> Like Herder, Hegel is dissatisfied with the notion of cognition as an instrument, which presupposes that “there is a *difference between ourselves and this cognition*.”<sup>15</sup> What distinguishes humans from other animals is reason, cognition, capacity to know, language: all factors in the human conception of the divine, and all of one piece in the puzzle of Revelation.

Herder’s insistence on the organic nature of reality also leaves a strong impression on Hegel’s philosophy. Herder writes that the Spirit of history

knows that in human nature the principles of *sensuality*, of *imagination*, of *selfishness*, of *honour*, of *sympathy with others*, of *godliness*, of the *moral sense*, of *faith*, etc., do not dwell in separated compartments, but that in a living

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<sup>13</sup> Herder, AP, 25-26.

<sup>14</sup> Herder, “Treatise on the Origin of Language,” in PW, 163.

<sup>15</sup> Hegel, Introduction to PhG, §74.

organization that gets stimulated from several sides, many of them, often all, cooperate in a living manner.<sup>16</sup>

These principles are all, according to the later works of Herder, “operating towards a *single* purpose,” namely that of “the great principle of Humaneness [*Menschlichkeit*],”<sup>17</sup> which has also previously been mentioned as “*Humanität*.”

For Hegel, the organic format will be much more comprehensive, since it will survey the interior development of human consciousness in its full relation to the world, a development that does not necessarily run in tandem with, but that is organically connected to, history. Taylor dismisses Hegel’s emphasis on a “self-authenticating, self-justifying” form of knowledge that can provide a total understanding of the world as an unrealistic aspect of his philosophy. Taylor proposes that what is meaningful in Hegel’s thought is the approach he took to his dismissal of the epistemological tradition that had culminated in Kant and that relied so much on a panoply of assumptions that could never be proven to be true. Hegel, while incorporating the criticisms of the Enlightenment made by Hamann and Herder into his philosophy, refuses to resort to a nihilist viewpoint in his assessment of human endeavour.<sup>18</sup>

Like Herder, Hegel refuses to see human beings as animals “with rationality added.” Man is “a different kind of totality,” one “in which the fact of reflective consciousness leaves nothing else unaltered; the feelings, desires, even the instinct for self-preservation of a reflective being must be different from those of other animals.”<sup>19</sup>

Hegel’s philosophy is not an “enclosed monument,” but neither does it involve an “endless chain” of history that continues forever, with a perpetually fleeing horizon ahead. A landmark is passed when man attains Absolute Knowing: the philosopher has peered through the penumbra of time and discerned the undercurrents of human history, and has come to the realisation that the truth dwells not in a specific place, but rather in

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<sup>16</sup> PW, 415.

<sup>17</sup> PW, 415.

<sup>18</sup> Taylor, in *Hegel: l’esprit absolu/Hegel: The Absolute Spirit*, ed. Theodore F. Geraets (Ottawa: Editions de l’Université d’Ottawa, 1984), 169.

<sup>19</sup> Taylor, *Hegel and Modern Society*, 19.

the process that never ends. The philosopher must realise that truth lies in the “pure act of putting in relation everything that proposes itself in the coming about of contingency.”<sup>20</sup>

While nature exhibits recurring cycles, there is, in nature, really “nothing new under the sun.”<sup>21</sup> Thus Hegel: “Only in those changes which take place in the spiritual sphere does anything new emerge.”<sup>22</sup> Hegel resolves the tension between nature and human knowledge “not in a narrow way that simply reduces nature to pure intelligibility (Descartes), but in a comprehensive way that allows nature to preserve its otherness, and freedom its necessity.”<sup>23</sup>

That said, there is loss in history for Hegel, since what is understood a certain way in a specific age cannot be understood that way again. Hegel uses the image of the owl (philosophy), which sees and does not act; to which could be added that of the mole (history), which burrows ahead but sees nothing.<sup>24</sup> When a “shape of life” has “grown old,” philosophy paints only “grey in grey”; it never rejuvenates, but merely understands.<sup>25</sup>

Hegel begins his *Phenomenology of Spirit* with a lot of philosophical baggage from thinkers like Kant, Fichte, and Schelling on his mind. He addresses innumerable disagreements with other philosophers without officially divulging the philosophers’ identities. Hegel objects to the idea that there has to be an objective “beginning” to philosophical endeavour: in fact, there really only needs to be a subject and an attendant object. Hegel will attempt to reconcile Parmenides’ “the being,” or “the one,” with Heraclitus’ “the flux.” He seeks to reconcile Plato’s appearance (the cave) and reality (the forms – essences). He will join together Aquinas’ faith and reason, all through an

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<sup>20</sup> Labarrière, in *Hegel: l’esprit absolu*, 171.

<sup>21</sup> G.W.F. Hegel, *Introduction to the Philosophy of World History*, trans. H.B. Nisbet (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), 124. Henceforth cited as IPWH. Compare Ecclesiastes 1:9, Proverbs 612:20.

<sup>22</sup> Hegel, IPWH, 124-125.

<sup>23</sup> Dupré, in *Hegel: l’esprit absolu*, 177.

<sup>24</sup> Remo Bodei, *Hegel: l’esprit absolu*, 165.

<sup>25</sup> G.W.F. Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*, trans. T.M. Knox (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1967), 13. Hegel writes this in the preface, where he adds the well-quoted line: “The owl of Minerva spreads its wings only with the falling of the dusk.”



appeal to intelligent reason, as opposed to intuition: intuition does not resolve tensions so much as it dissolves them, as Hegel points out when he refers to the “night when all cows are black.”<sup>26</sup> Like Herder, Hegel acknowledges: “in the child’s progress through school, we shall recognise the history of the cultural development of the world traced, as it were, in a silhouette.”<sup>27</sup>

Hegel does not overtly mention particular cultures as he describes the unfolding of consciousness, and some of his sections deal with phenomena that seem to have no connection to a specific cultural ethos. While the Romans will inspire more than one section in the *Phenomenology*, other sections are inspired by Sophocles’ *Antigone*, by Hegel’s knowledge of nature-worshipping faiths, by Hegel’s understanding of the Catholicism of his time, by the concept of phrenology, by the empiricism of early scientific development, by Rousseau’s idea of the “general will” and by the French Revolution, by the morality of the Protestant culture of Hegel’s age, and by the ethical life of the Greek Polis, among other things. Within each sub-section, the subject-object dimension takes on various meanings and provides a ground for the resolution of tensions. Hegel often includes three “moments” in the unravelling of a particular ethos or sub-section.

At the same time, Hegel’s master-slave dialectic, for instance, echoes the dynamics of any number of cases in history where peoples have been subjugated to another people’s advantage. Who, as time lapses, becomes more politically powerful: the coloniser, or the subdued? Who holds the reigns during the inevitable subsequent cultural atonement: the former slave-owners, or the former slaves? With whom does God side in the religious literature of the Occidental world: the Pharaoh, or Moses’ Jews? Who grips the imagination of citizens afloat in a decadent era: the Roman gladiator, or the Christian martyr? Who holds power in any time of serious disarray or upheaval? The gentle people in their refined homes, or the impoverished riff-raff who are the only ones who

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<sup>26</sup> Hegel, Preface to PhG, §16. These observations are owed to Professor M. Jenkins of St. Thomas More College at the University of Saskatchewan.

<sup>27</sup> Hegel, Preface to PhG, §28.

know how to provide the necessities of life and procure the things that become scarce during years of trial?

Also, Hegel's observation of sense-certainty addresses so many questions of import for modern science, psychology, sociology, and even mathematics. What is the "Now"? What is the "Here"? Are we ever really taking up the same space; do we ever stand in a fixed moment in time? How long did it take the "scientists" to discover that, as Hegel expresses in a slightly more advanced language, "there is no fixed moment in time"? Zeno's paradox,<sup>28</sup> so long a challenge for the mathematicians (who deal exclusively, according to Hegel, with "magnitude," the "unessential distinction" that "does not touch the thing itself"), is resolved in Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*. Hegel elaborates on the limits of mathematics: "The *evident* character of this defective cognition of which mathematics is so proud, and on which it plumes itself before philosophy, rests solely on the poverty of its purpose and the defectiveness of its stuff."<sup>29</sup>

And what about the notion of desire? For Hegel, it was always clear that desire consumes man more than he can ever consume what he desires. Sociologists discuss the "new" consumer society, and psychologists discuss the motives that drive human beings to act as they do, but Hegel has built on the rich tradition of philosophy to discuss these features of existence, not as separate phenomena that can be thought of in categories, nor as fixed truths that are "positive and dead," but as elements in the organic life of rational human beings in the universe. These elements are part of a "whole" that cannot do without them because they are the content of history's subconscious, and must be understood for the development of consciousness in history to come to fruition, as it must, in the mind of the true philosopher. As a man is liberated when the labyrinths of his inner life are gradually elucidated through psychoanalysis, the philosopher of any era is freed to perceive the "whole" when he has considered the path through which the

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<sup>28</sup> In one of Zeno's famous paradoxes, Achilles cannot outrace a tortoise to whom he has allowed a ten metre head start, because when he catches up to where the tortoise started, the tortoise has already moved ahead of that position, and every time Achilles catches up to the new position of the tortoise, the tortoise has already moved ahead of that position, ad infinitum.

<sup>29</sup> Hegel, Preface to PhG, §45.

“subject” that is consciousness comes to know itself. Hegel’s approach is to discover “from the ground up” how human interaction with the surrounding world and with other human beings begins and ends: his refusal to order history superficially by imposing an outside standard, or to begin with assumptions that have no direct relation to our earthly experience, permits him to show how the levels of discovery progress in the mind regardless of what time-lines they may take up in history.

On his part, Frederick C. Beiser makes a distinction

between two standards of truth in Hegel’s philosophy of history. The first standard of truth determines whether a philosophy adequately expresses the spirit of its age, whether it is true in describing its characteristic values and beliefs. [...] The second standard is the universal goal of world history, the self-consciousness of freedom. It is this standard that allows Hegel to speak of a universal truth amid all the change of world history. [...] The philosophies that express these cultures will therefore have different degrees of truth according to the degree to which their culture achieves or approximates the goal of universal history.<sup>30</sup>

Beiser makes an important point, but if the focus remains on the self-consciousness of freedom as a goal or end-point of history, Hegel falls into the pile of thinkers inspired by the Enlightenment who could not see past their own noses, but conjectured about what would constitute the end of history. The question of whether Hegel’s “Absolute knowing” ends history is the question of whether Hegel is a relevant thinker for the modern age: the whole *Phenomenology of Spirit* leads up to Absolute knowing in a way that cannot be ignored.

Remo Bodei proposes that the interpretation of Hegel’s philosophy as one that ends history is not accurate. He finds evidence that Hegel means to leave room for new developments once Absolute Knowing has been obtained. There are signs that Hegel wants Absolute Knowing and philosophical science to be a way of “speaking clearly to all.”<sup>31</sup> Charles Taylor, though, questions whether Hegel’s philosophy is in fact so

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<sup>30</sup> Beiser, 281-282.

<sup>31</sup> Remo Bodei, in *Hegel: l’esprit absolu*, 79. Bodei argues: “Hegel simply says that philosophy has no other task than to explain what is already present. One could thus, with this image of a modest Hegel, fight the image that is still presented, that of Kojève or Bloch, of a Hegel who ends history: the Absolute as the end of history; Hegel has said everything, now we have nothing left to say. No! Hegel simply says

modest.<sup>32</sup> Taylor suggests that Hegel's whole interpretation of history, which is supposed to culminate in "Comprehended History," would be cast into doubt if it were really possible (in Hegel's scheme) for a new phase of history to develop, since a new interpretation of the past would come along with this new phase.

Taylor forgets, though, that Hegel does not judge those phases according to the standard of any particular time: he is searching for the undercurrents that pull history in its various directions. Although a "post-modern" thinker might consider the Roman era to be brutal and repulsive, Hegel would say that it offered a unique outlook for consciousness in which an essential dialectic was resolved and carried over into the next phase. Hegel would say this is the case whether or not the ethos of the contemporary time is amenable to such a conclusion. And, as far as the "science" of philosophy is concerned, it does not matter particularly if one lives in ancient Athens or in contemporary times: Hegel's *Phenomenology* is to philosophy what the concrete laws of the universe are to modern science, or what Freud's ground-breaking forays into psychoanalysis are to the practise of psychology. One might ask how an ancient Greek could know the truth behind Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* if he lived far before it was ever written. For Hegel, that is like asking whether the rules of the universe existed before scientists discovered them, or whether people had a subconscious before they were ever aware of it.

Time is arbitrary insofar as the "whole" is concerned; what Hegel has discerned in his *Phenomenology* is meant to sustain philosophy until the end of time: it is the product of a man who uses the human capacity to reason to its fullest potential. How much history had actually transpired at the point of the writing of the *Phenomenology of Spirit* is

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that now, after having attained comprehension of one's own era, one has to start over again, one has to leave an open space. One has to leave room for the new. I also find a confirmation in a letter to von Raumer from 1816 where Hegel says that philosophy is simply the possibility of speaking to everyone with a clear format."\*

<sup>32</sup> Taylor, in *Hegel: l'esprit absolu*, 83. Taylor says to this effect: "You have both spoken of Hegel's modesty; it was perhaps with a touch of humour. There is no philosophy more presumptuous, precisely because it pretends to refuse that opposition [between subject and object]. There are many ways to present it, but let us choose for the time being the following one: between finite spirit and infinite Spirit, there is no hiatus. Does that not justify the interpretations that you mentioned, of Kojève and others, that speak of the end of history?"\*

merely how much of the content of the whole was *necessary* in order for a man of Hegel's mental prowess to be able to "comprehend" history. The standpoint that could be considered that of Hegel's time (presumably the one in which history is finally "comprehended") is not really that of Hegel's time at all. How many people in Hegel's time would he judge to have "comprehended" history in the manner outlined in his *Phenomenology of Spirit*? If Hegel means "Comprehended History" to indicate an understanding of the subconscious movement of human consciousness throughout history, an understanding that surpasses that of mere science and sheer faith and moves into the realm of the true "science" of philosophy, then would any age be able to claim exclusive right to it? This is how Hegel would seem to avoid entangling himself in the web of his own time, and why he would say that even if other as yet unknown phases develop, they might merely be digested into his "science" of philosophy as manifestations of so many already experienced lower forms of consciousness, and "Comprehended History" as he understood it might remain intact.

Of course, Taylor is right that the current consciousness is bound to affect the philosopher's view of the past. Hegel might agree with him in part, but would add that philosophers still have a responsibility to look over their shoulders at the dissolved eras — if they care to understand the past, and through it, the present. The "real" philosopher must do this in order to ascertain what consciousness itself is, and how it came to be what it is: through this, he will discover that Hegel's is (of course) the highest form of consciousness, the most complex and simultaneously the most simple (and truthful) way of understanding the world. Ultimately, this means that he will move through the stages from the most basic sense-certainty to "cut and dried" scientific discovery, and finally to the high regions of religion and art, and beyond into the light of philosophy.

Beiser explains how Hegel, though he admired the original historians Thucydides and Herodotus, found their historical reports lacking in "universal perspective." On the other hand, reflective historians, although they had a more "universal perspective," imposed "the view of the author upon the past." Fundamentally, Hegel wishes to "cancel the

weakness, and preserve the strengths, of original and reflective history.”<sup>33</sup> In the meantime, Herder expresses a similar understanding of how best to study history: “When philosophy is guided by history and history is enlivened by philosophy, then it is doubly entertaining and useful.”<sup>34</sup>

Isaiah Berlin claims that Herder and Hegel part company, however, when it comes to the necessity of evil within the unfolding of history. According to Berlin, Herder is more of a humanitarian thinker than Hegel, since he argues against cultural hegemony and imperial conquest. But in fact, Herder’s position on the necessity of violence in history is not very different from Hegel’s. It is true that Herder asks of history’s reformers: “[H]ave the consequences of their deeds, especially the *unforeseen* ones, all been unequivocal *blessing* for their successors? Anyone familiar with the *ensuing* history will surely have his doubts.”<sup>35</sup> But, in response to the “gentle philosopher” who wonders whether these reformations could “have occurred *without revolutions*,” he writes:

such a *quiet progression* [the one without revolutions] of the *human spirit* for the improvement of the world is hardly anything other than a *phantom* in our heads, never *God’s course* in *nature*. This seed falls to the earth: there it lies and grows stiff, but now comes the *sun* to awaken it; it bursts open, its vessels swelling violently asunder; it breaks out of the soil – thus the blossom, thus the fruit!<sup>36</sup>

Likewise, Hegel does not pause to consider which acts in history are not morally acceptable. This is not, however, because Hegel chooses merely to overlook violence, but rather because he has taken to heart Herder’s exhortations not to judge each culture or period by an outside standard. If a culture is violent, then Hegel will judge it according to its own warring standard. If the master wishes to subdue the slave, Hegel will find out whether the slave is in fact subdued, and whether the master is indeed his master. Rather than wring his hands over violence, Hegel tries to discover why it occurs, and what developments in human consciousness explain the nature and level of violence as it waxes or wanes throughout human history. This way Hegel can explain how men have

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<sup>33</sup> Beiser, 283.

<sup>34</sup> Herder, “Of the Changes in the Tastes of the Nations through the Ages,” in AP, 102.

<sup>35</sup> Herder, AP, 93.

<sup>36</sup> Herder, AP, 47.

always fallen short of the transitory ideals they set out for themselves, and that in one sense, the only valuable ideal is that man should survey history after it has blindly occurred, and assess it reasonably.

Hegel's disregard for human suffering is in fact necessary if history is to be considered as a development within human consciousness, as it is exposed in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. In discussing "the role of evil in the light of the absolute sovereignty of reason," Hegel notes: "Reason cannot stop to consider the injuries sustained by single individuals, for particular ends are submerged in the universal end."<sup>37</sup> He is not arguing that "the ends justify the means," but rather that there is something taking place that "cannot stop" in a very practical way: it is occurring within human thought and within the process of "becoming" Spirit that is human consciousness.

Herder and Hegel are in agreement that history is, in Hegel's famous words, a "slaughter-bench."<sup>38</sup> Herder expresses it, like Hegel, in the context of necessity: "Fortune will reach its destination, even over millions of corpses!"<sup>39</sup> Hegel's wish to explain historical evils stems from Herder's insistence:

Nothing could be further from my mind than to defend the endless mass-migrations and devastations, the vassals' wars and feuds, the armies of monks, the pilgrimages and crusades: I only wish to explain them, [to show] how *Spirit* breathes in everything, after all!<sup>40</sup>

Both Hegel and Herder would say that it is naive to portray history as a process in which necessity plays no part. While wars, crusades, and revolutions are not inevitable, they do not occur randomly. There are always reasons why history unfolds the way it does. It is not the case that history occurs as if pre-planned; still, the present would not be what it was if it were not for how things had gone in the past. As Herder puts it:

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<sup>37</sup> Hegel, IPWH, 43. Beiser notes that "in Hegel, the philosophy of history usurps the traditional function of a theodicy: it explains the existence of evil by showing it to be necessary for the realisation of the end of history." (Beiser, "Hegel's Historicism," in *The Cambridge Companion to Hegel*, 271)

<sup>38</sup> G.W.F. Hegel, *Introduction to the Philosophy of World History*, trans. Leo Rauch (Indianapolis and Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, 1988), 24.

<sup>39</sup> Herder, AP, 88.

<sup>40</sup> Herder, AP, 42.

The basis of every reformation has always been just such a *tiny seed* that *fell quietly* to the ground and was hardly worth mentioning. People had *long possessed* it: they were *looking at it* but *giving it no heed* – yet now it was supposed to alter *inclinations, customs, a world of habits, to create them all anew!* How is this possible without *revolution, without passion and movement?*<sup>41</sup>

The development of consciousness is connected for both Herder and Hegel to Christianity. Herder argues in anticipation of Hegel that Christianity is the “universal” religion.<sup>42</sup> Christianity “commands the purest humanity on the purest path.” It does so not “as an object of speculation,” but rather “as a provider of the light and life of humanity, through model example and loving deed, through progressively effective *community.*”<sup>43</sup> Hegel would agree entirely that “deed” and “progressively effective community” are crucial factors in the development of reason.

For both Herder and Hegel, Christianity “was only ever able and meant to permeate [rather than displace] everything”; they do not see how “divine undertakings” could be conceived “in the world and the human realm *other than by worldly and human driving forces.*” Any other kind of conception of the divine seems to Herder to be “made for the abstractions of the *utopian poet* rather than those of the *natural philosopher.*” Herder asks:

When has the deity ever acted, anywhere *in the whole analogy of nature*, other than through nature? And is it therefore any less deity — or is it deity precisely by pouring itself out over everything, by manifesting itself so uniformly and inscrutably *through every age* according to that age, and likewise on every continent, in every nation!<sup>44</sup>

Herder implies here Hegel’s argument that God’s purpose is manifested through history and through the development of human consciousness.

Similarly, throughout the *Introduction to the Philosophy of World History*, Hegel points out why he thinks Christianity offers a key to the Revelation that will occur in history. Of course, for Hegel, philosophy takes primacy of place in that

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<sup>41</sup> Herder, AP, 47-48.

<sup>42</sup> Herder, AP, 36. Isaiah Berlin mentions Herder’s belief that Christianity transcends the particular and encourages the “worship of what is universal and eternal.” (Berlin, “Herder and the Enlightenment,” in *The Proper Study of Mankind*, 372)

<sup>43</sup> Herder, PW, 424.

<sup>44</sup> Herder, AP, 37, 38.



[w]hat a religion grasps as a living relationship by means of representational thought is grasped by philosophy by means of rational representation, so that the content remains the same but appears in the latter instance in its highest, worthiest, and most vivid form. Philosophy is the highest means by which a nation can attain consciousness of the truth and realise the absolute mode of the Spirit.<sup>45</sup>

In the meantime, Hegel argues that Spirit seeks to attain knowledge and “to create a spiritual world in accordance with its own concept, to fulfil and realise its own nature, and to produce religion and the state in such a way that it will conform to its own concept.” This, says Hegel, “is the universal goal of the Spirit and of history; and just as the seed bears within it the whole nature of the tree and the taste and form of its fruits, so also do the first glimmerings of Spirit contain virtually the whole of history.”<sup>46</sup>

Hegel has latched on to Herder’s vision of the “*Spirit* that is too great for the frame of its age,” the Spirit that “sows in the dark.” For Herder, this Spirit is the “pure, incorruptible source of life,”<sup>47</sup> and it is *through the medium* of humanity rather than *because* of humanity that this Spirit will nurture beautiful fruit. In Hegel’s scheme, the role of human beings is enhanced.

Herder states an idea that translates into the format of Hegel’s *Phenomenology of Spirit*, in which the reader sees the whole Bacchanalian revel, or watches the cunning of reason operate “behind the back” of consciousness. Herder suggests that God may have a “*greater overall plan* than what an individual creature is able to comprehend” since “all the scenes, in which *every single actor*” merely plays his part, “together make a *whole*, a *major presentation* of which the *individual, self-centred actor* cannot know or see anything, but which the *spectator with the right perspective*, in *calm anticipation* of the *complete sequence*, can indeed see.”<sup>48</sup> In his essay *Of the Changes in the Tastes of the Nations through the Ages*, Herder admits that while gathering together “the many

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<sup>45</sup> Hegel, IPWH, 113. Hegel judges rather arbitrarily that “[c]oncrete philosophy can only occur among the Greeks and the Christians, whereas abstract philosophy can also be found among the Orientals, who do not, however, achieve a synthesis between the finite and the divine.” [IPWH, 113]

<sup>46</sup> Hegel, IPWH, 53.

<sup>47</sup> Herder, AP, 92.

<sup>48</sup> Herder, AP, 72.

changes of the past” the philosopher may be excused for his “audacious look ahead,” even though the realities of the future may very well “be the results of change behind our backs: so things changed before us, so they will change after us.”<sup>49</sup> For Hegel, this process will provide Spirit with knowledge of itself,<sup>50</sup> while Herder sees “seeds that begin *with a small germ*, like *all God’s works* and creations, yet whose first, tiny shoots already reveal, by their lovely appearance and smell, their special future as *God’s concealed creation*.”<sup>51</sup>

Herder’s conception of time is related to Hegel’s, since Herder conceives of time “as the notion that is implicit in his concept of *Kraft*.” Herder’s *Kraft* — force, or Spirit — is in turn defined as a “*process in time*.” Herder sees *Kraft* as “a stream of continuous change”: “reality is a flux of change” and “time is of its very essence.”<sup>52</sup> For Hegel, meanwhile, history is “the development of Spirit in *Time*, as Nature is the development of the Idea in *Space*.”<sup>53</sup>

The particular kind of Revelation that Herder and Hegel discern corroborates the links that exist between their philosophies of history. Herder presumes that each historical period yields a foundation for the next stage, in a way that recalls Hegel’s progression of stages, in which (sometimes surprising) “truths” are carried into each subsequent level of development. Herder writes:

No one is *alone* in his age; he builds on *what has come before*, which turns into and wants to be nothing but the foundation of the future — thus speaks the *analogy in nature*, the talking *image of God* in *all works*! Evidently it is so with the *human race*! The Egyptian could not exist without the Oriental; the Greek built upon them, the Roman lifted himself atop the back of the entire world — true *progression*, *progressing development*, even if none in particular were to benefit from it! It enters into the great! It becomes something of which *the history of empty hulls* boasts so much and of which it shows so little: the *stage* for a *guiding intention on earth*!<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Herder, “Of the Changes in the Tastes of the Nations through the Ages,” in AP, 103.

<sup>50</sup> Hegel, PhG, §808.

<sup>51</sup> Herder, AP, 92.

<sup>52</sup> Barnard, 46.

<sup>53</sup> Hegel, IPWH, 128.

<sup>54</sup> Herder, AP, 31.

In *Another Philosophy of History*, Herder seems to ask a direct question that Hegel has answered with his *Phenomenology of Spirit*. Herder asks:

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 only moments in the particular, mere *means towards a purpose* through progression — what a *view!* 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>55</sup>

Of course, Hegel does think that he “sees everything.” Hegel responds to Herder’s urge to view history, the world, and the world’s parts as a whole, all somehow being overseen by Providence. However, for Hegel, the role of human beings will be much more evidently important for the development of history than it is for Herder, for how could it be otherwise in light of the existence of reason?

For Herder, the determinants of historical continuity are manifested “in a two-dimensional manner: ‘horizontally,’ insofar as *at any given time* a number of factors exercise upon each other a reciprocal influence; ‘vertically,’ insofar as by succeeding each other they influence the course of events in a particular *direction*.”<sup>56</sup> At the same time, for Hegel, the “science” of philosophy is far superior to the “rapturous haziness” of the kind of theory that “supposes that it is staying right in the centre and in the depths” and that “looks disdainfully at determinateness.” Such depth and breadth is “empty,” an “intensity without content” that cannot be distinguished from “superficiality.”<sup>57</sup> In contrast, Hegel’s “science” of philosophy will seek out depth and breadth authentically.

Herder interprets Revelation to mean “the attainment of a clearer understanding”:  
“[T]he purest form of Revelation ... is to see things as they really are: without images;”<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Herder, AP, 32.

<sup>56</sup> Barnard, 119.

<sup>57</sup> Hegel, preface to PhG, §10.

<sup>58</sup> Herder uses a term here that evokes Hegel’s “picture-thinking.” (Hegel, PhG, §764-765) Herder writes: “Can there be any *general image* without *mutual subordination* and *integration*, or any *broad perspective* without *elevation*? When you keep your face close to the picture, fumbling with this splinter or groping at that speck of colour, you will never see the *entire image* — you will see anything but an *image!* And when your head is full of a group with which you have become infatuated, would your sight be able to *grasp the whole* of such *alternating ages*, to *impose order* on them, to *pursue them gently*? To isolate only the *main causes* underlying each scene, to *follow the currents* quietly, and then — to name them?

without delusions, face to face.”<sup>59</sup> Revelation does not occur in one swoop; rather, it is a continuous “process.”<sup>60</sup> Hegel shares this understanding, and his *Phenomenology of Spirit* reports that “continuous process” insofar as Hegel has been able to determine it. For Hegel, it is clear that God intends for us to know: He would not have initiated this process if it were not meant to be filled out, to come full circle. For it to come full circle does not mean that it must end in a cul-de-sac: a circle can be an infinite ring of Revelation that is defined more by process than by direction and that can be understood regardless of how its content evolves.

It is not by mere chance that the movement in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* from consciousness to self-consciousness is described in terms of the “curtain [of appearance] hanging before the inner world” being “drawn away.”<sup>61</sup> The *Phenomenology of Spirit* unfolds from consciousness to self-consciousness, to reason, to Spirit, to religion (consciousness of Spirit), and finally to Absolute Knowing (*self-consciousness of Spirit*);<sup>62</sup> the whole progression constitutes a painstaking *apo-kalupsis* (apocalypse: uncovering, Revelation).

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But if you are not able to do any of this — if history flickers and flares before your eyes, a welter of scenes, peoples, and ages — then read first and learn to see! I know, by the way, like you, that every *general image*, every *general concept*, is nothing but *abstraction*. The Creator alone is the one who *conceives* the full *unity* of *any one* and of *all* nations, in all their *great diversity*, without thereby losing sight of their *unity*.” (Herder, AP, 26)

<sup>59</sup> Compare Herder, AP, 97: “For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known. And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity.” Compare 1 Cor. 13:12-13.

<sup>60</sup> Barnard, 89.

<sup>61</sup> Hegel, PhG, §165.

<sup>62</sup> Hegel, PhG, §679.

## CHAPTER III

### GOD IN HISTORY

Herder may have retained the notion of a transcendent God on whom men are utterly dependent, irking Hegel to a certain extent, but they shared some understanding of God's role in history. Both argued (Herder, implicitly, and Hegel, explicitly) that God is only interesting to humans insofar as He is intelligible, or "knowable," and that He is intelligible through our human awareness and capacity to reason and communicate. Insofar as He acts through our reason, we can know Him, and whatever existence He may have that is outside of our reach and cannot be known, is null and void for us. For Hegel, whatever God is, is our reason, and insofar as we have reason, we have God. There is no ambiguity in Hegel's thought about the meaning of the human capacity for knowledge. It is entirely possible for humans to *know*, and they will know *philosophically*, however differently they may have been trained to think. At the same time, what is known is precisely "comprehended History,"<sup>1</sup> the very history that Herder wishes to see better understood.

At bottom, Hegel is elaborating the ideas of Herder, who sometimes argues that God is immanent, or that He works "through man and nature to advance the cause of

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<sup>1</sup> Hegel, PhG, §808.

mankind.”<sup>2</sup> Herder writes, for instance: “Religion is meant to accomplish nothing *but purposes for human beings, through human beings.*”<sup>3</sup> While Hegel demonstrates more explicitly his faith that meaning can be found in man’s history, Herder also upholds a vision

wider than that philosophy which *mixes up top and bottom*, which only ever clarifies particular *confusions* here and there, turning everything into a *game of ants*, into a striving of individual *inclinations and forces* without *purpose*, into a chaos where one despairs of virtue, purpose, and deity!<sup>4</sup>

For Herder, God had to be transcendent in order for the existence of man to have any meaning. The framework that God’s existence provides does not merely enhance the notion of relativism through which Herder gives each cultural group its own “centre,” but also counteracts the claim to cultural superiority that any of these groups might make upon having stepped into the spotlight of history. For Herder, this counteraction is aimed at the thinkers of the European Enlightenment, but it is a counteraction that puts any culture, even any overtly Christian culture, in its place. The implication is that relativism on its own cannot counteract the insolence of a self-centred cultural group, since who is to say that there cannot be dominant cultural groups at the political level even if at the theoretical level cultures are considered equal. In other words, if cultures are simply relative, what argument is there to dissuade the cultural group that includes among its central “tenets” a notion that it is superior to others? To say: “I’m sorry, but you are simply not special, because there are many other cultural groups on the Earth that think they are special too...” is not to convince anyone. The responder might say: “Well, if everything is relative, then who are you to tell me the ‘centre’ on which my culture is based is wrong?” The only thing that can give relativism “bite” is the historical outlook of the believer in a transcendent God: time will *destroy* all cultures, because history has a purpose that lies beyond that of human beings, whatever it may be. If there is no sense of an outside “moral” standard, or as Emerson would put it, a sense of “the ground of this

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<sup>2</sup> Ioannis Evrigenis, Introduction to Herder, AP, xxx.

<sup>3</sup> Herder, AP, 38.

<sup>4</sup> Herder, AP, 32.

uneasiness of ours, of this old discontent” (“the universal sense of want and ignorance, but the fine innuendo by which the soul makes its enormous claims”<sup>5</sup>), then there is no real basis for questioning our own piddling, but sometimes vital-seeming ends.

Likewise, for Hegel, God could not be merely immanent or else the development of reason would be the actualisation of nothing: the necessity that is vindicated in Absolute knowing begins with the seed of God’s impetus. The “circle that presupposes its end as its goal”<sup>6</sup> could not presuppose such a thing if the universe and the development of life were a random occurrence, that is to say, not a *necessary* one. But Hegel rejects the most traditional theological definition of “God,” namely the one that explains Him as what men are not, by arguing that this kind of “Subject” is a “fixed point” and that “anticipation” of its existence “posits the subject as an inert point, whereas the actuality is self-movement.”<sup>7</sup> Unlike Herder, Hegel argues that for the actualisation of man’s full capacities for reason, God is dependent on man. Hegel sees that the notion of a transcendent God often provides men with an excuse not to think logically about the world. For Hegel, this is paradoxical, since God clearly intended for man to develop his capacity for knowledge (whatever the story of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden may say), and since there is no good reason why men cannot aim for the highest level of understanding: the one that crosses all cultural and religious boundaries, the one that links apparently mutually exclusive cultural groups across the ages, namely, that of philosophy. If it is through philosophy that history can best be understood, then it is towards philosophy that the constant “unease” of Emerson ultimately leads: it is towards philosophical truth that “Spirit” aims, and it is in the practise of philosophy that man comes closest to God. For Herder and for Hegel man understands best his destiny when he sets aside his preformed cultural thoughts, his assumptions, and his abstractions, and when he feels the significance of the historical chain on which he represents but a small link.

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<sup>5</sup> Ralph Waldo Emerson, “The Over-Soul,” in *Emerson’s Essays* (New York: Gramercy Books, 1993), 140.

<sup>6</sup> Hegel, PhG, §18.

<sup>7</sup> Hegel, PhG, §23.

This is where the influence of Enlightenment thought on Herder and Hegel is clear: reason is all-powerful, and it represents the divine within us. History does unfold according to Providence, but that very Providence finds fruition in the development of our consciousness and in our capacity for reason.

Herder's expression of God's role in history is, like his whole philosophy of history and his whole body of work, self-contradictory. There are two semi-conflicting implications of Herder's belief in Revelation: the first that religion has experienced a decline in history until Christianity; the second that the idea of Redemption is secularised into a "theory of progress that retraces the collective Salvation of the species." Rouché argues that "Christianity and the cult of the national spirits wage a battle in Herder's thought that is perpetually restarted, and in which there will be no victor, but one vanquished: the orthodoxy." Rouché cites Helmut Groos when he writes: "Christianity with Herder only keeps its value as an absolute religion through ceasing to be Christianity. Identified with the ideal of *Humanität*, it ceases in effect to be: A) a scriptural religion; B) a religion of Salvation." Herder indeed calls every feature of Christianity that lies outside the core value of *Humanität* mere "shell," or "envelope," or "husk."<sup>8</sup>

What Herder accomplishes is to fuse Christian values with reason and with nature by rejecting dogmas and certain supernatural elements. Rouché argues that Herder secularised the concepts of Revelation, of Redemption, and of a chosen people in history.<sup>9</sup> The traditional Salvation that Herder supports through his theory of gradual Revelation and Education by God is challenged when Herder dismisses the notion of Christ as saviour and eliminates the need for Redemption by failing to believe in the Fall of man.<sup>10</sup> Unwittingly, Herder contributes to the dismantling of Lutheran orthodoxy.

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<sup>8</sup> Rouché, 131, 321, 479.\*

<sup>9</sup> Rouché, 115, 480. Rouché also mentions that in the first part of the *Ideas* (a part dealing with natural sciences) Herder laicises the concept of Incarnation by claiming that "each creature is the manifestation of an 'organizational force.'"<sup>\*</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Rouché, 481. Herder retains the traditional interpretation of the immortality of the soul, however, arguing that the Resurrection was the most important event of Jesus' whole existence, since it stands as proof of the immortality of the human soul. (Rouché, 485)



Herder's *Ideas* marks the waning of Herder's *Sturm und Drang*, of the specific alliance he had brokered between Christian thought and German nationalism: Herder's vision of gradual progression overtakes his nationalist inclinations, and resembles more and more the secularisation of Christian ideals and the humanist values of the early Enlightenment. Rouché suggests that Herder's originality in fact lies in his re-Christianisation of the concept of Progress that was conceived by the medieval mystics and secularised by the thinkers of the early Enlightenment, and which takes the shape of Herder's *Fortgang*.

The “disdain for all belief received from the outside and not personally experienced,” so common among both *Aufklärer* and *Stürmer*, was also a tenet of the medieval mystics.<sup>11</sup> In this spirit, Herder insists that religious enthusiasm must be an “exaltation of human faculties” rather than a passive reception of God's inspiration. Humanity is the only species endowed with language in a way that makes reason, real freedom, religion, and hope for immortality possible. The way in which Herder wishes to rely on Providence is a manifestation of the “rationalist optimism” of Leibniz (as opposed to the pessimist materialism of Holbach). Herder resents that man would be considered the result of mere fatality or chance. While the Enlightenment was arguably an optimistic phase in the history of thought, its rejection of faith could be construed as negative and one-sided. Herder's “rationalist optimism,” a response to the aspect of Enlightenment thought that threatened faith in Europe, is also taken up by Hegel, albeit in a different way.<sup>12</sup>

At moments, Herder shares with Spinoza a recognition that God, although He is not “identical with the world,” is immanent in the world; that is to say that He appears “indirectly, through [H]is opaque coat of creatures.” However, Herder is not a pantheist. Herder writes: “God is not the world, and the world is not God; that is certain.” Herder is a holist: he believes the spiritual and physical worlds are unified — he does not

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<sup>11</sup> Rouché, 134, 492.\* Barnard comments as well on the “recourse” that was “increasingly had to experience” in Herder's time. (Barnard, 13)

<sup>12</sup> Rouché, 206, 208, 376, 483.\*

partake in the fully monist belief that there is only one being. Herder's representation of God's role in history is often a traditional, Lutheran one. In Herder's philosophy of history for instance, the role of nature in forming nations resembles the role of Grace in theology; "the predetermination of history by physical geography is the collective form of Predestination."<sup>13</sup>

For Herder, God is the common object of the natural and historical sciences, while "the knowledge that explains the world" is the same as that knowledge which "saves the soul." Herder could not conceive of the divisions that are now taken for granted between faith and reason, natural and historical sciences, and philosophy and theology. To be frightened by the surrounding darkness of the universe is for Herder to forget that the same force that "acts and thinks within me" is "as eternal as the one that keeps assembled the suns and the stars."<sup>14</sup>

Herder's openness to the discoveries of science is evident when, in addressing astrology in his *Ideas*, Herder echoes Galileo,<sup>15</sup> whose (sometimes uncharacteristic) humility and simultaneous hope comes across so clearly in his *Letter to the Grand Duchess Christina*. Galileo defends Copernicus on the grounds that "[h]e did not ignore the Bible, but he knew very well that if his doctrine were proved, then it could not contradict the Scriptures *when they were rightly understood*."<sup>16</sup>

Following his interest in the spirits of nations, Herder holds that faith must be adapted to each distinct nation, and even to each individual believer. Herder is sympathetic to the idea that the variations that form within Christianity as it takes root in different cultures are legitimate. Herder also specifies that when a human being is inspired by God, he is not "emptied of himself and traversed by the Spirit like an empty pipe." The same could be said for nations in the Herderian scheme, since the monolithic quality and

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<sup>13</sup> Rouché, 179, 180, 193.\*

<sup>14</sup> Rouché, 181, 182, 191, 209.\* Furthermore, for Herder, the death of a human being is like the transition from chrysalis to butterfly.

<sup>15</sup> Rouché, 191.

<sup>16</sup> Galileo, *Discoveries and Opinions of Galileo*, trans. Stillman Drake (New York: Anchor Books, 1957), 179-180 (italics added).

psychological ethos of Herder's nations makes it easy to conceive of them as personalities.

Within Herder's thought, the Leibnizean notions of "force" and of "different degrees of consciousness" are fused together. There is a "virtual" pantheistic dynamism to Herder's thought, especially with his suggestion of a "ladder" of creatures in nature that replicates in material form the "degrees of consciousness" which develop in history. Revelation is for Herder both "the goal of Creation, and consciousness of this goal." Both the progress in nature and the progress of consciousness in history represent increasing closeness to God and to divinity, but the creationist element in Herder's thought ensures that his construct remain static. Although God does "become" progressively in the consciousness of humanity," He exists before it, and independently of it. The progression (Fortgang, not Fortschritt) of humanity's consciousness of God "adds itself to" (rather than substitutes itself for) "the perfection already given by God." That said, all dynamism and movement in Herder's scheme comes from his religious framework. Herder seems to juxtapose Spinoza's God on nature, and the God of the Bible on history.<sup>17</sup> It is the concept of gradual Revelation that imbues Herder's philosophy of history with anything beyond a creationist, static content.

Herder considers reason differently from the thinkers of the Enlightenment: his is the reason of the Reformers, and of Saint Paul. These religious men divide reason into two kinds, one kind being the Faustian reason of Goethe's Mephisto, the other kind being the reason of the Archangels of the "Prologue in the Sky." The first is a reason that is "darkened by sin," while the second is "lit by Grace." In deference to this last kind of reason, Herder ends up sustaining a philosophy in which freedom is "directed" by God. To obey God is to be free, and involves knowing God;<sup>18</sup> in this sense, Herder echoes Kant, for whom to know what is right is to do it, and to be free.

Rouché discerns that Herder's value of *Humanität* is a link between Hamann's "theory of the Socratic daemon" and Hegel's theory of a history in which God takes

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<sup>17</sup> Rouché, 199, 200, 235, 241, 333.\*

<sup>18</sup> Rouché, 236, 241.\*

consciousness of Himself.<sup>19</sup> This impetus for unorthodoxy comes from Herder's dismissal of Kant's theory of radical evil. Herder argues that man's essential nature is good. There is no conflict between "human nature and the divine will; the kingdom of God is possible on Earth." Although Herder scorns the pride of Enlightenment thinkers, he is himself an "intellectualist" since he believes that human intelligence must "serve the advancement of humanity." At the same time, *Humanität* and Christianity do not clash within Herder's mind.<sup>20</sup>

Herder dismisses Kant's proposition that only the human beings in the last stage of history can be redeemed. For Herder, it is clear that men can be redeemed regardless of the stage of history during which they exist. The individual is free from the "march of progress" insofar as his personal redemption is concerned; just as in *Another Philosophy of History*, the happiness of each nation is not contingent on its status among nations and within time.<sup>21</sup>

One of the differences between the will of God in *Another Philosophy of History* and in the *Ideas* is that in the first, it is indiscernible by human beings, while in the second it is discernible, and interior to humanity. Herder represents God at first as an "absolute monarch," but by the time he writes the *Ideas*, God has become a "constitutional sovereign who has renounced arbitrariness." With Herder's earlier God, the human capacity for reason is due to an intervention on the part of God; while with his later God, the capacity for human reason comes about because of human freedom. The progress of man's history is at once necessary and free, since it depends both on the "essence of man and of the world" and on human consciousness. This shift in Herder's representation of God also lightens God's responsibility as far as the evil tendencies of human beings are concerned. Nonetheless, at some level God remains for Herder a personal God.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Rouché, 253.\* Barnard calls *Humanität* the "doctrinal and emotional source" of Herder's "secular faith."

<sup>20</sup> Rouché, 242, 253, 254.\*

<sup>21</sup> Rouché, 210.

<sup>22</sup> Rouché, 383, 385, 388, 391, 394.\* Barnard adds that Herder "never quite succeeded in disentangling these problems, perhaps mainly because he acknowledged no real dichotomy between the realm of natural philosophy and theology on the one hand, or, on the other, between a providential order and one in which man was destined to play an essential and active part." (Barnard, 83)

Herder's work marks the time when the shedding of the "historical content of religion" begins among the faithful.<sup>23</sup> The "confessional forms" of religion are set aside, while the new soil for the "ancient, revealed religion" is found in the realm of reason.<sup>24</sup> F. M. Barnard relates the "religious re-orientation" of German Enlightenment thinkers to the desire to "deepen man's religious faith by a thorough re-appraisal of the origin and nature of religion as such."<sup>25</sup>

While Herder pared down traditionalist religion to a simple, irrational faith, he proceeded to seek a foundation for that faith in reason, which was to question the irrational remains to which he had reduced faith in the first place. According to Rouché, Herder "strikes religion while aiming [his swing] at intolerance, because one cannot live without the other. The maximum of critical reflection compatible with faith has been surpassed." By the third part of the *Ideas*, Herder appears as "an *Aufklärer* who would remember having once belonged to the *Sturm und Drang*, and who would be Christian." At the same time, Herder prepares the way for Hegel by declaring rational "the integral content of history."<sup>26</sup>

While Herder is perfectly content to leave stones unturned and to leave "reason" relatively undefined, Hegel will insist on scrutinizing every aspect of the developments he will survey. The notion advanced by Hegel that God takes consciousness of Himself through the development of humanity, is to Herder blasphemous.<sup>27</sup> That said, and although Herder often uses the term "reason" with derision, he also makes it clear that "reason would be in a bad way if it were not reason everywhere, and the universal good were not also the universally most useful. The magnetic needle of our effort seeks this pole; after all wanderings and oscillations it will and must find it."<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Rouché, 571.\*

<sup>24</sup> Rouché, 571.\* Taylor points out that Hegel, unlike some of his Romantic contemporaries, insists that the synthesis of subject and whole "be achieved through reason." (Taylor, *Hegel and Modern Society*, 12)

<sup>25</sup> Barnard, 13. Christian Wolff was partly responsible for this shift, since he introduced a philosophy in which he aimed "at a compromise with orthodox theology," and in which he "did not oppose Revelation to reason." (Barnard, 13)

<sup>26</sup> Rouché, 444, 552, 571.\*

<sup>27</sup> Rouché, 231.

<sup>28</sup> Herder, PW, 418.

The subtle hinge between Herder's and Hegel's positions is well illustrated by their ever-so-slightly diverging statements on the source of philosophy. Herder writes in a letter: "It is by the heavens that our philosophy must begin, not by the amphitheatre of anatomy and the dissection of cadavers."<sup>29</sup> Hegel writes more cautiously that in the past, "[t]he eye of the Spirit had to be forcibly turned and held fast to the things of this world," while "[n]ow we seem to need just the opposite," since "[t]he Spirit shows itself as so impoverished that, like a wanderer in the desert craving for a mouthful of water, it seems to crave for its refreshment only the bare feeling of the divine in general."<sup>30</sup> At the same time, Herder notices a similar thirst: "Before long, our age will open some eyes: soon enough, it will drive us to seek out *wells of ideas* [to slake] the thirst of the desert."<sup>31</sup> Likewise, for Hegel Spirit "has not only lost its essential life; it is also conscious of this loss" and will "turn away from the empty husks," demanding of philosophy "the recovery through its agency of that lost sense of solid and substantial being."<sup>32</sup>

Where Herder leans over the precipice of unorthodoxy, Hegel actually jumps, but never reaches the ground. Hegel's philosophy of Christianity is suspended somewhere between the idea of a transcendent God and that of pantheism.<sup>33</sup> In one sense, Hegel's Christianity explains God in terms unheard-of before, but also in terms that seem oddly harmonious: God is all-encompassing and yet somehow dependent on the success of the human experience.

Louis Dupré explains that Hegel wished to connect his own secular era with the religious transcendentalism of the past. For this, "[t]he secular world had to be *integrally*

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<sup>29</sup> Rouché, 191.\*

<sup>30</sup> Hegel, PhG, §8. Hegel's depiction of the Spirit's thirst is echoed much later by T.S. Eliot in the fifth section of *The Wasteland*. Eliot writes: "Here there is no water but only rock," repeating variations on this during the first part of this section, where he is describing the Europe of his day. He refers to ruins, to the song "London Bridge is Falling Down," and conveys a sense of extreme aridness and precariousness: "If there were the sound of water only/ Not the cicada/ And dry grass singing/ But sound of water over a rock/ Where the hermit-thrush sings in the pine trees/ Drip drop drip drop drop drop/ But there is no water"; and intones: "Falling towers/ Jerusalem Athens Alexandria/ Vienna London/ Unreal." (T.S. Eliot, "The Wasteland," in *Selected Poems* (London: Faber and Faber Ltd., 1954), 64-67)

<sup>31</sup> Herder, AP, 79.

<sup>32</sup> Hegel, PhG, §7.

<sup>33</sup> Taylor explains this as well, writing: "Hegel's position was in a sense on a narrow crest between theism and some form of naturalism or pantheism. The atmosphere was so rarefied on top that it was easy to fall off, and remains so." (Taylor, *Hegel and Modern Society*, 40)

assumed within a transcendent perspective.” Hegel wanted thought to be conceived transcendently so that the new age could develop its own religious dimension of sorts.”<sup>34</sup> Dupré’s argument captures well the spirit of what Hegel attempts in his philosophy. He articulates the way in which for Hegel, “the manifestation of God as Spirit forms only part of a process that involves both the infinite and the finite,” while “that divine manifestation remains both the inspiring source and the moving principle of the philosophy of Spirit.”<sup>35</sup> Dupré finds that Hegel’s religious theory ends up merging “what is Caesar’s with what is God’s.”<sup>36</sup>

The debate on Hegel’s specific understanding of God is one that often misses the mark. Students of Hegel’s philosophy argue over whether Hegel implies that God is a transcendent being who abides outside of human existence, or whether he would have “God” exist immanently through the physical matter and intelligence of human beings. These interpretations of Hegel place him either in the same category as Kant and other philosophers who would argue that God is unknowable, or in the company of pantheists and Romantics like Fichte and Schelling, who have been accused of positing some kind of spirit in human existence only to avoid having a “dead” philosophy.<sup>37</sup>

But Hegel is trying to avoid these very distinctions by explaining that God is unified with reality, and with human history, through reason. Hegel wants to *erase* the philosophical categories of God’s transcendentalism, on the one hand, and God’s mere immanence in human existence, on the other. He offers a philosophy that unites God and man through history and through the development of reason in a way that fits neither the category of God as transcendent, nor that of God as merely immanent. For Hegel, a human existence without God cannot account for reason, while reason cannot be taken

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<sup>34</sup> Dupré, in *Hegel: l’esprit absolu*, 127.

<sup>35</sup> Dupré, in *Hegel: l’esprit absolu*, 129. Dupré explains further: “Hegel’s theory of religion is based on two theses: 1) The mind is able to mediate the finite with the infinite, because it partakes in Spirit. 2) The finite mind constitutes the otherness that enables Spirit to know itself. The latter thesis had never been fully accepted by Christian orthodoxy, even though it had enjoyed a long tradition in Christian spirituality.” (Dupré, in *Hegel: l’esprit absolu*, 129-130)

<sup>36</sup> Dupré, in *Hegel: l’esprit absolu*, 135.

<sup>37</sup> These philosophers might be said to be blowing up their empty representations of mankind like balloons with the Romantic helium of “spirit.”

seriously if God does not have a stake in its results: if God is Father, then the children of God must have the opportunity to grow up, as implied in Herder's scheme.

In his introduction to Hegel's *Introduction to the Philosophy of World History*, translated by H.B. Nisbet, Duncan Forbes shows a refined understanding of Hegel's religious viewpoint. He describes Hegel's philosophy of history as "limited and tied down, and yet unlimited and free-ranging; able to survey the whole of reality, it is final and closed in one sense, wholly open in another, in a way that is not easy to grasp." Forbes argues that Hegel's *Geist* can only "be fully self-conscious as the result of the culmination of a process in time" — in the Europe of his day. This "fullness of time" is "tied down to [Hegel's] own age," and yet in a sense it "transcends time and historical specificity." Classical misunderstandings of Hegel's philosophy arise, according to Forbes, when scholars ignore Hegel's claim that the "content of his philosophy is Christianity." This clue, along with Hegel's insistence that the "true infinite" is the "unity of itself and the finite," is essential to the understanding of Hegel's philosophy.<sup>38</sup>

Hegel considers religion that is a "flight from the world" to be false, and seeks to prove that in the union of divine and human, the divine remains "wholly divine" but *for that* needs and remains "dependent on the human," while the human remains "fully human" but *for that* needs and depends "on the divine." Forbes notes how Hegel wrote in his early fragments that "[r]eason is analogous to love; both go out and lose themselves but also find themselves in the other, in the Not-I." Forbes cuts clearly through misinterpretations in other respects as well, noting that Hegel never intended for his philosophy to "shun or in any way devalue the objective world, of fact and contingency and finitude, the historian's world and the natural scientist's world and the world of every-day experience." Rather, his goal is "to show how necessary all this is to the life of Spirit."<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Duncan Forbes, Introduction to Hegel's *Introduction to the Philosophy of World History*, trans. H.B. Nisbet (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), viii-x. (This version is translated from the German edition of Johannes Hoffmeister, who took notes from Hegel's lectures on the topic.)

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, x.



Hegel says in his lectures on the *Introduction to the Philosophy of World History* that concrete events “are the *ways* of Providence, the means it uses, the phenomena in which it manifests itself in history; they are open to our inspection.” Not only is he confident that man can *know* God, but he argues that this is “our highest duty,” alongside that of *loving* God. For Hegel, the claim that man cannot know God is nothing short of blasphemy, since it is not in line with “the Scriptural saying that the Spirit leads into truth, searches all things, and penetrates even into the deep things of God.”<sup>40</sup> Hegel rejects outright the distinction that is often made between faith and knowledge and wonders how they could have come to be commonly accepted as opposites. He calls this distinction “an empty one,” since to have faith in something is ultimately to know it and be convinced of it. On the other hand, Hegel rejects equally the notion that man connects most profoundly with God through feeling: “It is a trivial commonplace that man is distinguished from the animals by his ability to think, yet this is something which is often forgotten.”<sup>41</sup> Hegel differs from Herder in his disdain for feeling, which he considers detrimental to reason.<sup>42</sup>

Hegel insists that although the “data of consciousness, all products and objects of thought — and above all religion and morality” come to man primarily “through the medium of feeling,” this is the “lowest form” they can take;<sup>43</sup> with Christianity, however, “the time has come in which this conviction and inner certainty need no longer remain a mere representation, but can also be thought, developed, and recognised as a definite piece of knowledge.” Hegel explains that the “spiritual principle which we call God is

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<sup>40</sup> Hegel, IPWH, 36. Hegel later notes that “[t]he understanding of the modern age has made God into an abstraction, into something that lies beyond the self-consciousness of man, into a bare iron wall against which man can only beat his head in vain. But the ideas of reason are totally different from the abstractions of the understanding.” (Hegel, IPWH, 106)

<sup>41</sup> Hegel, IPWH, 39, 41.

<sup>42</sup> Taylor, *Hegel and Modern Society*, 20.

<sup>43</sup> A little later on, Hegel clarifies that “if we see someone kneeling in prayer before an idol, and the content of his prayer is contemptible in the eyes of reason, we can still respect the feelings which animate it and acknowledge that they are just as valuable as those of the Christian who worships truth in symbolic form, or of the philosopher who immerses himself in eternal truth through rational thought. Only the objects of such feelings are different; but the feelings themselves are one and the same.” (Hegel, IPWH, 45) That the feelings are the same means in this case, for Hegel, that feeling does not discriminate sufficiently, unlike reason.

none other than the truly substantial, inherently and essentially individual and subjective truth. It is the source of all thought, and its thought is essentially creative; we encounter it as such in world history.”<sup>44</sup>

What Hegel is concerned with as he develops his official philosophy of history is the “Idea of human freedom.” But the way in which he frames this quest echoes his general theme of trying to unify the divine with the human. He urges us to

consider world history in relation to its ultimate end; this ultimate end is the intention that underlies the world. We know that God is the most perfect being; He is therefore able to will only Himself and that which is of the same nature as Himself. God and the nature of the divine will are one and the same thing; it is what we call in philosophy the *Idea*. Thus it is the Idea in general that we have to consider, and particularly its operation within the medium of the human Spirit; in more specific terms, it is the Idea of human freedom.<sup>45</sup>

Hegel considers that Christianity has offered “a revelation of God’s spiritual nature.” This is represented as the third “person” within the Trinity: the Holy Spirit. While God the Father is conceived as “a power [that] is universal but as yet enclosed within Himself,” and the Christ is the Father’s “own object, another version of Himself,” the Spirit “is the whole, and not just one or another of the elements in isolation.” In the Son, who is “just as immediate an expression of [God] as He is Himself,” God “knows Himself and contemplates Himself” — and it is this self-knowledge and self-contemplation that constitutes the third element, Spirit.<sup>46</sup>

The progression of world history is the uncovering of freedom within human consciousness, and the spirits involved include the “spirit of the nation” (reminiscent of Herder), which is both particular and universal, since it includes many individuals, and the “world Spirit,” which is “the Spirit of the world as it reveals itself through the human consciousness; the relationship of men to it is that of single parts to the whole which is

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<sup>44</sup> Hegel, IPWH, 40.

<sup>45</sup> Hegel, IPWH, 46.

<sup>46</sup> Hegel, IPWH, 51. Hegel later adds that “[t]he Christian Incarnation is not presented in an anthropomorphic form unworthy of the deity, but points instead to the true Idea of God.” (IPWH, 106)

their substance.” The world Spirit “corresponds to the divine Spirit, which is the Absolute Spirit,” or “God,” who “appears in everyone’s consciousness.”<sup>47</sup>

Quentin Lauer reminds us that Hegel’s God is concrete. The abstract God is not cancelled out in Hegel’s sight, but rather, realised.<sup>48</sup> Lauer’s interpretation sheds light on the tricky aspect of Hegel’s work: the holist aspect. It is hard for a modern thinker to see how Hegel does not slip into pantheism on the one hand, and how he simultaneously rejects a purely transcendent God, on the other. These are the two familiar categories, and they are the categories considered by traditional and modern scholars alike. But Hegel seeks to avoid both.<sup>49</sup>

In reference to Hegel’s statement “ohne Welt ist Gott nicht Gott,” Lauer argues that Hegel could very well mean that “without a world God is not God”; but “since one cannot hypothesise that there is no world, one cannot hypothesise that there is no God.”<sup>50</sup> Hegel is not saying that taking away the world would mean taking away God, but that God is only God *to* anyone if the world exists. Here he means *our* world, and, more fundamentally, *us*. The argument interpreted this way is incontestable, and it is not controversial in the way that modern and traditional thinkers might assume. It is controversial because it is a holist position. What exists is what is interesting for Hegel, and according to him, nothing exists that cannot be discovered. To say that God exists but that He exists *for us* is controversial because it joins together what has long been separated in the minds of philosophers, namely heaven and earth. Kant had not breached this barrier, since he ended up resorting to the concept of the “thing-in-itself,”

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<sup>47</sup> Hegel, IPWH, 51, 52, 53.

<sup>48</sup> Lauer, in *Hegel: l’esprit absolu*, 101. Lauer adds in this vein: “You certainly had the two schools — the one of which, the Rationalist School, said he had too much of God, and the other, the Revisionist School, said he didn’t have enough God. I suppose my temptation here is to say he had just the right amount, but amount is not the operative term here.” (Lauer, *Hegel: l’esprit absolu*, 105)

<sup>49</sup> Charles Taylor insists on this as well, writing that Hegel’s “idea of God is very hard to grasp and state coherently — if indeed it ultimately is coherent — because it cannot fit certain readily available categories in which we think of God and the world.” Taylor calls Hegel’s God a “Munchausen God,” referring to the incident in which Baron Munchausen “extricated himself [from a swamp] by seizing his own hair and heaving himself back on his horse.” (Taylor, *Hegel and Modern Society*, 38, 39)

<sup>50</sup> Lauer, in *Hegel: l’esprit absolu*, 104.

reminiscent of Plato's "forms." But Hegel intended to unify the metaphysical with the natural and express the nature of reality as it had been revealed to him.

Hegel's God, according to Charles Taylor, is more than the collective Spirit of human beings, but humans do constitute a "vehicle" for God's realisation — a realisation that requires the medium of finite spirits. Taylor interprets Hegel to mean that the "rest" of God's substance is the "spiritual reality underlying the universe as a whole." Taylor also insists God is not merely immanent in man for Hegel, but fails to define the aforementioned "spiritual reality" (a difficult task, admittedly) except to say that God is not entirely "independent" from man in Hegel's scheme.<sup>51</sup> Taylor specifies:

A conception of cosmic Spirit of this kind, if we can make sense of it, is the only one which can square the circle, as it were — which can provide the basis of a union between finite and cosmic Spirit which meets the requirement that man be united to the whole and yet not sacrifice his own self-consciousness and autonomous will.<sup>52</sup>

Taylor explains that God is self-positing, that God, "the subject who is necessarily embodied and whose embodiment is both the condition of his existence and the expression of what he is," cannot be separated from that expression, "which is coterminous with the conditions of existence." No part of God's expression "is just given."<sup>53</sup>

This is where Frederick C. Beiser is partly mistaken in his assessment of Hegel's religious views. Beiser argues that for Hegel, "Spirit is only the highest degree of organisation and development of the organic powers within nature." This statement is accurate, except for the word "only," the use of which is pivotal. Beiser continues:

If it were anything more, Hegel would relapse into the very dualism he condemns in Kant and Fichte. It is noteworthy that this materialistic element to Hegel's

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<sup>51</sup> Taylor, *Hegel and Modern Society*, 11, 26.

<sup>52</sup> Taylor, *Hegel and Modern Society*, 11. Taylor adds that "[l]ike finite subjects, the absolute subject must go through a cycle, a drama, in which it suffers division in order to return to unity." (Taylor, *Hegel and Modern Society*, 41)

<sup>53</sup> Taylor, *Hegel and Modern Society*, 38.

metaphysics was not lost on his contemporaries, who were quick to praise and damn him accordingly.<sup>54</sup>

This second statement is objectionable because Hegel is not a materialist in any real or traditional sense of the term. To call Hegel a materialist is as silly as to call him a transcendentalist; it is to ignore that Hegel was seeking to unify the abstract with the concrete; it is merely to reduce the abstract to the concrete, which Hegel could have done very easily without his complex and precarious system of philosophy. For Hegel to argue that the abstract must be “actualised” and “realised” through action<sup>55</sup> is not for him to equate ideas with action.

Hegel does say that Spirit is abstract until it is actualised through the “will, the activity of mankind in the world at large,” but this actualisation will be one that unites man with something that is greater than him. Beiser reduces this notion of the “I that is a We and the We that is an I” to some vague identification “with the social whole.”<sup>56</sup> It is strange that Hegel, whose distaste for sentimentality is well known, could be seen to have built a whole system merely to end it with the kind of “identification with the social whole” that some of the standpoints throughout the *Phenomenology of Spirit* include anyway.<sup>57</sup> Hegel is uncovering the hard “science” of philosophy and the path to comprehended History, not a soft notion of universal politico-cultural allegiance.

As far as Hegel’s contemporaries are concerned, it is true that they were quick to condemn and praise him, but as Laurence Dickey points out, his contemporaries were often Lutheran pietists<sup>58</sup> like Schleiermacher, whose transcendentalist views Hegel reviled, or theological rationalists who intended to base religion on human anthropology (a kind of reductionism Hegel referred to as “twaddle”). Hegel was adamant that

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<sup>54</sup> Frederick C. Beiser, Introduction to *The Cambridge Companion to Hegel*, ed. Frederick C. Beiser (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 9.

<sup>55</sup> Beiser, 291.

<sup>56</sup> Beiser, 292.

<sup>57</sup> Hegel’s portrayal of the “Ethical Order,” with its association to the Greeks and to the works of Sophocles, stands as a case in point. (Hegel, PhG, §444-483).

<sup>58</sup> Hegel referred to some of these people as the “inane priests in Berlin.” (Laurence Dickey, “Hegel on Religion and Philosophy,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Hegel*, ed. Frederick C. Beiser (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 309)

“speculative philosophy had no intention of replacing either God with man, Christianity with atheism, or Lutheranism with speculative philosophy.” Hegel argued “that ‘the substance’ of the Christian religion and his philosophy were ‘the same.’” He defined the difference between religion and philosophy as the difference between “believing” and “knowing.” Dickey suggests that Hegel, in the tradition of many Christian thinkers before him, “aimed at making philosophy the agent for expanding Christian *pistis* into Christian *gnosis*.” Hegel’s problem, according to Dickey, was that the middle ground between revolutionary French principles and reactionary evangelical principles that he sought to promote was losing its audience, which “was vanishing precisely because of the religio-political polarisation that Hegel’s philosophy was designed to arrest.”<sup>59</sup>

On his part, Beiser suggests Hegel “prohibits hypostasising his concept of Spirit,” pointing to Hegel’s “adherence to the Aristotelian dictum that universals exist only *in re*.” In order to prove this, Beiser uses one example from Hegel’s *Encyclopedia* that describes *animals* as something “not to be found,” something “determinate.”<sup>60</sup> But this does not relate at all to Hegel’s notion of Revelation as developed in the reason of man, nor does it take into account the special nature of Spirit as something that, as Taylor has pointed out, must precisely *be found*. What some would consider the “mystical” aspect of Hegel’s philosophy is in fact Hegel’s insistence that what is “given” by nature is not all that is important. What is also important is man’s role, insofar as it relates to the capacity for reason, and to his search for unification with the divine.<sup>61</sup>

What Herder and Hegel could not imagine is the way in which their organic, holistic, and spiritual approach to the understanding of history would open the gates for the

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<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 302, 304, 324, 309, 310, 311.

<sup>60</sup> Beiser, “Hegel’s Historicism,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Hegel*, 290-291.

<sup>61</sup> In Dickey’s words, “the ‘methodical procedure’ that raises philosophy to the level of science also triggers for Hegel a process whereby man becomes increasingly conscious of his religious *telos*.” (Dickey, 308) He adds later: “Hegel’s pedagogic agenda emphasised that the aim of speculative philosophy was to remind men of the religious dimension of their nature. For Hegel, grounding human nature in religion enabled him to show men that they were spiritual beings rather than ‘merely’ natural ones.” (Dickey, 307) Alan Patten, who can hardly be accused of over-emphasising the metaphysical dimension of Hegel’s thought, has pointed out that “the civic humanist reading” of Hegel “cannot stand entirely on its own.” Patten suspects that upon being questioned explicitly about the role of man in history, Hegel would “fall back” on an interpretation of history that highlights God’s plan. (Alan Patten, *Hegel’s Idea of Freedom* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 204)

atheist, materialistic, and existentialist philosophies of the modern age. Where Hegel and (sometimes) Herder link divine and human purposes in an attempt to approach the one and elevate the other, modern philosophers will ask why God is necessary at all for the understanding of human existence. After an orgy of Nietzschean abandon in which good and evil were estimated to have been superseded, philosophers recalled the problem of morality, and realised that a moral scheme without God meant a return to the purest slate of philosophy, along with a palpable emptiness in the abode of the Spirit that had been inhabited since prehistory. Morality can, of course, exist without the “idea” of God, just as morality under the God of the Judeo-Christian faith, for instance, has shifted inexorably throughout the centuries. But the modern ethos arises not only from the relativist, rationalist, and nationalist strands of Herder’s and Hegel’s thought, *but from their faith itself*, and from their last attempt to link heaven and earth, metaphysics and science, before the power would be wrested from the clerics by the men of science, and the slight filaments still floating between Heaven and Earth would be swept away as cobwebs adorning a newly disenchanted world.

## CONCLUSION

Michael N. Forster, in the introduction to his collection of Herder's works, writes: "Hegel's philosophy turns out to be an elaborate systematic extension of Herderian ideas (especially concerning God, the mind, and history)."<sup>1</sup> Indeed, as this thesis demonstrates, the seeds of Hegel's philosophy are contained within Herder's writings, although Hegel constructs a self-contained and cohesive system out of some of these seedlings, while Herder's texts themselves are more self-contradictory.

Herder's philosophy introduces a vision of societies and cultures centred on their own happiness but nonetheless connected by a great chain: the chain of the development of the natural world, of world history, and of the fleeting human earthly experience, as set in motion by the impetus and source of all life, God. Herder's concern for the survival of German culture and for the reconciliation of science and faith, of the human and the divine, of the multifarious and at once seamless nature of existence, leads to a philosophy of history that breaks the boundaries of orthodoxy, and that simultaneously challenges the new philosophies that are in some sense just as close-minded and self-congratulatory as the orthodoxies of the past.

Herder's care not to neglect the particular was formative for Hegel's *Phenomenology*, as was Herder's refusal to judge epochs and cultures by a universal standard, and his insistence that the human experience with its natural and spiritual elements constitutes

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<sup>1</sup> Michael N. Forster, Introduction to J.G. Herder, *Philosophical Writings*, trans. Michael N. Forster (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), vii.



one whole piece. Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* takes up many of Herder's concerns and explains the completeness of the human experience in a way that evokes the influential analytical method of Freud, and places more of history's burden on the shoulders of humanity. Hegel turns the historical experience into a high science the proper practise of which will liberate man and permit him to know his own origins in the only way that is possible. In Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*, the chain of history is portrayed as it is linked to the greater chain of human consciousness and anchored in the dark leagues of the ocean of Spirit. Hegel will be Cousteau and, with the clear thought of "science" and interest in the organic elements of life, will take the study of philosophy right to the depths of its meaning.

Rouché understands that "[Herder's] philosophy of history illuminates itself not only by the influences that it felt, but by those that it exerted."<sup>2</sup> The contradictions that arose in Herder's complex thought seem to have sparked in their collision the ideas Hegel expresses with so much ardour. The "science" of philosophy as expressed in Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* is like an inversion of the allegory of the cave in Plato's *Republic*.<sup>3</sup> It is not a question of seeking answers outside of the world in order to bring them down from on high, but rather a question of looking right to the bottom of things to find how they came about. It provides inspiration for the organic and pantheistic orientation of the Romantic thinkers; but it is also deeply bound up with the philosophy of Herder, who criticised all at once the Enlightenment, the Christian orthodoxy, and the secularisation of Christianity to which he unwittingly contributed.

Karl Löwith has said that Hegel was the "last Christian philosopher."<sup>4</sup> Herder was the second-last, then, before a new ethos materialised that would bring about a different world, and new reasons to encourage the proper comprehension of history. While, at the

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<sup>2</sup> Rouché, 598.\*

<sup>3</sup> Beiser remarks: "Hegel was taking issue with the Platonic tradition of philosophy, which had been responsible for so much of the a-historicism of the history of philosophy." (Beiser, "Hegel's Historicism," in *The Cambridge Companion to Hegel*, 276)

<sup>4</sup> Dickey, "Hegel on Religion and Philosophy," in *The Cambridge Companion to Hegel*, 302. Löwith also had it that Hegel's understanding of the "progression from the abstract to the concrete" was one that "makes him a philosopher whose conception of secularisation was fully Christian in character." (Ibid., 331)

surface, both thinkers can be linked on the “chain” to National Socialism, or to Communism, they were in fact antagonistic towards the empty secular and rationalist strands of thought that would lead to these political movements. They were also critical of the overt secularisation of Christianity that was occurring even in their day, but in fact contributed to its fruition through their belief in Revelation, which sprang from the optimistic view they held of the human capacity for reason.

Although Herder’s commitment to a transcendent God ultimately outweighed his interest in promoting the potential of human beings to represent God “immanently,” Hegel’s commitment to a transcendent God is more easily overlooked. The “immanence” implied in Hegel’s dialectical process makes Hegel’s work more vulnerable to those who wish to deny the transcendent in philosophy. The fact that Hegel’s *Phenomenology of Spirit* is intertwined with the stages of cognition and culminates in a materialised absolute Knowing makes it fodder for those who would discount the spiritual foundation of this very Phenomenology. Hegel’s “cold march of necessity” has the echo of Marxist thought, while his warning to the philosophers of the Romantic age not to uphold an “intensity without content,” “sheer force without spread,” and “an empty depth,” accompanies Hegel’s conviction that these last have surrendered themselves “to the uncontrolled ferment of the [divine] Substance.”<sup>5</sup>

However, it is Marx more than any philosopher who would draw Hegel’s scorn for wishing “to be edifying” in the most fundamental sense. Hegel warns with equal dismay against “an extension of substance that pours forth as a finite multiplicity without the force to hold the multiplicity together.” Those who turn Hegel into a materialist forget conveniently that although “Spirit has broken with the world it has hitherto inhabited and imagined, and is of a mind to submerge it in the past,” it is nonetheless Spirit that continues on, “never at rest but always engaged in moving forward,” to bring the Phenomenology to its finale. They forget that without Spirit, the entire panoply of

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<sup>5</sup> Hegel, PhG, §7-10.

visions Hegel presents collapses, and, as Hegel would put it, “is in no way distinguishable from superficiality.”<sup>6</sup>

Herder and Hegel positioned themselves in relation to the philosophers of their own time, and Hegel positioned himself partly against Herder’s more traditional view of religion. But Hegel’s *Phenomenology of Spirit* is suffused with the tone and character of Herder’s *Another Philosophy of History*, though it is a work of a different format and largely of a different content as well. Herder’s influence on Hegel may not have been foremost in Hegel’s mind as he wrote, but it is unmistakable to the reader of both these texts today.

In contemporary times, one of the greatest concerns of the Occidental world is the question of whether democracy can be, or should be, brought to other parts of the world. Plato’s conviction that democracy was the second-worst form of government, because it leads so easily to demagoguery and to the worst form of government (tyranny), is not a conviction shared by philosophers of the current age. Whether democracy is in fact so bad, particularly in countries where vast swaths of the population are educated enough to know when to take their governments “to the cleaners,” is one question. What is more relevant is the issue of whether it is suitable to impress democracy on nations that otherwise might not embrace it.

Herder’s contention that nations find happiness on their own centre would seem to answer this question negatively, while his hope that “*Humanität*” might spread would answer it positively. Hegel’s *Phenomenology of Spirit* suggests that careful reasoning and the proper practise of philosophy is universal, and that what conclusions work for one human group must work for another. But if the *Phenomenology* is considered as an educational tract for those who care to understand history properly, it is implied that its conclusions will not be universal; they will merely come to fruition in the minds of Hegel’s students.

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<sup>6</sup> Hegel, PhG, §9-11.

What both philosophers agree on is the fact that history develops organically: this would suggest that nations are not impermeable, monolithic entities. If so, to hope for the spread of “*Humanität*” is perhaps not misplaced, especially in light of the way in which scientific research and sociological study has been affecting people’s perceptions of themselves and their interactions: it is no longer considered sensible or useful to punish felons capitally, for instance, in most of the states in the Occidental world. At the same time, a humane perception of others and the attendant humane treatment of people by governments cannot be imposed on groups that are not developing that perception “organically.” That is to say that governments of nations like China, while they could not have been *forced* to develop a concern for “humaneness,” might very well be able to arrive at such a concern if their dignity and self-reliance remain intact throughout the process.

Lastly, the question of *Education* is a vital one throughout both Herder and Hegel’s works. Herder insists that the underlying dynamic of human history is a *gently* progressing process of Education by God, or by Providence, while Hegel considers history by assessing its process of sub-conscious learning, and offers this process as evidence that philosophy, well considered and well taught, can open minds and strengthen spirit *absolutely*.

The ultimate education is one that leads minds to avoid religious fanaticism on the one hand, and moral relativism (in which religion is considered to be embarrassing) on the other. Religious views must be tempered by a literary and aesthetic concern that respects the value of analogy and metaphor, that rejects the pedantry of word-for-word interpretations, and, most importantly, that seeks out core messages, emphasising these messages over and against the smaller, paradoxical statements that are found in primary texts like the Bible. Historiography must be used in assessing texts insofar as their authors may have had important motives for making certain statements to an intended audience, within a specific context.

Similarly, relativism hampers rather than enhances the imagination. Although religious and cultural factors sometimes divide, they have the potential to unify. When emphasis is placed on the core messages of the great religions of the world, it is clear that they resemble each other in important ways. The modern tendency to shirk specific religious and cultural content leaves an empty void where fanaticism can prevail. The spiritual realm, conceived from the boundaries of any given religious perspective, is a unified place. It is at once a richly diverse place, where revelations occur throughout history from different sides, as though various curtains were being pulled back onto the same centre from all angles. It is a mistake to devalue the core, in relativism as in religious or cultural fanaticism. The core is often best expressed through the contingent, earthly, and specific religions and cultures that span history and the world.

While the scientific and objective elements of education can never be undervalued, and the great theories and daily lessons of science are vital unifying factors in the world, the religious, literary, musical, and linguistic component of education should never be neglected. The “musaic sciences,” as they might be called, provide an important outlet for the emotional and spiritual processes of human existence, refining the emotions and moderating the expenditure of spiritual energy.

This thesis has offered a counterweight to Berlin’s interpretation of Herder as a relativist thinker, and has shown how Hegel’s work cannot be thought of exclusively in terms of rationalist or traditionalist reasoning. This thesis has demonstrated the significance of the religious content in Herder’s and Hegel’s work, and has shown how this content is relevant for political thought and indispensable for the accurate interpretation of these thinkers. This thesis has traced the ways in which *Herder as a moderate* is connected to *Hegel as a moderate*. This thesis was written with a view to strengthening moderateness in general, the weakness of which in the face of vigorous extremism represents a natural disadvantage. If philosophers aimed “to edify,” as religious and relativist fanatics do, and “dourness” were eradicated from philosophy, man’s full potential as a creature of God gifted with reason would be impossible to attain.

The lessons gleaned from Herder's and Hegel's philosophies of history might well be expressed thus: Consider humaneness to be a potential characteristic of all human beings; do not impose your vision of it, however, on others, but lead by example; and finally, promote everywhere and in every way the concept of a good, gentle, but efficient and well-rounded *Education*.

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